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SHORT NOTES

BLACK-FRONTED TERN ON THE HAAST COAST

Judged by the paucity of reports, the Black-fronted Tern (*C. albostratus*) is a rare bird west of the Southern Alps and on the coast of Westland. Several ornithologists have visited that region without finding this tern at all, though the Black-billed Gull (*L. bulleri*) is common enough; and rivers such as the Taramakau and Whataroa have wide areas of shingle which would seem to offer suitable sites for nesting. Perhaps the heavy rainfall is the deterrent.

The following record is therefore of some interest. On 20/2/63 my wife and I found two Black-fronted Terns resting on a sandbar at the joint mouth of the Turnbull and Okuru Rivers, about five miles south of Haast. Both were adults in worn breeding dress. They were loosely attached to a flock of eleven White-fronted Terns (*S. striata*). Mr. P. Grant (*Notornis* X, 185), who found a single Black-fronted Tern at the Taramakau estuary, has commented on the rarity of this species in Westland. By contrast the White-fronted Tern is plentiful and has breeding colonies at many estuaries.

— H. R. MCKENZIE



BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER IN MANUKAU HARBOUR

The purpose of this note is to record the second example of the Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*) to be discovered in New Zealand. The first was known to be present in the Firth of Thames from January to March, 1960 (*Notornis* VIII, 233-235). It was skilfully photographed by Donald Urquhart; and it is a matter of some interest that as the result of a request from the editors of *British Birds*, two of his photographs appeared in that magazine (Vol. 54, plates 52 b and c).

On 1/12/63 John Jenkins and I reached the Karaka Coast of Manukau Harbour via Kidd's paddocks. At midday the tide was nearly full; but the weather was showery, and as a drifting curtain of drizzle was moving steadily in our direction, we ate our lunch without being in any hurry to examine more closely a flock of small waders, mostly summering Wrybills, which occupied the top of a little beach scarcely

two chains from the patch of gorse where we were sheltering. After the weather cleared, I walked slowly across to study these waders more closely, approaching behind an upturned dinghy stranded in the bay during a recent gale and now resting at the top of the beach. Most of the flock were within a few yards of it. There were more birds than at first appeared, as at least half of the flock were squatting in hollows in the soft sand and shell.

Four Turnstones and a Red-breasted Dotterel received only a passing glance. The tally of Wrybills was 34, and I was checking the six Red-necked Stints, which were elusively scattered among the Wrybills when a very small short-legged sandpiper rose slowly from one of the hollows and took a few steps. It had a long, rather heavy bill which dipped distinctly near the tip; and as it was only fifteen yards away, I recognised it at once as a Broad-billed Sandpiper. Only a few moments were needed to check that its crown was streaked and its legs dull green. My impression was that it was rather more heavily spotted on the sides of the breast than the Firth of Thames specimen when first seen in January 1960. J.J. was hastily recalled from the pursuit of other waders and we were able to compare notes together. During our examination of the bird, it moved slowly down from the beach and started to feed on the wet ooze with a Wrybill on one side and a Red-necked Stint on the other. A broad-brimmed sunhat would have covered the three. We could not have had a handier set of circumstances for judging its size, shape and markings, which together make *falcinellus* quite distinct from other small sandpipers.

— R. B. SIBSON



NOTE ON THE LITTLE BITTERN

If the careful descriptions of a small bittern seen at Meremere by P. J. Howard and others (*Notornis* X, 317-319) are translated into a composite sketch the bird seems unlikely on several counts to be the New Zealand Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus novaeseelandiae*). Most of the features described add up to a small, and probably young, specimen of the Brown Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) and the description of behaviour and attitudes does nothing to discount this suggestion. Many immature specimens of the Brown Bittern in collections are much smaller than adults, with remarkably short bills. The editorial note quoting an earlier observation by R. T. Adams suggests in fact that Mr. Adams' first conclusion that the bird he saw was an unusually small specimen of Brown Bittern was correct. The Meremere bird is described in two places as having 'an elongated dumbbell-like face patch.' This is diagnostic of *Botaurus*, as also is the wing description 'wings buff, barred with brown, somewhat resembling hen pheasant. Scapulars buff, barred with grey.'

Ixobrychus is not barred anywhere, at any age. Its flight feathers and tail are jet black, contrasting in flight with the greater wing-coverts which are chestnut-buff. Cheeks above the whitish throat are uniformly chestnut and this colour continues down the neck, becoming dark vinous where the long neck feathers meet at the back. The crown is black and back dark rich brown. There is a generous amount of dark centring in some feathers, more pronounced in young birds, but the pattern thus produced is longitudinally streaky. It is, moreover, a very small bird, of body size, except when the neck is stretched, not larger than a California Quail.