

D.H.B. described the ground call as 'ti,' and the flight call as 'ti tu' (—). This is similar to the 'kit to' (—) described by Saunders (1951) for the call of Lesser Yellowlegs.

Thus the characters which distinguished this bird as a Lesser Yellowlegs, and not a Greater Yellowlegs, were based on field observations of its general body size, the relative length and definite straightness of its bill, and the nature of its call.

The Lesser Yellowlegs breeds in Canada, from North Quebec to Manitoba and Alaska. It migrates throughout east North America, and winters in South America. The Greater Yellowlegs breeds in areas from Labrador and Hudson Bay South to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and South Manitoba. It migrates throughout the United States and winters along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts north to the Carolinas — occasionally further.

I wish to thank Dr. Stonehouse, Mr. E. G. Turbott, and Mr. D. H. Brathwaite for their help and the considerable interest they have shown.

REFERENCES

- FLEMING, C. A., 1963: *Notornis* X, 6: pp. 258-262.
SAUNDERS, 1951: A Guide to Bird Songs.



THE PORIRUA YELLOWLEGS

By R. A. FALLA

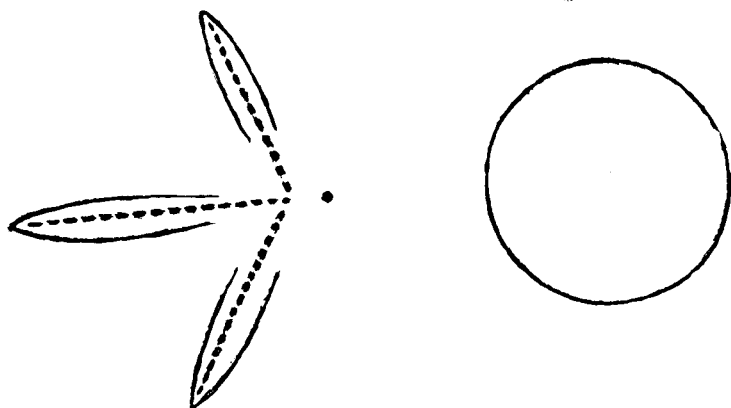
As one of the many observers of the vagrant wader near Porirua in November 1962, I have studied with interest the paper by C. A. Fleming (1963) in which are advanced the reasons that led to a conclusion that it was a Greater Yellowlegs, *Totanus melanoleuca*. It would not be helpful to consider any further the subjective evidence. The bird was apparently always alone and my own impression was that, apart from the length of leg, it was little bigger than a tattler or a knot. This opinion has about the same chance of being wrong as that of those who thought it was larger.

Furthermore the ingenious device of estimating the length of the bill by comparison with a measured stick which the bird walked over must be regarded as liable to some margin of error.

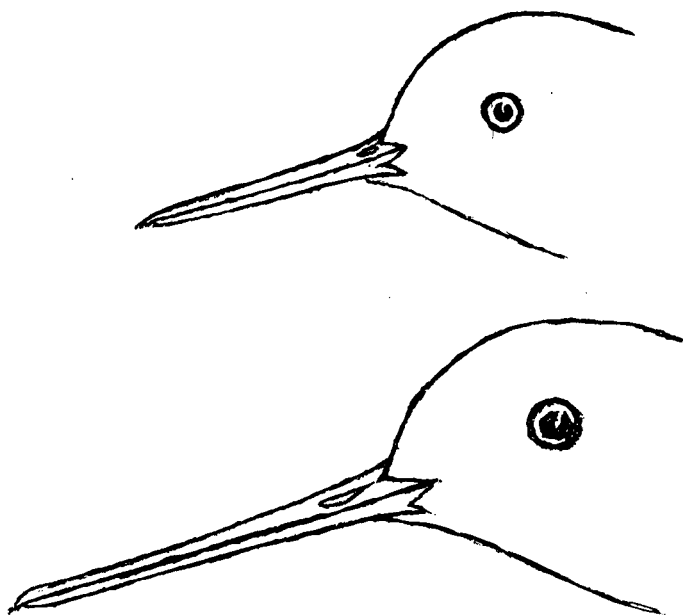
The main purpose of this questioning note is to comment on the objective evidence — the photograph of a footprint in soft mud (Fleming 1963, pl. XXVI b), and the skin of a female Lesser Yellowlegs, *Totanus flavipes*, sent to the Dominion Museum at Dr. Fleming's request by the American Museum of Natural History. The soft mud has clearly depressed into a V-shaped groove totally unlike the impression made by a dried foot in plasticine. The grooves in the mud are much wider than the toes and could be slightly longer, so that an estimated mid-toe length of 41 millimetres may be excessive. In the dried skin of *T. flavipes*, collected in 1899, the normal shrinkage of up to 1 mm. at each of the five joints of the middle toe must be reckoned with. Its present length of 33 mm. is consistent with an original flesh length of 35mm. or more. The span between the tips of the spread outer toes is 50 mm. even in the dried foot, and this is the actual extent of span in the photographed footprint.

In the accompanying diagram, which is natural size, the dotted lines are the dimensions of the dried toes of the specimen of *T. flavipes*

the groove shapes are assumed, and the circle represents the half-crown for comparison with the published photograph. The impression of a live foot of the same bird could well have been larger.



Another fact that arises from a comparison of the only two available skins, one of *T. melanoleuca* (Nebraska, 3 October) and one of *T. flavipes* (New York, 18 September) is that the latter is appreciably paler under the wing, the coverts nearly white and the axillaries entirely so except for an imperceptible smudge at the tips of the longest.



Yellowlegs Heads (actual size)

Upper: *T. flavipes*, female

Lower: *T. melanoleuca*, male.

By contrast *T. melanoleuca* is darker, with perceptible chevron bars and vermiculation on the axillaries. The published photographs in the paper under review (Plates XXV and XXVI) are most consistent in this respect with the specimen of *T. flavipes*. It must be remembered, too, that *T. melanoleuca* has a relatively as well as absolutely longer bill than *T. flavipes*. In the former the linear distance from the back of the eye to the base of the culmen is less than half the length of the bill; in the latter it is fully half or more than half. This can be tested in any side-on photograph, such as XXVa in the paper cited.

These further speculations cannot be claimed to be conclusive, but they do prompt the reflection that:—

- (a) Subjective speculation can be a stimulating exercise up to a point.
- (b) When the available recorded data in the literature are, as in the case of the two Yellowlegs, rather meagre for such common birds, are sometimes defective, and occasionally contradictory, the field observer can be left speculating.
- (c) In default of a fresh specimen even a fifty-year old skin with full data can help the interpretation of photographs considerably.

If the submissions advanced above are accepted as valid the Porirua bird could have been a Lesser Yellowlegs.

REFERENCE

FLEMING, 1963: *Notornis* 10: 258-262.



SHORT NOTE

WELCOME SWALLOW IN SOUTHLAND

A bird observed at Otatara, near Invercargill, intermittently from November 1963 to early March 1964 can be described as follows:

About the size of a pipit but in flight and habits unlike any bird I have seen. The flight was fast — fluttering — weaving, somewhat bat-like. The bird was in association with sparrows, greenfinch and chaffinch around the farm, close to the buildings at times. Invariably separated from the other birds when they took flight. It landed very seldom — would soar quite high on its own till lost to view and then next moment would be seen flying fast very close to the ground, closely following contours. It would persist in this for ten minutes or so over a wide area, frequently coming into sight again, and then would disappear. It was observed perching only once in rather a bad light. From the front view the bird was very dark all over, either dark grey or brownish, with a small patch of diffused buffy yellow at the throat. The colour in flight was a rich velvety brownish-black (almost lambent) with a small patch of creamy yellow on the upper tail coverts or very low on the rump, seen from behind. The beak appeared to be dark and short, the neck short and the eye dark. The tail was relatively long but no other feature about the tail was obvious.

The flight was so fast and erratic that although I kept the field glasses handy I never succeeded in viewing it through them.

— L. E. HENDERSON

[This account and an accompanying sketch answer the description of a juvenile Welcome Swallow.—Ed.]