

witness the blue-grey plumage. Mr. Cook, who saw the bird for the longest period, said that he thought that the bird was changing from brown to blue-grey in colour.

The question arises as to why the bird should be seen in New Zealand as previous sightings have been very few. A reason may be worked out with the help of the following brief reports. Another bird, apparently similar to the Kaihinu bird in habits, was seen at the same time in a district perhaps some twenty miles away but this report has not yet been followed up. At Greymouth, a smaller cuckoo (possibly a Fan-tailed Cuckoo) was seen on 30th December, 1963. From Jacobs River area comes the report of a strange cuckoo-like bird seen in January, 1964, and from Manakauaia (a little north of Jacobs River) the report of an Australian Tree Martin seen in December, 1963, and still there in mid-January, 1964. It is apparent that a number of birds from the Australian area were brought to this country by the succession of strong westerly winds which blew over the West Coast in December, 1963. It is unlikely that they were in sufficient numbers to breed here.

* The question of rufous phases was discussed with Mr. E. G. Turbott, who said that the rufous phase is finally an adult plumage. This means that the bird mentioned was not in rufous phase plumage but was a normal immature bird changing into adult plumage. Mr. K. A. Hindwood apparently linked the Rufous Phase mentioned in Oliver, second edition, p. 537, with immaturity because of the barred throat. He stated that he had written without going into literature regarding the matter and apparently had forgotten or was unaware of the adult Rufous Phase cuckoos. This clearly explains the difference in the two opinions.



SHORT NOTES

MARSH SANDPIPER IN SOUTH TARANAKI

On 1st November, 1963, while I was visiting a freshwater pond on the coastal side of Hawera in the company of F. Finer, M. Bysouth and G. Macdonald, an unusual bird was noticed on the coastal end of the pool. It appeared to be resting while standing in the shallows, and while F.F., M.B. and G.M. kept binoculars trained on it, I was able to approach to at least 30ft. before the bird showed signs of annoyance. From here, I secured three colour transparencies of the bird, using a telephoto lens. These have enabled it to be identified as a Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) by R. B. Sibson and H. R. McKenzie, both of whom made observations of the other two New Zealand records of Marsh Sandpiper, in the Auckland area, in 1959 and 1963 (*Notornis* VIII, 125-126, and X, 235-236).

The bird had a slim, streamlined appearance in keeping with the diagrams in Witherby's 'Handbook of British Birds,' and Bannerman's 'Birds of the British Isles,' Vol. X, Plate 10. It was generally white except for grey upper surface and wings, the mantle and scapulars appearing speckled grey-brown. The face was white, the crown shaded, and it was somewhat dark around the eyes. The bill was noticeably long, thin, and needle-like. The legs were very long, straight, and, like the bill, appeared to be dark (the sun was overhead, being midday). The bill and legs do not resemble those of any similar bird depicted in Witherby (e.g. Greenshank, P. 320). I did not note the colour of rump or tail but F.F. remarked later that it appeared to have some white on the upper surface when it took to flight.

While I was photographing it, the bird waded within easy distance for about five minutes, apparently annoyed at being disturbed, but not appearing alarmed. At one stage it waded into the water up to the body in the same manner as that depicted in D. A. Urquhart's photograph of the Marsh Sandpiper at Mangere (*Notornis* VIII, 210, Plate XXXII). When it eventually took to the air, it flew off to the inland end of the pool making rapid wingbeats and calling "chip-chip-chip" frequently, which agrees with the description of its call in Witherby. The bird alighted in vegetation in a less accessible part of the pond and was not relocated. Subsequent visits by F.F. and M.B. shortly afterwards also failed to relocate it.

The pool, of about 10 acres, is on the property of Mr. R. V. Nowell, three miles from Hawera, and is used for watering his stock. Small numbers of Pied Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) are usually found there. It is separated from the coast by 220 yards of lupin-covered black-sand dunes, with a drop of 250 feet of sharp cliff to the sea beach. When first seen, the bird was standing on black sand near the lupins.

Since observing this bird, I have been able to see J. L. Kendrick's movie of the Marsh Sandpiper recorded in *Notornis* X. Its appearance and flight agree with my notes and recollection of the Hawera bird.

— MAURICE G. MACDONALD



GREENFINCH-LIKE SPARROWS

For several years I have noticed 'greenfinch-like' sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) periodically in my garden at feeding time. Many of the females appeared to be a 'yellowish green' about the head, and over the breast in particular. At first, I dismissed the yellowness of the sparrows as an optical illusion under certain lighting conditions or as contamination by paint. However, as the yellowing appeared seasonally, I decided to seek some other reason for it, perhaps pollen dust. It was soon found that the season of 'yellowing' coincided with the flowering of the Pohutukawa (*Metrocideros excelsa*). It was found that the sparrows have a liking for the nectar, and for the insects that visit the Pohutukawa. In their search for the nectar and insects, the sparrows 'wade' through the numerous stamens and, in so doing, become discoloured by the adhering pollen. The staining of the plumage is slight, but sufficient to be remarkable.

The males, because of their black 'bibs' and darker plumage, do not show the discolouring, although they frequent the flowers as much as the females.

This observation is of interest as it shows how a bird which is a seed- and insect-eater (omnivorous in many respects) can assume the role of a pollinator. In the past, I have frequently observed various finches indulging in nectar feeding. However, I believe that the true pollinators of the Pohutukawa (apart from wind) are the many moths which visit the flowers at dusk, and that the sparrows merely clean up the remains of the 'banquet' of the previous evening. From casual observation it appears to me that Pohutukawa flowers secrete most nectar towards evening and that the anthers dehisce about the same time, thus catering for the nocturnal moths.

— C. McCANN