

BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER IN THE FIRTH OF THAMES  
IN WINTER

A Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*) spent most of 1964 in association with other small waders, especially Wrybills (*A. frontalis*) on the western shore of the Firth of Thames, where it was watched at close quarters on at least seven occasions by numerous observers between early May and the end of December. On May 2 Mr. F. C. Kinsky sighted at a range of about 20 yards an unusual wader which was later proved to be a Broad-billed Sandpiper. It was consorting with Wrybills near Kairito Creek. On May 17, when a winter census of shore-birds in the Firth of Thames was taken, it was found again; and two days later its identity was confirmed by H.R.McK., who noted that its moult into breeding dress was well advanced. Its breast showed much more intensive spotting than that of the first example recorded along the same shore between January and March, 1960. (v. *Notornis* 8, 233-235).

The next sighting was on October 13, when it was found by H.R.McK. some miles to the north-west near White Bridge. Here in summer the shellbanks are regularly used as high-tide roosts by non-breeding Wrybills; and they are sometimes joined by the smaller arctic migratory waders, especially Red-necked Stints (*C. ruficollis*). The Broad-billed Sandpiper was easily picked out among them. It was noted that by now it had moulted into winter plumage.

On this rather more shelly stretch of coast, there is an alternative summer roost for Wrybills near the old lime-works at the mouth of Pukorokoro Creek. It was here that the Broad-billed Sandpiper was located on Nov. 23, Dec. 13 and Dec. 22. Dec. 13 was wet and blowy. While most of the other waders continued to rest for some time after the cbb set in, a dozen Red-necked Stints and the Broad-billed Sandpiper were feeding busily on a comparatively sheltered pocket of exposed mud, which lay among the shell-banks. However, on Dec. 22, which was hot and still the Broad-billed Sandpiper spent some hours during a very big tide resting on a sun-baked mud-cum-shell patch in a mixed flock of small waders which included more than a hundred Wrybills, 18 Red-necked Stints, about a dozen Curlew Sandpipers (*C. testacea*), three Large Sand Dotterels (*C. leschenaulti*) and a Terek Sandpiper (*T. terek*). Though it was often dozing with its head reversed and its bill tucked under its scapulars, the striped crown was a sure pointer to its identity.

It is doubtful if this should be claimed as the third record of this rare visitor to New Zealand; for the Broad-billed Sandpiper here described may well be the same bird as seen and reported at Kidd's Bay, Karaka on 1/12/63 (v. *Notornis* 10, 411), and never found there again, despite frequent searches. It is not a long flight, less than thirty miles, over the Hunua Ranges or Bombay Hills from Karaka to Miranda; but so far there is little evidence of bird traffic between Manukau Harbour and the Firth of Thames nor have any regular flightlines for waders between these two well-known feeding grounds been observed. Among those who were able to study this Broad-billed Sandpiper at close range, were Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Trollope, Miss A. J. Goodwin, Messrs. B. D. Bell, A. M. C. Davis, F. C. Kinsky, D. V. Merton, J. F. O'Brien, S. Payne, A. Wright and the writers.

— H. R. MCKENZIE

— R. B. SIBSON