

## WELCOME SWALLOW: FIRST BREEDING RECORDS FOR SOUTH ISLAND

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The original report was by R. F. Savill in a letter in the Christchurch "Press" of 16th November, 1961. When I inquired, Mr. Savill said that he had been fishing at Lakeside (west side of Lake Ellesmere, near Leeston and approximately 30 miles from Christchurch) and had noticed a pair constantly flying in and out of a disused launch moored offshore and thought they were probably nesting. On 19th November I found the pair as reported by Mr. Savill, flying in and out of the cabin of the launch "Loretta" moored about 25 yards offshore: they ranged out over the water, often dipping down to the surface, and from time to time they would leave the water and pass inland for a short distance; at intervals they entered the cabin, remaining from two to three minutes and often coming out together. They were apparently building; once one of the birds was seen picking up sandy material at the lake edge (later events confirmed that building was probably in progress at this stage). On one occasion we saw a bird take a midge from the surface.

I got in touch immediately with the owner of the launch, Mr. A. C. Young, of Irwell, and with rangers of the North Canterbury Acclimatisation Society and was assured that the pair would not be disturbed. Mr. Young said that when he visited the launch on 24th September he had found a nest already built, but having no knowledge of swallows had pulled it off and in the process destroyed the two eggs: this first nest had been built against the glass of the cabin window. As the birds were now flying straight through the cabin, it seemed likely that the nest was situated well within the interior of the launch, but it seemed best, at this stage, not to disturb the birds in order to examine the nest more closely.

Several Canterbury observers visited the site during the following month. Mr. L. Hoff (North Canterbury Acclimatisation Society) was able to see the nest on a ledge right towards the bow — on 26th November — but no closer examination was made. (During this period the launch was visited by the owner occasionally, to pump out water.)

On 23rd December I found that the birds were spending much longer periods (10-15 minutes) at the nest; they sometimes emerged together, but once one came out immediately after the other entered, presumably replacing its mate. Once during this visit a harrier was chased by the pair; once both emerged together to chase a sparrow which alighted on the cabin roof. As indicated by later events, incubation must have been in progress.

On 7th January, 1962, the birds were making very short visits of a few seconds and seemed to be feeding chicks. On 14th January, G. R. Williams and I rowed out and examined the nest; we found that it contained four young ready to leave. Mrs. M. Buchanan, of Rakaia Huts, who had been making regular visits since the discovery of the nest, reported, two days later, on 16th January, that the parents and young had left the nest and were perching on a dinghy about 20 yards away: a strong south east wind was blowing, but the adults eventually managed to shepherd the young, which were very unsteady

in flight, back to the launch. On 17th January I saw the young with their parents in the neighbourhood of the launch — on the nearby dinghy and amongst the raupo. By this stage the young flew quite strongly, although high winds were still blowing; the only trace of unsteadiness in flight was on alighting.

It may be added that at least one of the brood failed to survive, for on 2nd March a youth reported having shot one (apparently a genuine misunderstanding when shooting sparrows), the bird being handed in to Mr. R. Novis (North Canterbury Acclimatisation Society ranger). The specimen is in the Canterbury Museum.

The last observation for the season was by D. H. Brathwaite, who saw a small flock, presumably this family, at Lakeside on 1st May.

Inquiries in the district, made mainly by Mrs. M. Buchanan, during the period of the above observations, indicated that several local residents had known of the birds' presence; further, there was a strong suggestion that more than one pair had been in the area during September-October, informants stating that as many as seven had been present in the adjacent Hart's Creek estuary.

The following observations in the neighbourhood of the "Loretta" summarise the 1962/63 and 1963/64 seasons:—

- 19/8/62 D. H. Brathwaite reported pair at launch.
- 24/8/62 J. Flux and E.G.T. saw pair about launch.
- 26/8/62 E.G.T. saw pair about launch.
- 22/9/62 D. Graham and D. Dawson saw 3 about the area.
- 30/9/62 Mrs. M. Buchanan observed 2 pairs, one pair entering launch and the other active about the adjacent concrete water gauge (situated about 20 yards offshore).
- 28/10/62 J. P. Strijbos and E.G.T. saw three birds. One pair was active about water gauge, but none seen entering launch. (The water gauge was subsequently abandoned and a half-finished nest, built on the inside wall with very little to support it, was found there by Mrs. Buchanan.)
- 22/11/62 Mrs. Buchanan saw pair going regularly into launch.
- 31/12/62 (E.G.T.) Young being fed in launch.
- 3/1/63 Mrs. Buchanan, D. Graham and E.G.T. examined nest in launch, situated exactly as last year; it contained one well-grown chick and two eggs. It seems probable that this chick failed to survive, for it was not seen out of the nest with the adults.
- 10/2/63 (E.G.T.) Pair visiting the launch constantly.

Again this year local information suggested the presence in the Lakeside area of more than the total to be expected had only one pair colonised the area. Mrs. Buchanan received a report from a local fisherman of 6 seen in early December in the Hart's Creek area, and again of "numbers" in January. The latter were about a mile to the north, not far offshore.

- 18/5/63 (E.G.T.) Three seen feeding over flooded lake shore of Hart's Creek estuary adjacent to Lakeside.
- 25/8/63 Pair flying about at Lakeside but only once perched on "Loretta."
- 27/10/63 Members of the O.S.N.Z. field study group saw one going repeatedly into the "Loretta."

- 11/1/64 D. H. Brathwaite and E.G.T. rowed out to launch: nest as before but empty. Pair entering regularly.  
25/1/64 (E.G.T.) Pair were entering and leaving cockpit of "Loretta," but not going right through cabin to nest.  
1/3/64 (J. M. Cunningham and E.G.T.) No sign of Swallows about the area — waited for approximately one hour.

(Breeding success was not known in the 1963/64 season: a brood could have left the "Loretta" unnoticed at the end of October.)

In addition to the swallows observed as above at Lakeside, some appeared at Kaituna (east side of Lake Ellesmere, about 15 miles across the lake from Lakeside), the first observation being made by D. Graham on 27/1/63. Two birds were seen; one, according to Mr. Graham, having a much paler breast, and thus apparently a young bird. They were resting on the road and returned to the same spot several times after being disturbed by cars.

In the following season, on 24/11/63, I heard from Mr. G. Burrows of Ataahua (near Kaituna) that three young were flying with their parents. They were thought to have nested in an old cottage adjacent to Mr. Burrows' house, but further word was received from Mrs. K. C. Pegley, of Christchurch, who stated that on 23rd and 24th November she saw swallows going in and out below her week-end caravan — a converted railway carriage — situated about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from Mr. Burrows': the birds seen by Mr. Burrows had possibly nested in this site. It is of further interest that Mrs. S. E. Patten, of "Stirling Hills" (in the Kaituna Valley some 4 miles from the lake), on 1/12/63 saw c.6 swallows. Mrs. Pegley and Mr. and Mrs. Burrows saw nothing more of the birds near the lake shore at Ataahua, and it thus seems probable that Mrs. Patten had seen the family as it moved away from the lake up the Kaituna Valley. I visited both areas on 14/12/63 but could see no sign of the birds.

My final records for 1963/64 were made at the North Selwyn Huts (on lake shore about 5 miles from Lakeside on the north side of Lake Ellesmere): Mr. G. Tunncliffe saw two swallows here on 20/1/64, and again one in early February.

Finally, I am indebted to Mrs. Buchanan for the following note, after my departure from Christchurch, on the 1964/65 season. Mrs. Buchanan wrote that a family of 5 newly fledged chicks was seen in the raupo adjacent to the "Loretta" on 28/10/64, one of the parents, when first seen, making repeated flights back into the cabin; finally the five chicks returned to the launch. During the following four weeks Mrs. Buchanan visited the area regularly and recorded renewed activity by the pair, which were apparently preparing to rear a second brood in the same nest in the launch; nothing further was seen of the five young birds.

To summarise, as the "Loretta's" owner first saw signs of nesting in September, 1961, it seems safe to assume that the pair arrived in the area in that year. As breeding by this pair could not have produced a total of more than five in the following season, this would not provide enough birds to explain the breeding recorded in that season on the opposite shore at Kaituna: however, the pair which attempted to nest in the water gauge could later in the same season have moved to Kaituna and bred, or could even have bred successfully at Lakeside unobserved, i.e. adults and young may have crossed to Kaituna after departure from the nest.

At the same time, persistent reports of additional swallows in the Lakeside area — all unconfirmed — suggest strongly that the original colonisation was by a party of several birds.

#### APPENDIX

Plant material used as strengthening in the partly-completed nest collected from the water gauge at the end of the 1962/63 season was kindly identified as under, by Miss Ruth Mason, of the Botany Division, D.S.I.R.:—

*Ruppia* sp. — leaves.

*Lemna* sp. — a few fruits.

*Trifolium* sp. — a seed and some leaves.

*Festuca arundinacea* — some fruits.

A filamentous green algae.

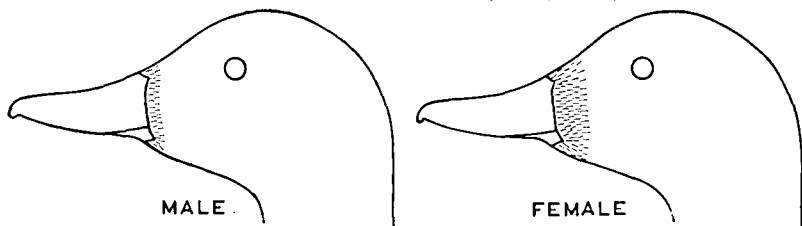


### SHORT NOTE

#### NOTE ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF SEX IN JUVENILE PARADISE SHELDUCK

While banding 23 juvenile Paradise Duck (*Tadorna variegata*) in the central North Island during November 1961, I carefully studied the plumage before sexing each bird cloacally. The juvenile female has a similar black head to the male, but Delacour (1956) states the female has "a reddish tinge on the breast and upper mantle." I agree with this but consider it to be darker than the eclipse plumage of the adult female. I also found that white feathers are not necessarily present on the head of the immature female.

In my examination of these juveniles which had their plumage fully developed except for the primary feathers, I found there was an area of grey around the base of the bill on the forehead, cheeks and chin. In the males it was narrow and in the females extended to nearly half way between the bill and the eyes. (cf. Fig. 1).



Using this grey area in conjunction with the general colouration I determined the sex of the juveniles and found the method to be correct, when checked by cloacal examination.

In December 1962, I found this variation again occurring in the juveniles but was unable to make cloacal examinations to check. It is therefore desirable for further information to confirm this method of sexing the juveniles at this stage.

#### REFERENCE

DELACOUR, JEAN, 1956: *The Waterfowl of the World*, Vol. 1, Country Life Limited, London.  
— H. J. F. McALLUM