

SHORT NOTE

AMERICAN WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN CURLEW)
IN FIRTH OF THAMES

(a) The first of March 1964 was a dismal day. Heavy clouds hung low over the Firth of Thames and as, with two friends, I approached Miranda, heavy rain set in. For most of the morning visibility was reduced to a few yards in the driving rain, but we were fortunate enough to strike two clear spells in the course of our visit. The first, at the old lime-works, was just long enough for us to pick out two Terek Sandpipers fossicking actively along the flanks of a mob of Wrybill. The second time when the rain lifted briefly, we were moving along the foreshore near Waitakaruru towards Kairito. By this time the tide was well on the ebb. All along the receding tideline waders were scattered including at least six Longbilled Curlews (*N. madagascariensis*) distributed among the Godwits. Some hundreds of yards away to our right a bird jumped up hotly pursued by a Godwit and flew towards us, coming to rest directly ahead, not twenty feet from a Curlew. The bird was obviously a Whimbrel but as it landed no pale markings on the back were apparent. Since my schooldays I always now take particular note of the markings on the back of any Whimbrel which I encounter, hoping to detect a dark lower back and rump without any pale markings, this being the distinctive field characteristic of the Hudsonian Whimbrel (*N. phaeopus hudsonicus*). This bird would not allow any closer approach than a hundred yards or more before flying. Twice without success I tried to approach closer. Then the rain set in once more, and the Whimbrel disappeared into the gloom, winging its way somewhere in the direction of Miranda, and we retired to the car. In most respects this Whimbrel closely resembled an Eastern Whimbrel (*variegatus*) in size, shape and colouration, but in place of the usual pale back extending up between the wings, this bird displayed a uniformly dark upper surface as it flew away on both occasions when I had attempted to approach it. It was very restless and chose to stay apart from other birds. On Ohiwa Harbour, Bay of Plenty, in 1949, McKenzie also found this sub-species of Whimbrel very wary, reporting (Notornis IV, 20) that "Much weary rowing, our athletic youth being many years past, could almost have convinced us that this wariness was indeed a valuable identification means."

The Whimbrel was reported only once again, on census day, May 17, on the same stretch of coast.

— M. J. HOGG

(b) On 17/5/64 Stewart Payne, my husband, J. A. Brown, our children, Caroline and Mason, and I visited the Kairito shellbank at "Wrybill Reach." Our task was to cover this area for the 1964 winter census of the Kaiaua-Thames coast. The weather was a mixture of sunshine and scattered showers and a sudden squall had given us a brief wetting. Fortunately it had cleared away, enabling us to count the birds, mainly Wrybills (*Anarhynchus frontalis*), that were present. We had found two well coloured Curlew Sandpipers (*C. ferruginea*) and also two Terek Sandpipers (*Xenus cinereus*), the bright orange-yellow legs of the latter being reflected in the wet mud as the tide ebbed and they moved out to feed.

Looking back from our position half-way along the shellbank, I noticed a Long-billed Curlew (*N. madagascariensis*) on the mud to the

landward side of the shellbank and about a hundred yards north of us. The bird got up in sudden alarm, giving its distinctive call and we all saw that it was being chased by a smaller bird. The attacker was similar to the Asiatic Whimbrel (*N. phaeopus variegatus*) which is known to us, but this bird was entirely brown on its upper surface and without noticeable barring (B.B.). An excellent view was obtained by all of us as it swept closely past. The flank was creamy fawn (B.B.) and the legs trailed behind the tail (J.A.B.). The bill was long and curved down and the flight rapid and powerful. It gave no call. When later we joined other parties at the census base at Miranda to hand in our tally cards, Mr. H. K. McKenzie, on our evidence, confirmed our identification of the bird as an American Whimbrel or Hudsonian Curlew (*N. phaeopus hudsonicus*). He stated that it was almost certainly the same bird which had been seen and described a short time before and in the same vicinity by M. J. Hogg.

— BETH BROWN

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NOTICES

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The spectacular spread of the White-faced Heron (*Ardea novae-hollandiae*) appears to be continuing. Information on the establishment of new colonies, the size of flocks, changes in local population, should be sent to:—

Mrs. A. L. K. Carroll, Wildlife Research,
Dept. Internal Affairs, Wellington.

A special study of the New Zealand Thrushes (*Turnagra*), their discovery, habits, decline, etc., is being made by Mr. D. G. Medway, who would be grateful to receive any information which members may have of unpublished records or out-of-the-way references. His address is: P.O. Box 476, New Plymouth.

FIELD GUIDE

Members may be interested to know that the long-promised "Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand" has reached the page-proofs stage and should be available within a few months.

LITERATURE AVAILABLE

Back Numbers of Notornis at 5s. each. Large orders for full or part sets at special prices.

Reprints of "Kermadec Expedition, Nov. 1964," by A. T. Edgar, at 4/6d. **O.S.N.Z. Library Catalogue**, 70 pp., at 5s.

Banding Reports, Nos. 8-14. 5/- each. (Nos. 1-7 are incorporated in early journals). Order from Mrs. H. R. McKenzie, Box 45; Clevedon.

DONATIONS for Year Ending 31/12/65

Cash: McLaren I. G., £2; St. Paul E., Gallop C. P., Parsonson C. F., Broun W. J., Nuttall A., £1; Fagan J. A., Todd A. Wightman G., 10/-; Smaller amounts totalling £1/7/7.

Field Study Courses: Cragg A., £5/12/6; Mackenzie N. B., £2/11/-; Fooks L. E., £2/5/6; McKenzie H. R., £1/7/-.

Photographs: Bell B. D., Blackburn A., Dominion Museum, Flux J. E. C., Harrow G., Merton D. V., Morgan B. and J., Wright A.

Officers' Expenses: Boeson B. E., Beach Patrol, 16/2; Brathwaite D. H., Checklist, 10/2; Miss M. M. Neill, Nest Records, account not kept; Sibson R. B., Editor, account not kept.

Back Numbers of "Notornis," Etc.: Duguid Mrs. F. C., 42; Gittos S., 20; Maning A. H. M., 5; Munro A.I., 50; Southerill E. H., 24; Tunks Miss E., 9.