

As the size of flocks has increased, some regular roosts may become overcrowded, especially during spring tides; and many oystercatchers, sometimes indeed the whole local population, are forced to desert the shore and look elsewhere for a resting place. Both in Manukau and Kaipara Harbours, *finschi* oystercatchers now readily resort to grassy 'resting paddocks' when tides are very high or the weather is boisterous. Most of their food, however, in the North Island is still found along the seashore, where there are wide tidal flats; yet, as was noted some years ago (5) they sometimes forage inland. An interesting instance of this came to hand at Taporā in mid-Kaipara. Here on 7/7/62 some thousands of birds of several species had been attracted to feed over wet pasture and ploughland, once the bed of a shallow lake, now drained. Together with c. 5000 Red-billed Gulls, were c. 30 Bar-tailed Godwits, a few Pied Stilts and c. 400 S.I. Pied Oystercatchers, as well as flocks of Starlings and Yellowhammers. Nearly all these birds were feeding busily. The lake-bed was about one mile inland; and the oystercatchers were clearly feeding there by choice and enjoying a change of diet; for the full tide left uncovered a huge acreage of sandy flats and the cool southerly wind was not strong enough to worry Wrybills or Dotterels on the adjacent beaches, though not a single *finschi* oystercatcher could be found remaining along them.

#### REFERENCES

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## SHORT NOTE

### "PADDLING" IN RED-BILLED AND BLACK-BILLED GULLS

Fordham's (1963) reference (*Notornis* 10, 206) to "paddling" in the Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) reminded me of similar behaviour seen in the two smaller species of Gull. I have seen this once since reading Fordham's account. It was on 8/2/64: a very warm day (c 80° F) with a moderate S.E. wind. A mixed flock of Red-billed Gulls (*L. scopulinus*) and Black-billed Gulls (*L. bulleri*) were feeding on a sandy flat at the Waimakariri mouth. This flat was periodically covered by a wave of about two inches. As both species showed the same behaviour only one description is given. The bird would work its feet into the soft sand by rapid "marking time" and this caused it to move slowly backwards. The sand around the feet was considerably disturbed and the birds were seen occasionally to snatch some small item of food and eat it. Later examination revealed a large number of small polychaete worms in the sand. Having worked itself some few feet backwards each bird would step out and either stand watching the others or return and work a similar stretch. A similar "marking time" was seen in Red-billed Gulls at the Heathcote-Avon estuary by Miss E. Andrews (pers. comm.). This observation was in early March 1966 and would probably be of the same behaviour pattern.

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