

WHIMBRELS AT LAKE WAITUNA, SOUTHLAND

On 6/4/65 I was at the western end of Lake Waituna in company with Mr. R. Bond. We decided that we would have a good look over Walker's Bay. This bay is about one mile long by half a mile wide and adjacent to the sea coast, but separated from the sea by a large permanent shingle bank. At low tide it consists almost entirely of mud flats and is greatly favoured by a variety of wading birds.

From a position among tussock overlooking the bay we could see scattered groups of waders which included Godwit, Turnstone, Golden Plover, and two birds which we concluded could only be Whimbrel. We viewed these two birds at a distance of about 200 yards with 15x and 30x telescope in a moderately good light. Both birds were together, but quite apart from all other waders. Neither of us had previously seen a Whimbrel. Only after returning home did I realise that we had made no attempt to determine which subspecies of Whimbrel we had seen — Asiatic (*N. phaeopus variegatus*) or Hudsonian (*N. p. hudsonicus*).

On 11/4/65 Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Barlow visited Walker's Bay but were unable to locate the two Whimbrel, and it was assumed that they had departed for the north.

On 21/9/65 I was making a count of wintering waders on a mud flat on the western shore of Lake Waituna, some half a mile from Walker's Bay, when I again sighted two Whimbrel. There can be little doubt that these were the same birds sighted on 6/4/65 and that they had spent the winter in Southland. They were by themselves when first seen and immediately took to flight at my approach. I had only 6 x 30 binoculars with me. The two birds flew about half a mile and fortunately landed on the mud flat close to the lake shore, which at this point is well covered with manuka and flax, some six to eight feet high. After making a careful stalk through this cover I arrived at a point about 50 to 60 yards from the Whimbrel, which were feeding near, but not with, some 100+ Godwit and a few Turnstone. It was fine and sunny and visibility was good. Although my approach had been very careful, the two birds seemed to sense my presence and appeared alert. They had stopped feeding, although the Godwit, some of which were nearer, continued to feed. I could not get a full back view of the birds as they moved slowly and cautiously to my left. I showed myself deliberately, hoping they would fly directly away from me. Both birds immediately took to flight, but went at right angles. I watched the birds through my binoculars as they flew away, and apart from what I am sure was just the bright sun shining on one bird's back, saw no sign of any light coloured plumage on either rump or back.

Because of their extreme wariness and the fact that no light colouring was noted on rump or back on either occasion, especially at the second sighting when it was particularly looked for, I think the evidence suggests that they were *hudsonicus*; but because of my lack of previous experience with Whimbrels I feel I am not qualified to make a very strong claim to the certainty of this sighting.

— R. R. SUTTON