

GODWITS IN SOUTH WESTLAND

On 8/10/67 Mr. R. Cleland, Chief Ranger, Mt. Aspiring National Park, informed me that he had seen some birds which he did not know among a group of oystercatchers south of Haast near the Nolans' homestead on the Okuru road. Accordingly I visited the area and found four Bartailed Godwits (*L. lapponica*) feeding in the short grass along with 12 S.I. Pied Oystercatchers (*H. o. finschi*), 5 Black Oystercatchers (*H. unicolor*), 8 Paradise (*T. variegata*) and some other ducks. One of the Godwits still had a trace of breeding plumage.

Mrs. R. Nolan, in front of whose home the birds were feeding, told me that they had been there for a week. When I revisited the area on October 14th and 28th there were still four Godwits but only six Pied Oystercatchers. A further visit on November 5th revealed twelve Godwits and no other waders or ducks. They were feeding widely spread over a large paddock, undisturbed by the dogs and cattle.

There are few, if any, records of these Godwits so far south in Westland.

— ALAN WRIGHT

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MALE BELLBIRDS LOCKED IN COMBAT

Shortly before dusk on 25/9/68, while walking through beech forest in the Buller Valley near St. Arnaud, Nelson, I noticed what at first glance appeared to be an injured Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) on the forest floor. Closer inspection showed two Bellbirds locked tightly together.

The two birds were holding each other by claws dug deep into head and body. They were lying breast to breast with wings tightly folded; one bird was curled up with its head tucked in, while the other's head was free. The latter had an opponent's claw dug in only a few millimetres from one eye. Neither bird made any sound and except for occasional muscular contractions hardly moved even when picked up.

The birds were separated with difficulty, for on being pulled free the claws immediately took a new hold. The gripping of the birds' claws into each other, and into me when separating them, seemed to be a reflex action over-riding any desire to escape.

Deep purple plumage on the top and sides of the head indicated that both birds were males, and each weighed about 35 grams (taken on a 100 gram spring balance). The birds were released about three minutes after being separated. One flew only 10 feet to a low branch where it sat quietly for several minutes, while the other moved further away and was soon out of sight.

During September Bellbirds are establishing breeding territories, a period when a rise in the level of testosterone in the blood dramatically increases the aggressiveness of many birds (A New Dictionary of Birds, ed. A. L. Thomson, 1964, p. 41). However, prolonged physical assault seldom occurs with wild birds, being replaced by aggressive movements, postures and vocal threats that repel or intimidate without recourse to actual fighting. Physical combat is in fact disadvantageous since it requires much energy and exposes the birds to attack by predators. Indeed the present birds would have been very vulnerable to a passing stoat, cat, or rat.

— R. H. TAYLOR