

A NEW ARCTIC WADER FOR NEW ZEALAND TWO WHITE-RUMPED (BONAPARTE'S) SANDPIPERS AT KARAKA

By H. R. McKENZIE

A party consisting of Gordon and Sara Glenn, members of an Audubon Society in New Jersey, U.S.A., Susan Fogarty, Hetty McKenzie and the writer set out on 9th December, 1969, to try to band New Zealand Dotterel chicks at the Karaka shellbank on the south side of the Manukau Harbour. The writer remained by the outlet of a large drain onto the tideflat while the others moved down the coast. As the tide fell ten Red-necked Stints *C. ruficollis* flew into the inch-deep runnel on the flat and fed, where soon they were joined by two Knots *C. canutus*, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata* and two strange birds, all forming a close group, convenient for making comparisons. The party returned and all studied the birds, mostly at less than twenty yards.

It was agreed that the new birds were two-thirds of the size of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and of similar shape, the bill similar but shorter and finer, rather dark. Other points noted were brown crown, a little streaky; medium sized superciliary eyestripe; dark grey stripe through eye; grey cheek; back marked much as Sharp-tailed Sandpiper; grey pattern high on breast; off-white under; legs described variously by the party as "greeny-grey," "muddy-green" and "brown-green." Witherby, et al, give "dusky green or brownish grey." One bird was a little larger, the pattern as above, but with slightly stronger colours and markings. For some time they ceased feeding and cuddled down against a sloping bank of mud, side by side and touching. They often fed close to each other, or to the other birds.

In comparison the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper had bill similar in shape but larger; more reddish and striped crown; faint superciliary eyestripe; back appeared more scaled; dark chin and throat; scarcely any breast pattern, whitish under.

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdi*, which has recently been obtained in Tasmania and could occur here, seemed likely. The writer had recently seen a flock of this species on the Mississippi River flying close by and giving a good view of the firm dark streak down the rump and upper tail. To check for this the birds were put up, each member of the party being assigned a bird to watch. This failed. The whole flock ran together, then rose in a tight bunch, twisting and flipping, so that nothing diagnostic was seen.

A perusal of the literature ruled out Baird's Sandpiper (even though the rump colour of the new birds was still not known) and indicated White-rumped (Bonaparte's) Sandpiper, for which the genus is variously given as *Calidris*, *Erolia* and *Pisobia*. The name of the species is given as *fuscicollis* by the authors quoted. It was therefore necessary to determine the pattern and colours of the rump and upper tail.

The writer returned the next day and was later joined by Mrs. J. A. (Beth) Brown, an experienced observer. Fortunately the birds had returned and were watched closely until the larger one

bathed in the very shallow water of the runnel, lying on its side and flapping. This gave ample opportunity to see plainly the quite large white area right across the rump, including the lower rump, as compared with the all-dark upper surface of the tail. The latter was clearly seen several times and some further views of the white rump were obtained also. The bird then preened, showing small parts of the white area. It was notable that the white of the rump was a true white, while the undersurface was off-white. A summary of the statements of the various authors shows that this is the only one of the small streaked sandpipers to have the white rump right across, to be straight-billed and to have short legs. As to be expected from the literature, these birds were very tame.

As a photograph in the field would have proved nothing except size and shape, A. M. C. Davis was asked to come with a clapnet to catch the birds to be photographed in the hand and banded. Unfortunately they left before this could be done; nor could they be found on any subsequent visits.

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SHORT NOTES

STILTS RAISING NESTS ABOVE FLOOD WATERS

Stilts (*Himantopus*) of the New World have been known to build up their nests when surrounding water rises, and threatens to engulf the eggs. F. K. Truslow in the *National Geographic* for August 1960 (118.2: 240-245) illustrates this in a remarkable series of colour pictures. On this occasion the nest was built up no less than 4½ inches, the eggs being rolled from side to side as each side of the nest was raised in turn.

The habit does not appear to have been recorded in New Zealand, although Mr. H. R. McKenzie informs me he has observed it. On 28/10/67 I photographed the nest of a Pied Stilt *H. leucocephalus* at the Seaview reclamation, Wellington. The nest was on the edge of a rain soak (Plate XXVII). Heavy rain occurred a few days later and on my next visit, 12/11/67, having expected to find the nest under water, I was surprised to find it had been built up with mud and small stones (Plate XXVIII). The extra height gained was only about 2 inches but it was sufficient to keep the eggs above the higher water level. Two eggs of the four had gone but the remaining two were pipping and the chicks which hatched were reared successfully.