

SIGHTINGS OF RARE WADERS IN THE FAR NORTH

By A. T. EDGAR

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*.

On 3/11/70, Rangiputa Bank (Rangaunu Harbour) carried breeding populations of Red-billed Gulls, Caspian and White-faced Terns; about 40 New Zealand Dotterels and a large assemblage of arctic waders including Godwits, Knots, Turnstones and Whimbrel. At the southern tip of the bank a small party of Godwits flew when approached by Dr. and Mrs. J. H. Seddon and A.T.E., leaving a small solitary wader on the shoreline.

This bird was under observation for about 45 minutes at ranges of 10-20 yards. Using x 10 binoculars, we identified it as a Western Sandpiper. During the period of observation it fed along or just in the edge of the falling tide. Short periods of standing still, body more or less horizontal, alternated with short runs and feeding by dabbling in the mud. At one time it paused to preen the feathers of its upper surface. When a dotterel approached it flipped out of the way and then carried on as before. When we stood up it flew, rising about 15 feet before flattening out, and descended at an angle to land near a party of seven dotterel about 40 yards along the beach, where it continued to feed and allowed close approach without apparent alarm.

Size, about that of a Red-necked Stint; upper parts predominantly brownish grey with light edges to the feathers of mantle, scapulars and wing coverts. Fine dark streaking on crown and neck. A dark patch, narrow in front of and broadening behind the eye, contrasted with well marked white superciliary stripes meeting above the bill. When during one of its brief pauses the bird happened to halt facing the observer, with its bill pointed downwards at an angle of about 45 degrees, as if it was peering, the combination of white forehead and superciliaries, grey crown and dark eye patch produced a somewhat slant-eyed quizzical appearance. Underparts white, with a grey wash on the sides of the breast. Wing tips dark, not extending beyond tail. In flight, the rump showed dark centre and white sides; a very narrow wing-bar. Legs, longer than those of a stint, black (J.H.S.) or very dark blackish olive (A.T.E.); hind toe present. Bill black, at least as long as head, rather slender overall but broader at the base and tapering to the tip, which was slightly decurved.

In deciding on the identification we eliminated *C. pusilla* because of bill shape; and *C. bairdi* because of bill shape, length of wing, and absence of buffy colour. The Western Sandpiper has been recorded in New Zealand only once before, namely on Farewell Spit in October 1964 (Notornis 12: 109).

Little Whimbrel *Numenius minutus*.

Paua, 3/3/71. At high tide a large flock of mixed waders was resting on one of the paddocks, including numerous Godwits, Turnstones, Banded Dotterel, some Knots, Stints, a Tattler, a Terek Sandpiper and two flocks of New Zealand Dotterel totalling about 53 individuals. I had seen no Golden Plover, and was glassing the flock in the hope of finding some, when I saw a single bird standing rather erect with head well up, buffy face and variegated upper

surface. At first sight I took it to be *Pluvialis*, but even at long range there appeared to be something not right about this identification. The paddocks and gateways were wet after heavy rains and I could not use my car but had to approach the birds on foot. Fortunately my bird was associating with one of the New Zealand Dotterel flocks, which did not move when the main mob edged away and allowed me to get to quite close range and have a good look at the stranger. It proved to be a Little Whimbrel.

Slim and erect, head and neck finer than a Golden Plover's and neck longer; bill under two inches, arched downwards, brownish, pinkish at the base of the mandible. Crown dark, with a narrow buffy median stripe and buffy white superciliary stripes. Sides of face buffy. Upper parts boldly spangled, dark brown and buff. Chin and throat whitish, breast buffy, belly and underparts paler or whitish. Rump and tail, well seen when the bird flew a short distance, brownish to greyish brown, tail barred darker brown. Legs relatively long, greyish. Compared with an Asiatic or American Whimbrel the bird had a much shorter bill, was altogether more slender and had a different carriage; it was also noticeably smaller.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*.

Paua, 30/3/71. A large flock of mixed waders was roosting on one of the paddocks. I was able to spend over an hour moving my car along the western edge of the flock, observing at close range individual birds, including four Sharp-tailed Sandpipers which I watched for some time, alongside Turnstones. On moving round to the eastern edge of the flock I found another sandpiper, standing between two Turnstones. It was much the same shape as the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, but considerably smaller, and had a fine straight bill; brown crown, whitish superciliary, greyish eye stripe; pattern of back and wings like Sharp-tailed Sandpiper's but less "scaly"; upper breast lightly streaked greyish, rest of underparts whitish. No rufous tinge on breast or crown. Legs, as far as could be seen, dark; no yellowish tinge. The birds were quite tame and I had plenty of time for close observation at a range of about 20 yards with x 10 binoculars but was still uncertain about the identification till the flock began to thin out as parties of birds left to feed on the mudflats. Eventually my birds flew, and I had an excellent view of the sandpiper's all-white rump and dark tail.

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SHORT NOTE

COMMUNAL FISHING BY SHAGS

On 2/5/71 a flock of Little Black Shags *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* was fishing in Orakei Basin. Scattered through the flock were 12 Pied Shags *P. varius*, diving and swimming with the flock, and except for their comparative clumsiness, behaving exactly like the Little Black Shags. I noticed this behaviour again on 7/5/71 with a smaller proportion of Pied Shags. The Pied Shags usually fish individually. Were they copying the Little Black Shags and joining in where the pickings were better?

The Pied Shag is a permanent resident of Orakei Basin whereas the Little Black Shag comes and goes periodically, being more often seen there in autumn and winter. Orakei Basin is largely impounded, tidal water controlled by flood gates.

— SYLVIA M. REED