

## MARSH SANDPIPERS IN THE BAY OF PLENTY

The purpose of this note is to record the discovery of four Marsh Sandpipers *Tringa stagnatilis* at Kaituna cut estuary reclamation near Maketu in the Bay of Plenty. The four birds were studied on three occasions, 25/1/70, 2/2/70 and 4/2/70. On the first visit I was accompanied by my wife and on the last by Mr. T. B. S. Taylor. Photographs were taken. On each visit these sandpipers were watched for several hours, usually at a distance of about 40 yards, but sometimes from as close as 25 feet. The weather was generally clear and sunny with a light breeze. Binoculars 7 x 50 and a 30x telescope were used. Previously on 31/8/69 I had had an opportunity to study the single Marsh Sandpiper at Mangere, the sixth to be recorded in New Zealand (Notornis 16, 148 and 286).

These four Marsh Sandpipers associated with Pied Stilts, feeding among them on the swampy mud flats and dozing together a few feet to one side of a resting flock. But if they moved too close the Pied Stilts tended to dash at them. They easily avoided these threatening attacks by hopping or fluttering a few feet out of the way; and quite unconcerned they would resume feeding at once. They fed actively, probing deeply in the soft mud, with distinctive white tails upended. Between probings they strode out quickly and gracefully.

In shape somewhat like small stilts, they had light grey-brown upperparts, long straight sharply-pointed black bills, and long greenish-grey legs. In flight the long legs trailed well beyond the tail. The white forehead and superciliary line contrasted with the black eye and surrounding grey patch which extended back to include the ear coverts. Throat and underparts were very light dusty grey forward, becoming pure white on the belly and under the tail. The upperparts from crown to mantle, scapulars and wings were light brownish-grey. The tail, rump and back appeared white, but a fine transverse barring on the tail feathers was best seen when the tail was spread during preening. In flight the white of the tail and rump extended well up to the mantle as a clear distinctive wedge. Underwing linings and axillaries showed white, shading into speckled grey around the edges. At rest the bend of the wing and the tips of the primaries appeared almost black.

There was a slight variation in plumage of the four birds. While three had uniform smooth brownish grey upperparts, one which may have been immature had a faintly streaked and barred pattern, especially on the mantle, scapulars and overlapping primary feathers.

When flying, they called frequently. The call could best be described as a slowly repeated 'tchew' 'tchew' 'tchew.'

Several other species of waders, both endemic and arctic, visited the Kaituna estuary during our visits. After the four Marsh Sandpipers, perhaps the most notable were:— Red-breasted Dotterel (5), Wrybill (7), Pectoral Sandpiper (1), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (2), Turnstone (13).

— J. H. SEDDON