

## SHORT NOTES

### THE SPREAD OF THE BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL

#### (a) *MANUKAU HARBOUR*

For two successive winters a Black-fronted Dotterel has joined the Wrybills which at full tide have been roosting on the dredged shell and mud beside No. 4 pond A.M.D.B. Mangere. It was found by Gerald Robinson on 22 May 1970, this being the first record of the species as far north as Manukau Harbour. It remained at least till 15 August; and during its three months' stay it was watched at close quarters by Mrs S. Reed and other Auckland members on at least eight occasions. For example on 24 July 1970 it was standing quietly on the edge of a compact flock of c. 400 Wrybills; while at some distance was a loose scattering of c. 200 Banded Dotterels.

On 29 June 1971 Pat Crombie reported that a Black-fronted Dotterel was once again present with the wintering Wrybills. This bird also disappeared about mid-August. It especially favoured the edges of a shallow pool, where it could sometimes be found either by itself or near feeding stilts, while the Wrybills were away on the tidal flats. In both winters Banded Dotterels resorted to the five or six acres of dried out dredgings, which indeed provided an ideal dotterel habitat. Not once was the Black-fronted Dotterel seen to consort with the Banded Dotterels. On 10 August it was easily located near its chosen pool. It was missing next day nor was it seen thereafter.

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#### (b) *LOWER WAIKATO*

In the mid-1960s Ross McKenzie and I made several trips reconnoitring the numerous lakes of the lower Waikato. On 12 June we found a pair of Black-fronted Dotterels, which were frequenting an attractive little delta in the south-east sector of L. Waikare. They were in full view at the water's edge where a streamlet fanned over a pumicey beach. We were alerted by their flittings and movements. Then while H.R.McK. used his telescope I crossed some marshy ground and examined them from a distance of 20-30 yards. They were clearly a pair, one being rather bigger than the other. They were sharing their strip of beach with a pair of Pipits. Water-levels in L. Waikare are now controlled by the Waikato Valley Authority. At the time of our visit the level was low. When I returned on 7 August, no *melanops* could be seen, but a Welcome Swallow was flitting over the swampy delta. Now this area is overgrown with weeds and no longer suitable.

Although we have returned to L. Waikare on numerous occasions, we have no further sightings, but the lake is so large that there may be isolated stretches of shore where Black-fronted Dotterels could bring off a brood when the water is low.

Often have we looked hopefully across the water to a tongue of land which juts into L. Wahi. There have been reports that dotterels visit this locality in summer. On 1 February 1970 Mr Peter Howard kindly arranged to take me there and I was at once impressed with the possibilities of the shore-line. Stilts, of course, were numerous in the muddy shallows and two sandpipers were carefully diagnosed as American, *Calidris melanotos*. Of Black-fronted Dotterels there was not a sign.

Along the River Waikato itself sandy islands are often exposed in summer for weeks, even months, on end. In a dry summer these might well repay examination from Huntly downwards.

The provenance of the few Black-fronted Dotterels so far discovered in the province of Auckland is a matter of conjecture. All have appeared in winter. Are they fresh invaders from Australia or pioneers of a northward dispersal from Hawkes Bay?

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(c) TARANAKI

On the morning of 1 August 1971, in the course of a regular beach patrol, W. Cash and R. Gallienne saw an unusual dotterel at a small fresh-water lagoon about 50 yards from the sea near Bell Block beach, 5 miles north of New Plymouth. In the afternoon the writer and W. Cash returned and were able to watch the dotterel closely as it fed actively around the edge of the same lagoon. It was a Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*), the first known record of this species from Taranaki.

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(d) WAIKANAE

On 13 November 1971 Dr and Mrs C. A. Fleming watched a Black-fronted Dotterel feeding on the north bank of the Waikanae River not far from the new marina.

(e) MARLBOROUGH

On 14 May 1969 we saw three Black-fronted Dotterels on the Wairau River bed, just below the main road (No. 1 State Highway) bridge. When we saw them again on the following day they had been joined by a fourth. Next Wednesday J.D. saw all four again in the same place, but during the few days after this the river was in flood and they probably moved elsewhere.

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(f) *OUTRAM, OTAGO*

While walking along a gravel beach on the Taieri River near Outram at 7.30 p.m. on 21 December 1966 one of my dogs flushed a dotterel-like bird which flew round and landed some 70-80 yards further along the beach. It appeared brownish on the upper parts with white throat and a prominent black Y-shaped band on the breast, and with a black forehead. I contacted Mrs J. B. Hamel and she suggested that it might be a Black-fronted Dotterel.

I saw presumably the same bird again at 4 p.m. on 23 December on the same beach. It was feeding along the edge of the water and on viewing it through binoculars I could see in addition to the previous markings observed that there was a white line passing just above the eye and continuing round the back of the head. Also it had a bright red beak with black tip and a red ring round the eye. With the description given in the Field Guide it was possible to confirm that it was a Black-fronted Dotterel. It was on the beach again at 5 p.m. on 27 December. No further sightings were made in 1966. The beach is some 160 by 60 yards in area and situated approximately one mile downstream from the Outram Bridge (Map reference, NZMS 1, Sheet S163 - 930726).

On 26 November 1970 I noticed a Black-fronted Dotterel on the same beach and my wife and I observed it from 4 p.m. to 4.45 p.m. That same evening Mr P. Schweigman came out from Dunedin and we watched it for about half an hour. It was also observed on nine days between 28 November 1970 and 15 January 1971.

All the sightings were on the same beach, except for the last when the bird appeared on a gravel beach about a quarter of a mile upstream from the beach of the previous sightings. On this occasion it landed on the gravel beach and after a few minutes it flew to the opposite side of the river and began feeding on muddy ground at the edge of the water.

The beach where the bird was seen most often was inspected at least once a day from 26 November 1970 to 11 January 1971. After that date it was inspected frequently but not every day. Since 15 January there have been no further sightings up till the present time, 11 May 1971.

GEORGE GRANT

SEX AND AGE OF THE ONLY SPECIMEN OF THE  
DARTER *Anhinga rufa* (DAUDIN)  
RECORDED FROM NEW ZEALAND

The only record of a Darter, *Anhinga rufa* (Daudin), in New Zealand is that of a skin which was found nailed to the wall of a shed at Hokitika, South Westland, in January by F. R. Fuller. Buller (1875), when reporting the find, gave a detailed description of the skin and thought that it was either an adult female or an immature of either sex. The skin is in the Canterbury Museum (AV 14,971). It has the following plumage characteristics which indicate that it is that of an adult female. There are long, thin,