

LITTLE WHIMBRELS AT NAPIER

On 17 January 1969, during a visit to the Ahuriri Lagoon area, three birds quite new to us flew from a patch of bare earth and scattered grass across the stop bank beside the Ahuriri outfall channel. Their flight in the still air was notably languid, with short, deliberate wing-beat, and the brown upper surface showed no rump or wing pattern.

Sketches and notes were made from telescope examination of them on the ground, where they were associated with stilts and Golden Plovers and somewhat obscured by the growth of *Salicornia*. Their height brought them to about the level of a standing stilt's bend of wing; size about that of a Golden Plover, though a little taller because of longer legs. Bill short compared with godwit/whimbrel proportions, i.e. slightly longer than its head length, down-curved, dark at tip and pink at base. Top of head when seen from in front clearly striped with two broad dark bands above each eye. Back and wings brown with primaries showing as very dark and covert feathers brown with lighter margins; chest and flanks buff wash; abdomen and under-tail greyish-white. Legs pale with bluish or olive-grey tinge. No call was heard.

At the time we felt that these birds could only be Little Whimbrels (*Numenius minutus*), one of which had been recorded here by Brathwaite in July and October 1952 and in April 1953. Any remaining doubts were dispelled when on 22 October 1972 BDH and A. Blackburn, together with seven others of the OSNZ Field Study group, saw one on the main Ahuriri estuary feeding among scattered godwits and Golden Plovers. A first impression was of whimbrel colouring and stance, but with very short bill and smaller size, clearly smaller than nearby godwits, and with similar body size as but taller than Golden Plover. When it flew, alone, a "tchoo-tchoo-tchoo" call was heard, and its uniform brown upper surface with darker primaries was clearly seen.

REFERENCES

- BRAETHWAITE, D. H. 1953a. Wader seen at Napier. *Notornis* 5 (4): 117.
——— 1953b. Little Whimbrel at Napier. *Notornis* 5 (6): 181.

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