

FAR-INLAND SIGHTINGS OF SPOONBILL AND GODWIT

On 21 October 1972 while completing a survey of the Makarora riverbed I was skirting the shoreline at the head of Lake Wanaka about 4.30 p.m. when a large white bird was seen resting on a small grassy island about 70 yards from the lake edge. As a White Heron had been reported to me a few days earlier from Clyde, Central Otago, my first thoughts were that this could be the same bird making its way back to Okarito, South Westland, where they traditionally breed. However, through the glasses I was surprised to find it was a Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), easily identified by the large, black, spatulate bill and the long black legs. There was a well-defined crest characteristic of breeding plumage, but no sign of a sandy-buff wash on the foreneck. A strong westerly wind was blowing at the time, keeping the birds on the ground, and the Spoonbill was resting among a small flock of Mallard, Paradise and Grey Duck. Jet boats later disturbed it but it flew back to the same spot.

It was still present in the same area, feeding in shallow water at the lake edge with characteristic scythe-like motions of the bill, on 29 October.

The day after my first sighting (22 October), while examining the waterfowl and waders in one of the shallow reaches of western Lake Wanaka (near the Matukituki River mouth) we were even more surprised to find four Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica baueri*) feeding in a swampy lakeside field among a scattered flock of 44 South Island Pied Oystercatchers. The birds were viewed to within 25 yards in brilliant late afternoon sunshine. They were all very pale in plumage and seemed to be relatively small in body size and not especially long in the bills, and hence were thought to be all males. When flushed, the very pale rump and barred tail were prominent; the birds then settled on the lake edge mud 100 yards away and recommenced feeding. A week later (28 October) only three could be found in the same area. They were feeding at the lake edge in a tight group, with the oystercatchers 50 yards away in drier pasture.

The distributional qualifications of "seldom reported inland" (Godwit) and "rarely inland" (Spoonbill) in the *Field Guide* appear to be very conservative understatements. The only other inland sightings I have been able to trace (with distances from the nearest coast added in brackets) are:

Godwit: 3 January 1949 — 8 flying over Lake Rotorua (22 miles), JHC in Black 1954: 226; 28 September 1971 — 1 at confluence of Rakaia and Wilberforce rivers, with a flock of c. 30 South Island Pied Oystercatchers (52 miles), D. G. Geddes pers. comm.

Spoonbill: 26 January 1959 — 1 at Lake Wahi, near Huntly (18 miles), Merton 1960: 202; 3 January 1961 — 1 at Wanstead Swamp, Hawkes Bay (12 miles), Heighway 1961: 240.

For comparison, the birds at Lake Wanaka were considerably further inland — Godwit: c. 50 miles from west, 100 from east coast; Spoonbill: c. 36 miles from west, 100 from east coast.

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LITERATURE CITED

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