DECREASE OF GREY WARBLER

There has been a drastic decline in the numbers of Grey Warbler *(Gerygone igata)* recorded in my garden, compared with thirty years ago, although the environment has remained unchanged. In a daily record of all species seen in the garden over a twelve month period, the figures for May 1942 to April 1943 gave a total of 257 for the Grey Warbler whereas those for May 1971 to April 1972 gave the much reduced tally of 39. Now weeks may pass without a Warbler being recorded but thirty years ago it was a constant inhabitant and actually breeding. We do not use any sprays.

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FERNBIRDS ON THE HILLS WEST OF DUNEDIN

There have been several uncertain reports of Fernbirds *(Bowdleria p. punctata)* on Flagstaff and Swampy hills on the western boundaries of Dunedin city, but they have never been confirmed.

On 24 June 1973 Mr Neil Henderson and others saw one Fernbird and heard two others along Burns Track at an altitude of about 1600′ (488m).

The general vegetation in the region consists of tussock *(Chionochloa rigida)* 1m high and scattered flax *(Phormium tenax)* 1.5m sometimes clumped. The flax bushes are about a metre apart with tussock between. Odd coprosma bushes *(C. rugosa* and *C. propinqua)*, Olearia, Hebe, Manuka (2m), Aciphylla, Gorse and Cassinia are sparsely scattered throughout.

Drainage is good, and the terrain generally dry except in one shallow valley where there are numerous patches of boggy ground. These wet areas are clothed with *Carex spp.* with scattered flax 2m high with Coprosma and occasional Hebes on firmer ground.

On each of two subsequent visits, 29 July and 4 August 1973, we saw one Fernbird in the wet area. Three others, however, were seen widely separated (over 1 mile apart) amongst the tussock and flax — one bird was seen at over 2000′ (610m) close to the summit of Swampy.

All the Fernbirds heard calling (a total of four) were tracked down and good views obtained of each. They appeared to be no different in colour or pattern from the birds RSG has seen at Tuakitoto.

The rolling and sometimes steep terrain covered with tussock and scattered areas of flax extends not only west towards Middlemarch but also north to the Shag Valley and south to the Maungatuas. It is likely that Fernbirds are scattered throughout.

Mrs J. B. Hamel suggests the possibility that Fernbird populations in tussock scrublands may be limited to higher altitudes e.g. over 1200′ (366m) where rainfall is in excess of 47″ (1193mm).

Fernbirds, rather than being isolated in pockets of relatively dense population in the lowland bogs and about the margins of lakes such as Lakes Waihola and Tuakitoto, may have therefore a more continuous distribution and a greater tolerance of harsher conditions in East Otago than we had previously assumed.

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BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW RECORDS FROM THE KERMADEC ISLANDS

Prior to the two new records noted below, the only record of Bristle thighed Curlew *(Numenius tahitiensis)* in the New Zealand region is that of one sighted in August 1966 on Macauley Island (O'Brien 1966; Bell & Williams in press).

On 9 September 1972, during the combined Wildlife/Forest Service visit to Raoul Island, a visit was made to North Meyer Island. There the dried remains of a "Whimbrel" were found high on the rocks in a situation showing that the bird must have died on the island. These remains were later forwarded to the Dominion Museum and there identified by F. C. Kinsky as a female Bristle-thighed Curlew.

On 25 September 1972 an unusual Whimbrel was seen on the shores of Blue Lake, Raoul Island. At that time five Asiatic Whimbrel *(Numenius phaeopus variegatus)* were present on Raoul, and the unusual bird was observed to be a similar size but to have two obvious differences: Firstly, its voice, which I recorded as *krreeep* with a slightly rising cadence, had no similarity to the Asiatic Whimbrel's *ti-ti-ti-ti.* Secondly, the light (buff) tail coverts formed a band across the lower rump rather than the obvious blaze up the back of Asiatic Whimbrels.

On 30 September I was able to photograph this bird (see Fig. 1). Study, by F. C. Kinsky and myself, of this and other photographs and comparison with museum specimens and published descriptions (Peterson 1961; Matthiessen 1967) show two further diagnostic features:— Firstly, the back and wing coverts, as seen in the photograph,