

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 Waiholo 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,



FIGURE 1 — Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) on the shore of Blue Lake, Raoul Island, 30 September 1972.

Photo: C. R. Veitch

are more obviously speckled than those of Asiatic Whimbrels. Secondly, the streaking on the breast is less pronounced and does not extend as far down as that on Asiatic Whimbrels.

These diagnostic features, when added up, show that the bird in question was also a Bristle-thighed Curlew.

For future field identification, the voice and tail covert colour are the most noticeable diagnostic features of the Bristle-thighed Curlew. One further feature, not noted above, which can be useful in the field, is that the tail of the Asiatic Whimbrel is grey with black bars while that of the Bristle-thighed Curlew is rusty buff with black bars. Other features are ones of comparison and, therefore, of little use in the field in New Zealand.

LITERATURE CITED

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