

FAREWELL SPIT, MARCH 1974

By A. T. EDGAR

ABSTRACT

The results of a combined Wildlife Service/OSNZ visit to Farewell Spit, the northwestern point of the South Island, from 7 to 14 March 1974 are given. The objects were (a) to make an accurate count of the main waders, (b) to see what rare species were present and in what numbers and (c) to make an accurate count of Black Swan.

A list of 95 species, including past records with their appropriate references, is given. New records are Canada Goose (1), Paradise Duck (15), Large Sand Dotterel (4), Lesser Yellowlegs (1) and Rock Pigeon (1). Counts for waders were: South Island Pied Oystercatcher, 8619 and 7407; Variable Oystercatcher, 74 black; Golden Plover, 16, 15, 14; NZ Dotterel, 8; Banded Dotterel, 1134 and 1624; Mongolian Dotterel, 4; Large Sand Dotterel, 4; Wrybill, 1; Curlew, 22; Asiatic Whimbrel, 23; Little Whimbrel, 1; Bar-tailed Godwit, 13492 and 12215; Lesser Yellowlegs, 1; Greenshank, 2; Turnstone, 1334 and 1879; Knot, 18700 and 16143; Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 5; Curlew Sandpiper, 3; Red-necked Stint, 28; Sanderling, 2 and Pied Stilt, 20. The count of Black Swan on 12 March 1974 was 13678.

INTRODUCTION

A combined Wildlife Service/OSNZ party visited Farewell Spit 7-14 March 1974. Those taking part in the exercise were B. D. Bell (Leader), J. S. Adams, C. R. Barnicoat, F. H. Boyce, J. A. Brown, A. T. Edgar, B. A. Ellis, T. R. Harty, N. R. Hellyer, R. McLay, M. Smith, T. Hartley-Smith, R. Russ, C. R. Veitch, R. M. Weston, M. Williams; Mesdames M. Adams, B. Brown, H. Harty, S. M. Reed. The party assembled at Nelson noon 7 March, proceeded to Farewell Spit and established camp at Freeman's woolshed that evening, broke camp and returned to Nelson by noon 14 March.

Thanks are due to Brian Bell for organising and running the expedition; to John Adams and Goldie Hartley-Smith for transport on the Spit; to Rod Russ for his efficiency as quartermaster; to the ladies of the party for undertaking a major part of the domestic chores; to Frank and Berna Soper for entertaining us to a barbecue in their delightful garden; to Mr S. W. Freeman and family for practical help and the use of their woolshed.

OSNZ members who over the years since 1961 have enjoyed the facilities and assistance provided on Freeman's farm will learn

with regret that the property has been sold. The Freeman's have been good friends of the Society and all who have experienced their hospitality will wish them good health and good fortune in the future.

Weather was fine and rather warm with light or moderate winds; 4 metre tides between 1000 and 1200 hours on 8-11 March.

The basic plan was —

- (a) to make an accurate count of the main waders
- (b) to see what rarer species are present and in what numbers
- (c) to make an accurate count of Black Swan.

The work programme provided for a day of familiarization on the Spit on 8 March, census of main waders on 9 March and a repeat census on 11 March, check on rarities on 10 and 13 March and a census of Black Swan on 12 March. The daily roster was so arranged that members were able to visit different parts of the Spit on successive days. On wader census days the Spit was worked by six parties covering miles 0-5, 5-7½, 7½-10, 10-12½, 12½-15, 15-tip, with emphasis on the need for accurate counting of large wader mobs congregated at high tide on the outer beach and flats on the Spit. Rarities were noted when seen and checked in detail on alternate days. Several members occupied unorganised time in checking birds on Freeman's farm and pond and at Puponga Inlet.

No special watch was kept for offshore seabirds; storm-cast specimens were listed by CRV and cards were completed for the four map squares which cover the Spit.

In past years the scrub-covered area (miles 0-5) was relatively easy of access by a network of animal tracks. Very few grazing animals remain on the Spit; scrub and rushes are much denser in miles 0-5 and in March 1974 drought conditions had dried up the pools which in normal times hold a few water birds and attract a few sandpipers etc.

SPECIES LIST

Each major expedition to Farewell Spit adds new species to the locality list. March 1974 additions were Canada Goose, Paradise Duck, Large Sand Dotterel, Lesser Yellowlegs and Feral Pigeon. Listed here are 95 species recorded between Freeman's farm and the tip of Farewell Spit.

March 1974 figures are given in some detail and relevant past records are briefly noted, with references in the text when the source of information is other than the list of references given at the end of this paper.

LITTLE BLUE PENGUIN (*Eudyptula minor*)

Regular. March 1974, numerous tracks along the length of the Spit.

WANDERING ALBATROSS (*Diomedea exulans*)

Offshore, January 1961; probable sighting January 1967.

MOLLYMAWK sp. (*Diomedea* sp.)

Offshore, May 1962, January 1967; three in March 1974.

NELLY (*Macronectes giganteus*)

Offshore, May 1962.

BROAD-BILLED PRION (*Pachyptila vittata*)

Storm cast specimen, January 1961. One in October 1971 (BDB).

FAIRY PRION (*P. turtur*)

January 1961, 50 plus offshore; January 1967, two, storm cast.

DARK PETRELS (possibly *Puffinus carneipes*)

Offshore, January 1961, May 1962, January 1967.

BULLER'S SHEARWATER (*P. bulleri*)

Offshore, January 1961.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*P. griseus*)

Offshore, January 1961, January 1967; March 1974, a number shearing off the outer beach.

FLUTTERING SHEARWATER (*P. gavia*)

Offshore, January 1961, in thousands; May 1962, fairly large flocks; small flocks in January 1967.

DIVING PETREL (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*)

January 1961, storm cast specimen.

GANNET (*Sula bassana*)

January 1961, 12; May 1962, 150; January 1967, 12; March 1974, 30.

BLACK SHAG (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

January 1961; May 1962, 25-30; September 1962; January 1967, 42; described as the common shag of the Spit, but usually Little Shags are more plentiful. March 1974, highest count on any one day, 22.

PIED SHAG (*P. varius*)

Recorded October 1971 (BDB).

LITTLE SHAG (*P. melanoleucos*)

January 1961, 90; May 1962, 250; April 1965, 400; January 1967, 37. March 1974, 110 counted one evening at the roost near Freeman's pond; inner beach count 12 March 1974, 243.

SPOTTED SHAG (*Stictocarbo punctatus*)

Single birds, storm cast, May 1962 and March 1974.

WHITE-FACED HERON (*Ardea novaehollandiae*)

Regular. Estimated population May 1962, 435. January 1967, only 190 recorded on the Spit, but 290 at Golden Bay and 101 at Westhaven gave a grand total of 581. March 1974, 440 counted along the inner beach during the swan census.

WHITE HERON (*Egretta alba*)

Recorded October 1971 (BDB).

AUSTRALIAN BITTERN (*Botaurus stellaris*)

January 1961, three at permanent pool, mile 3. Not recorded subsequently.

ROYAL SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*)

March 1958, one (BDB). May 1962, 8. September 1962, 4. April 1965, 2. Not recorded in January 1961 and 1967. December 1973, 5 (R. J. Pierce). March 1974, 4, seen daily either on the zostera flats or on the Spit around mile 6.

BLACK SWAN (*Cygnus atratus*)

Regular. January 1967, estimated 7,000. For the swan census on 12 March 1974 the inner beach was divided into eight sections, each 2-mile section covered by a pair of observers, pairs working toward each other to eliminate overlap. The total recorded was 13,678. On the same day a count was made from a small aircraft flying at 500 feet with two observers and one recorder. The average count of swans from the air was 6,300 and the range 7,100 to 5,600.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

A single bird, swimming among the swans on 12 March 1974 and seen on several other days, is a new record for the Spit.

PARADISE DUCK (*Tadorna variegata*)

A new record for the Spit. Birds seen on Freeman's pond on several days by various observers, maximum recorded 15, six males and nine females (SMR). Two males were seen at 3-mile pond (BDB).

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Recorded in small numbers on all visits. March 1974, two on Freeman's pond (one mutant); party of 10 on Spit.

GREY DUCK (*A. superciliosa*)

Recorded on all visits; May 1962, a mixed flock of 5-600 ducks, some Mallard, mostly Grey or hybrid; January 1967, 91; March 1974, 20 on Freeman's pond, and 153 ducks, mostly Grey, swimming off the inner beach at the time of the swan count.

N.Z. SHOVELER (*A. rhynchotis*)

May 1962, 26; September 1962, 11; January 1967, 10; March 1974, 3.

HARRIER (*Circus approximans*)

Recorded in January 1961. May 1962, 13; September 1962, 4; January 1967, 4-5; March 1974, 10 counted on both census days.

CALIFORNIAN QUAIL (*Lophortyx californica*)

Recorded at the base of the Spit in January 1967. 10 March 1974, a covey of 10 beyond mile 15.

WESTERN WEKA (*Gallirallus australis*)

Regular. Tracks all along the Spit and birds calling at night near the woolshed, March 1974.

PUKEKO (*Porphyrio melanotos*)

January 1961, odd pairs and a family party at mile 3 pool. May 1962, one. January 1967, 2-3 pairs on farm, 2-3 at mile 3, total 10. March 1974, one seen at mile 3, c. 30 on 10 March 1974 beyond mile 15.

SOUTH ISLAND PIED OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

January 1961, 2,048; May 1962, 4,000; September 1962, 750; January 1967, 4,126 (the total count for Farewell Spit, Golden Bay and Westhaven was 8,214). 1974 census counts, 9 March, 8,619; 11 March, 7,407. On both days over 50% of the birds were in great flocks in mile 7½-10 area.

VARIABLE OYSTERCATCHER (*H. unicolor*)

January 1961, 42, all black except for one intermediate (smudgy) bird. May 1962, 22 blacks, on outer beach and sand flats; September 1962, 16 blacks scattered among 750 SIPO.

January 1967, 37; as on previous occasions a flock was sometimes seen at Fossil Point but birds were at times dispersed along the whole length of the Spit. 9 March 1974, 42 blacks, most of them scattered among the SIPO flocks and easily counted when the flock was put to flight; RMcL studied with binoculars one large flock (mile 7½-10) and reports that it included an indeterminate number of intermediate and pied variable.

GREY PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

January 1961, one. September 1962, two single birds at miles 7 and 9 respectively, both in breeding plumage.

Single birds in December 1968, and October 1971 (BDB).

GOLDEN PLOVER (*P. dominica*)

January 1961, 30. April 1965, 3. January 1967, 40. 15 on 28 December 1973 (R. J. Pierce). March 1974, counts on 8th, 9th and 11th were respectively 16, 15 and 14 birds.

NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL (*Charadrius obscurus*)

January 1961, 5. May 1962, 5. September 1962, one. April 1965, 3. January 1967, 3. Two in October 1971 (BDB). One on 28 December 1973 (R. J. Pierce). March 1974, census counts on 9th and 11th were two at mile 5-7½ and 3 at mile 7½-10, total 5; on 13 March 1974 two parties, one of 5 and one of 3, total 8 birds, seen around mile 8.

BANDED DOTTEREL (*C. bicinctus*)

January 1961, 1,088. May 1962, 1, 255. September 1962, 50. April 1965, 200 plus. January 1967, 930 counted in the week 10th-17th, 1,458 in week 24th-31st. March 1974, 1,134 counted on 9th, 1,624 on 11th.

MONGOLIAN DOTTEREL (*C. mongolus*)

January 1961, one. January 1967, 3. March 1974, 4.

LARGE SAND DOTTEREL (*C. leschenaulti*)

10 March 1974, four at about mile 8 (BDB). A new record for the Spit.

WRYBILL (*Anarhynchus frontalis*)

January 1961, 29. May 1962, 7. September 1962, 2. April 1965, 3. January 1967, 4. Two on 27 December 1973 (R. J. Pierce). March 1974, one.

CURLEW (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

January 1961, 18. May 1962, 7. September 1962, 37. April 1965, 3. January 1967, 35. 9 March 1974, 22. On subsequent days the Curlew flock was variously recorded as 18, 19 and 29 birds, but the maximum figure of 22 is correct; on two occasions it was noticed that when observers approached a large flock of mixed waders, a flock of curlew took off leaving two to four individuals apparently undisturbed.

ASIATIC WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*)

First recorded by BDB in March 1958. January 1961, 21. May 1962, one (sp. unid.). June 1966, 3 (BDB). January 1967, 26. March 1968, 34 and October 1971, 10 (BDB). March 1974, 15 on 9th, 13 on 11th, two parties totalling 23 birds around mile 12 on 12th.

AMERICAN WHIMBREL (*N. p. hudsonicus*)

April 1965, one.

LITTLE WHIMBREL (*N. minutus*)

One in January 1961; one in March 1968 (BDB).

AMERICAN BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa haemastica*)

11 March 1974, one at mile 10, closely examined by CRV.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (sp. unid.)

One was seen in January 1961.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*)

January 1961, 17,720. May 1962, 2,000. September 1962, 8,000. January 1967, 19,000. October 1971, 12,000 (BDB). 9th March 1974, 13,492; 11th March, 12,215; about 80% of the birds were still in winter plumage but movement had probably started as at about 1630 hours a large flock of about 2,000 birds was seen flying high and heading north.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

A new record for the Spit. When first seen on 9 March 1974 by RMV it was in company with a Greenshank; found again on 10 March 1974 and closely examined by BB, who confirmed the identification.

GREENSHANK (*T. nebularia*)

November 1963, 2. April 1965, 2. January 1967, 1. March 1974, one seen on 9th, two on 11th.

WANDERING TATTLER (*T. incana*)

April 1965, one.

SIBERIAN TATTLER (*T. brevipes*)

1962, one in May, one in September. April 1965, 2. January 1967, 4. March 1968, 4 and October 1971, one (BDB).

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

January 1961, 808. 1962 May, 20; September, 50. April 1965, 400. January 1967, 700. Figures for March 1974 at 1,334 on 9th and 1,879 on 11th were far in excess of any previous record. There were parties and flocks all along the outer beach and on the flats of the Spit. A proportion of the birds may have been on passage. The counts for miles 1-10 were very close on both days at 691 and 688, but for mile 10-tip the count was 643 on 9th March and on 11th March 1,191, of which 635 were found between mile 15 and the tip of the Spit.

KNOT (*Calidris canutus*)

January 1961, 27,370. 1962 May, 730; September, 10,000. January 1967, 26,000. October 1971, 18,000 (BDB). March 1974, 18,700 on 9th and 16,143 on 11th. Of one large mob studied on 12 March 1974 about 90% were already in colour.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER (*C. acuminata*)

January 1961, 2. April 1965, 12. January 1967, 7. March 1974, 5.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*C. ferruginea*)

January 1961, 2. September 1962, one. October 1964, 3. April 1965, 7. January 1967, 4. March 1968, 4 (BDB). March 1974, 3.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*C. mauri*)

October 1964, one.

RED-NECKED STINT (*C. ruficollis*)

January 1961, 9. 1962 May, 6; September 4. October 1964, 31. April 1965, 25. January 1967, 38. March 1968, 38 (BDB). 8 March 1974, 28; only 16 and 19 were counted on 9th and 11th March, both counts including a partial albino.

SANDERLING (*C. alba*)

Two in May 1962. Two seen by R. J. Pierce on 28 December 1973 and two on 8-9 March 1974.

PIED STILT (*Himantopus leucocephalus*)

January 1961, 18. 1962 May, 21; September, 10. January 1967, 39, at the pools mile 2-5. March 1974, pools dry; 20 stilts counted near the base of the Spit.

BLACK STILT (*H. novaeseelandiae*)

January 1961, one.

POMARINE SKUA (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

Single birds recorded in January 1961 and April 1965. March 1974, a dark phase small skua considered to be this species.

ARCTIC SKUA (*S. parasiticus*)

January 1961, 5. May 1962, one. January 1967, 5 or 6 small skuas, usually seen flying over the inner flats. March 1974, three small skuas, seen at intervals over the inner beach and inner flats;

one bird, flying parallel to the outer beach, held a yellowish object in its bill. This object was twice dropped and retrieved in mid air by a rapid swoop, the bird then resuming its horizontal flight.

BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus dominicanus*)

January 1961, 200. May 1962, 500. January 1967, 271. March 1974, 353.

RED-BILLED GULL (*L. novaehollandiae*)

January 1961, 199. May 1962, 454. January 1967, 310. March 1974, 380.

BLACK-BILLED GULL (*L. bulleri*)

January 1961, 101. May 1962, 61. January 1967, 160. March 1974, 10 plus.

BLACK-FRONTED TERN (*Chlidonias albobristatus*)

January 1961, 5. May 1962, 23. April 1965, about 200, including a large number of juveniles. January 1967, 10. March 1974, 122, a few with orange bills and feet, the majority with dark bills.

WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN (*C. leucopterus*)

January 1967, one. 1974, one seen near the tip of the Spit in February by Dr Gerald Robinson, and probably the same bird in March by our party.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

January 1961, 86. 1962, 39 in May, 30 plus in September. January 1967, 200. December 1973, colony at Shelly Bank had 46 occupied nests; 125 adults and 30 juveniles at the colony and a number of adults and juveniles which had left the colony were seen along the Spit (R. J. Pierce). March 1974, 109.

CRESTED TERN (*Sterna bergii*)

January 1960, one (Bell 1960: 261).

LITTLE TERN (*S. albigrons*)

January 1967, 3. December 1973, one near tip of Spit (R. J. Pierce). March 1974, 5 (3 at mile 7½-10, 2 beyond mile 15).

WHITE-FRONTED TERN (*S. striata*)

January 1961, 1,085. May 1962, 42. January 1967, 185. March 1974, 693 on 11th, 806 near tip of Spit on 12th.

WHITE-CAPPED NODDY (*Anous minutus*)

January 1961, one.

N.Z. PIGEON (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*)

January 1967, two on Freeman's farm.

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

A feral pigeon was seen on 10 March 1974 at mile 7½.

SHINING CUCKOO (*Chalcites lucidus*)

January 1967, one on Freeman's farm; recorded October 1971 (BDB). March 1974, one on Freeman's farm, four on the Spit beyond mile 15.

LONG-TAILED CUCKOO (*Eudynamis taitensis*)

Sightings of single birds on 2 November 1946 (White 1948: 170), 21 January 1961 (McKenzie & McKenzie 1961: 251) and one in the pines near the lighthouse in December 1968 (BDB).

MOREPORK (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*)

March 1974, heard calling; one entered Freeman's woolshed.

N.Z. KINGFISHER (*Halcyon sancta*)

Not recorded in January 1961. May 1962, 28 counted along the length of the inner beach. September 1962, three, and January 1967, one, near base of Spit. March 1974, three near the base of the Spit, two beyond mile 15.

SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*)

Regularly recorded in suitable areas on the Spit.

AUSTRALIAN TREE MARTIN (*Hylochelidon nigricans*)

Two in January 1960 (Wright 1960: 261).

WELCOME SWALLOW (*Hirundo tahitica*)

Well established; 11 March 1974, about 50 over paddocks at the base of the Spit and seven birds between mile 12½-15.

N.Z. PIPIT (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

Regular; sightings miles 0-10 and near tip of Spit.

HEDGE SPARROW (*Prunella modularis*)

Regular; sightings miles 0-10 and 12½-15.

GREY WARBLER (*Gerygone igata*)

Regular; sightings miles 0-5.

FANTAIL (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*)

Regular; sightings miles 0-5; one black fantail seen on farm.

TOMTIT (*Petroica macrocephala*)

January 1961, seen near homestead.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*)

Regular near base of Spit; March 1974, one recorded mile 12½-15.

BLACKBIRD (*T. merula*)

Regular near base of Spit.

SILVEREYE (*Zosterops lateralis*)

Regular; small flocks recorded at several localities along the Spit.

BELLBIRD (*Anthornis melanura*)

January 1967, present at base of Spit.

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Regular; sightings miles 0-10.

CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Regular; sightings miles 0-10 and 12½-15.

GREENFINCH (*Carduelis chloris*)

Recorded 1961, 1962 and 1967; not seen in March 1974.

GOLDFINCH (*C. carduelis*)

Regular; March 1974, sightings miles 0-10, 12½-15.

REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

Regular; March 1974, flocks seen at miles 0-7½ and 12½-15.

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

Regular; sightings at base and miles 12½-tip of Spit.

STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Regular; March 1974, moderate numbers near base and larger flocks mile 12½-tip of Spit.

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JUST PUBLISHED !

MAURI ORA, Vol. 2, August 1974. The journal of the Biological Society of the University of Canterbury (the first number of which was reviewed in *Notornis* 20 (3): 287-8, September 1973), this useful publication contains the following articles of interest to ornithologists:

Castle, J. F. "Birds recovered from Banks Peninsula beaches, New Zealand, February 1971 to February 1974." Pp. 31-44; Craig, D. A. "Further information on the distribution of the blue duck." Pp. 137-138; Rind, S. "Some helminth parasites of freshwater birds from the South Island, New Zealand, with particular reference to trematodes of ducks." Pp. 139-146.