

A STRAY PIED TIT

A male Pied Tit (*Petroica macrocephala toitoi*) spent four days in January 1974 at the home of Mr and Mrs W. Morton a mile south of Clevedon on the Clevedon-Papakura Road (ref. NZMS 1, N42/540418). It was noted to be taking caterpillars in the vegetable garden. Mr Morton recognised it and secured photographs of it which proved its identity, this in open rich dairying farmland eight miles by map from the nearest known habitat of the species, the Moumoukai Bush in the Hunua Ranges. The country between consists of three miles of open farmland and then five miles of rough farmland with patches of poor bush and large areas of scrub, from which there have been no reports known to the writer over the last 52 years.

One was heard on 1 November 1950 by Mr R. H. D. Stidolph in Thorp's Bush (ref. NZMS 1, N42/550445) on the northern outskirts of Clevedon Village. This Scenic Reserve is good bush and a narrow strip of bush and scrub runs six miles north to the sea with farmland and a large pine plantation to the west of it and all open farmland on the east. This should be good habitat but one farmer has owned part of this strip for 52 years and another for 39 years and neither has ever found the species there, nor have I. The one of November 1950 must have been the last or one of the last of a small local population or, more likely, a stray like the present one.

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AUSTRALIAN TREE MARTINS NEAR TE ARAROA

On 25 April 1974 my wife and I observed a flock of birds, identified as this species, at the mouth of the Karakatuwhero River, about 7 km east of Hicks Bay (map ref. NZMS 18, sheet 6, N55-7463). With the assistance of binoculars, detailed notes on plumage and activity were made on the spot, and reference to the *Field Guide* indicated that the birds were Australian Tree Martins, *Hylochelidon nigricans*. Later reference to Oliver (1930), Leach (1912) and Buller (1888) confirmed the species. The distinguishing features of greyish-white rump, absence of deeply forked tail, and chestnut-brown forehead, the last more noticeable in some birds than others, were all noted in the field. The birds did not appear to be disturbed by the near presence of observers, and it is also noted that Tree Martins have previously been reported at Hicks Bay.

Under observation for about an hour on a mild sunny afternoon, these birds were actively hawking over a winding, shallow, shingly river with several small rapids, near the sea outlet. The area was largely coastal wasteland, with extensive lupin growth and a scattering of miscellaneous larger trees. Numbers were c. 30-35 but an accurate count was made difficult by the continuous dipping, diving, darting flight. Occasionally the Martins would flock together in groups of

various sizes and rise on a wheeling high-level flight until almost out of sight. This activity would be followed by scattered dispersal again and return in smaller groups for low-level hawking, even to the extent of touching the water surface. No call was heard.

The area was visited again on 13 July 1974 for the purpose of photographing the Martins. In this we were unsuccessful, possibly on account of the dull and rather windy conditions. However, c. 20 were observed in the same general area, but in smaller more widely-scattered groups, and all flying low. These groups of two to six birds ranged more widely than the closer larger association noted on the first observation.

The initial momentary and distant glimpse of these Martins gave an impression of native bats in flight. When seen to be birds, there remained the possibility of the more common Welcome Swallow. However, after several flights within 10 feet of the observers and the perching of 7 birds within 30 feet, detailed records thus made possible are felt to sufficiently match formal records as to warrant a confirmed sighting.

REFERENCES

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COMMON SANDPIPER IN THE KAIPARA HARBOUR

A Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*) was seen at Port Albert, on the Kaipara Harbour, on 23 February 1974 by J. A. Brown, E. D. Metherell, D. M. Walter, Mrs Pamela Walter and the writer.

The bird was in the air when first seen. It had the prominent white wing-bar and distinctive manner of flight, with alternating periods of rapid wing-beats and short glides on bowed wings, described by Merton *et al.* (1965) and Edgar (1969). It alighted and we were able to watch as it fed actively over an expanse of estuarine mud close to a main channel, or perched on a shelly hummock and a clump of exposed roots, at times hiding on the far side of these and taking brief looks at us over the top.

Upper surfaces were a soft even brown, darker on the head, while the underparts were white. The straight bill was fine, dark and short, with a paler area, possibly pinkish-yellow, at the base of the lower mandible. A brownish wash spread over face, neck and onto