SHORT NOTES

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE DIET OF THE SOUTH ISLAND PIED OYSTERCATCHER

While Baker (5) has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the prey upon which the different forms of New Zealand oystercatchers feed in tidal estuaries and along the seashore and has drawn attention to the need for further study, he makes no mention of the fact that for five or more months of the year, August-December, most adult pairs of the South Island Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus finschi* are on inland breeding grounds in a variety of habitats, e.g. riverbeds, cultivated farmlands (2), mountain bogs (4), where they enjoy a change of diet which must surely lack the salty tang of crabs, cockles, mud-snails, pipis, tuatuas, etc. Here they form part of the association so characteristic of the riverbeds east of the Southern Alps; and their competitors for food are likely to include Paradise Shelduck, Pied Stilt, Black Stilt, Banded Dotterel, Wrybill, Black-billed Gull, Black-fronted Tern; possibly some passerines and more recently Spur-winged Plover and Black-backed Gull. Moreover it is on this diet that new generations of *finschi* have to be fed and reared; and if they make the same demands as their close relatives, the British oystercatchers studied by Tinbergen and his associates, their parents have to help them with offerings of meaty tit-bits. At this stage we can only guess what *finschi* eat when inland on their breeding grounds; but the diet almost certainly includes worms, slugs, snails, insects, grubs, possibly tadpoles, frog spawn and larval fish. At all events, *finschi* oystercatchers are ecologically isolated from *unicolor* and *reischeki* at highly significant times in their lives, both in the nursery and on the home territory.

At other seasons, too, flocks of South Island Pied Oystercatchers will desert the seashore — marine littoral zone, if you so wish — to forage inland (1). This type of behaviour is now known to be quite normal in some of their northern wintering grounds; and I believe the same applies in the Oreti estuary at Invercargill airport. Perhaps I may quote some examples from my note-books.

TAMAKI ESTUARY: 13/2/71. c.130 on grass in Glendowie Reserve. While some were dozing or preening, others were quite definitely searching for food, walking purposefully, probing and prodding at tufts of grass..

27/8/71. c.120 scattered among many Red-billed Gulls on muddy football pitches, perhaps gobbling up drowned earthworms.

FIRTH OF THAMES: 10/9/71. 500+ feeding inland on lush green pastures. 3 Variable (2 black and 1 smudgy) had accompanied them.

KAIPARA HARBOUR: 16/9/73. Jordan's Farm. Hundreds of S.I.P.O. and Bar-tailed Godwits probing busily — one might almost say 'feeding ravenously' — in waterlogged pastures among cattle. Many Pied Stilts present, but not apparently so hungry.

In wet winters in northern New Zealand, *finschi* oystercatchers pass many hours in well grassed coastal paddocks, not just loafing but often seeking food on ground where the water is fresh rather than saline.

REFERENCES

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2. 1963 SOPER, M. F. N.Z. Bird Portraits. 59-61.
3. 1966 SIBSON, R.B. *Increasing numbers of S.I.P.O. in northern N.Z. Notornis* 13, 94-97.
4. 1969 CHILD, P. S.I.P.O. nesting high in Central Otago. Notornis 16, 186.
5. 1974 BAKER, A. J. Prey-specific Feeding Methods of N.Z. Oystercatchers. Notornis 21, 219-233.

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THE CENTRAL OTAGO WOOD-SWALLOWS

Further to my previous note (Child 1974), I have now to report that, unfortunately, the two species of Australian Wood-swallows which lived at Naseby Forest for several months during the 1971-72 and 1972-73 summers did not return during the 1973-74 season. Of the original 4 male White-browed and the pair of Masked with their two offspring, the last sightings were as follows:

29 April 1972: Last sighting of one of the male White-browed. Three remained.

6 May 1972: A male White-browed picked up dead under trees near the house; now a museum specimen in the Otago Museum.

1 June 1973: Last sighting of the two juvenile Masked. Weather pleasant with very light frosts (1-2°C.). Both birds had the appearance of females; still faintly spotted on the dorsal wing surfaces.

15 June 1973: Last sighting of one of the two remaining White-browed. (Hard frosts.)

30 July 1973: Last sighting of the other male White-browed and the male Masked. First of a series of hard frosts (to −10°C).

4 August 1973: Last sighting of the female Masked. Next day snow fell to a depth of 20 cm. Over the previous week she was moulting and looked very bedraggled and became quite dark in colour.

(In 1972 it was 27 July that the parent Masked birds were last seen, until they returned with their offspring on 9 March 1973.)

From 23 April 1973 the birds were given a dish of honey-water as well as the usual bread and kitchen scraps; the honey-water was an immediate success with all six wood-swallows, and they consumed a