

## A CRESTED TERN IN THE FIRTH OF THAMES

The Piako River flows into the upper Firth of Thames and here on 30 March 1974 with F. V. Thompson, Acclimatisation Society Field Officer, I saw what was to me an unknown tern.

The weather was fine with a light north-easterly wind. The tide had been dropping for an hour and a half. At 1430 hours the bird appeared from the direction of Thames, flying with the wind about 6m above the water, with head held at a downward angle and moved from side to side as if looking for fish. The bird looked "different" and when it passed above and circled I saw that the bill was a definite yellow. No diving or catching of fish took place. The bird continued out of sight towards Miranda.

The upper surfaces of the body and the forehead were not seen well, but the crown and nape were black; underparts white with wings medium grey; feet dark brown to black; tail forked and longer than that of a Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*); estimated total length 45-50cm. An immature Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) flying with the tern provided a useful size comparison. The bird seemed in good condition. No calls were heard.

On consulting the *Field Guide* (pp.159-160) I concluded that the bird could only be a Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*). It is stated that this tern habitually fishes in estuaries and will penetrate rivers. It is a rare straggler to New Zealand with three previous records: Raoul Island (April 1910); one ashore dead in Spirits Bay (March 1951) and Farewell Spit, with White-fronted Terns (January 1960).

## LITERATURE CITED

FALLA, R. A.; SIBSON, R. B.; TURBOTT, E. G. 1966. A field guide to the birds of New Zealand. London: Collins.

A. M. HABRAKEN

Ponga Road,  
R.D. 4,  
Papakura

NORTHERN LITTLE BLUE PENGUIN MORTALITY  
IN NORTHLAND

Two periods of high mortality of the Northern Little Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) have been recorded in Northland during the past year.

Members of the Whangarei branch of the OSNZ have made repeated and extensive patrols of both east and west coast Northland beaches. The table shows results from selected beach patrols, and penguins per mile indicate significant trends in penguin mortality. Normal levels of penguin mortality seen at most times of the year are taken as below 3 per mile. One peak was seen during July and August 1973 and was most prominent in Ninety Mile Beach. The second peak was more widespread, was more prominent on the east