The specimen was deposited with National Museum, Wellington, and the ticks with Entomology Division, DSIR, Auckland.

On the following day, 11 September 1973, a message was received from Mr T. Walker of Balclutha to say that a live albatross in a healthy condition was on the property of Mr Ligget of Tuamata, near Clinton (12 miles south of Balclutha).

When collected, it was found to be another juvenile Buller's Mollymawk. The bird was held overnight, measurements taken, banded M-24018 and released at the Royal Albatross Colony, Taiaroa Head, at 9 a.m. 13 September 1973.

As with the previous bird, wind conditions had been much the same, and, at recovery time, the bird was 30 miles from the sea. It is interesting to note that other Mollymawks have been recovered (Wright 1973, *Notornis* 20: 72) from this area and from the Invercargill area (Sutton, R.R., pers. comm.).

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NEST OF MARSH CRAKE

On 25 November 1974, Messrs Ian Mathieson and Stuart Sutherland, Southland Acclimatization Society field officers, were banding a brood of Paradise Ducks *(Tadorna variegata)* on Mr Gibson Soper's property near Athol, Southland, when they found the nest of a Marsh Crake *(Porzana pusilla affinis)*.

The nest of this species has never been described in the literature, the only evidence of nesting (apart from the presence of the species!) being an egg from Awanui in the Buddle collection, now deposited in the Auckland War Memorial Museum. (Falla *et al.* 1967, Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand: 107).

On 30 November 1974, we visited the area with Mr Neil Henderson. Mr Soper's property is on the flat and extends to low foothills, with the 1450 m high mass of Mid Dome towering above it. The pond measures 37 m by 11 m approximately. This is a well-stabilized pond man-made about five years ago. Bordering vegetation includes rushes, *Carex* species, flax, manuka, toitoi, sweet briar and introduced grasses with *Chrysobactron* and musk among them. The rushes and *Carex* predominate. In the water itself, *Potamogeton cheesmanii* and *Azola rubra* are growing. The pond is fed by a small marshy creek which, at the time of our visits, had no flowing water and was little more than a narrow marsh overgrown with carex, manuka, introduced grasses and bushes of black currant, flowering currant and raspberry.

The nest was in the middle of a clump of the rush *Juncus gregiflorus,* 120 cm tall and 75 cm in diameter, one of three clumps growing in the water about 60 cm from the pond edge. The nest itself was formed of dry brown rush stalks, rather loosely crossed. Its outer diameter was 13.3 cm and inner diameter 7 cm. There was a sparsely constructed dome-shaped canopy of dried rush stalks above the eggs. The nest platform was 15 cm above water level. There had been an unusually low rainfall in the area, and the pond's level was slightly below normal.

There were seven eggs, olive-brown in colour, plump ovoid in shape. The eggs were not measured because of risk of desertion by the bird, but they looked large considering the size of the bird.

FIGURE 1 — Eggs of Marsh Crake *(Porzana pusilla affinis),* Athol, Southland, November 1974. Photo: R. R. Sutton

The bird returned to the nest within ten minutes of being disturbed. It approached stealthily, with a rat-like creeping action, using rush cover where there was any. When crossing the water from pond-edge to rush-clump, it appeared to skate or scamper rapidly across the surface of the water. It was generally very inconspicuous.

A further visit was made on 12 December 1974 by RRS accompanied by Sir Robert Falla and Mr Grant Foster of the National Film Unit. The nest was empty but intact with no sign of predation or disturbance. A close search of the surrounding area disclosed the

rounded cap of one egg, symmetrical in shape, and consistent with successful hatching. The birds were not seen. On this scanty evidence, it was assumed that this was a successful hatch, and that with this species all the eggshell is removed by the incubating bird.

Some notes relating to clutch size may be of interest. On 6 November 1958, at Lake Murihiku, Invercargill, RRS saw a pair of adults with a brood of five to eight young. The chicks moved so quickly in different directions that an accurate account was impossible. In the same Lake Murihiku area RRS, with Mr R. S. Andrew, saw three chicks on 6 November 1961.

The Athol pond was visited again by MLB, wth Mrs Olga Sansom, on 7 January 1975. In a dry summer the pond level had receded still further. The day was memorable for its tussock butterflies, dragonflies and sweet wild raspberries, but no Marsh Crakes were found.

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THE TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE OF NEW ZEALAND SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS

The question of whether or not to regard morphologically distinct allopatric populations of closely related birds as of the one species is one to which there is no ready answer. Even where interbreeding along a narrow zone of distributional overlap indicates that reproductive isolation has not been achieved, opinions will probably always differ. Mayr (1942, *Systematics and the Origin of Species,* New York) has distinguished between zones of primary intergradation, in which the characters of one subspecies grade into those of another, and zones of secondary intergradation, in which the population consists of birds which are phenotypically similar to those of the allopatric populations and others which are intermediate in various character combinations. Mayr suggested that zones of secondary intergradation occur where formerly isolated populations have come into contact before developing either ecological or reproductive isolation.

Van Tets *et al.* (1967, *Emu* 67: 85-93) found that the Spur-winged Plover *(Lobibyx novaehollandiae)* and the Masked Plover *(L. miles)* form a zone of such secondary intergradation. The Spur-winged Plover breeds in south-eastern Australia and the very similar Masked Plover in northern Australia and New Guinea. *L. n. gracemeri* Mathews, 1915 is characterised by more wattle above the eye and less