

WHITE FORM OF THE SOUTHERN GIANT PETREL: FURTHER N.Z. RECORDS

New Zealand coastal voyages during the past 18 months have produced the following records:—

1. 12th September 1974, position 40°57'S 176°25'E, vessel 9 miles ESE from Castle Point. One white Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) with scattered black spots on body and upper wing and a pale yellow-brown bill. The bird was closely observed following the vessel for 24 minutes, it then settled on the water with dark plumaged Giant Petrels (*Macronectes* sp.) which were feeding on galley refuse. It was then seen intermittently during the next 45 minutes following the vessel and occasionally flying out on the vessel's beam. Other ship-following birds were 14 dark Giant Petrels (*Macronectes* sp.), 80+ Cape Pigeons (*Daption capensis*) and 3 Wandering Albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*).

2. 18th August 1975, position 35°52'S 174°32'E, vessel entering Whangarei Harbour during gale conditions with wind North Easterly 40 knots. A white Southern Giant Petrel followed the ship from the Fairway Buoy in as far as Busby Head (2 miles). Plumage was entirely white apart from a few black spots, bill light brown and the feet appeared black. Strangely, the bird had a piece of rope about 3 feet long attached to one leg. This did not appear to affect the bird's flight power and in the very strong wind the rope streamed out behind like an extended tail. Indeed at first glance the observer thought he had sighted an immense Tropic Bird, "*Phaethon giganteus*"?

Other birds included 10 dark Giant Petrels (*Macronectes* sp.) and 15 Cape Pigeons which followed the ship into Whangarei Harbour as far as the Refinery jetties.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON A DIFFICULT DOTTEREL, *CHARADRIUS MONGOLUS*

When collating more than 30 years' jottings on Banded Dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*) in the Firth of Thames, I came upon a forgotten note describing what I called at the time a 'Mystery' Dotterel. In the light of wider experience there can be little doubt that the bird was a Mongolian Dotterel (*Charadrius mongolus*), a migratory species

which had been causing confusion among Australian ornithologists (McGill & Keast 1945) and at that time had not been detected in New Zealand (Hogg 1961).

On 25 November 1945 C. A. Fleming, H. R. McKenzie and I spent some hours on the west coast of the Firth of Thames south to Miranda. We were especially interested in the Banded Dotterels. Some pairs were still occupying territories and nests with eggs were found. Some young of the season were already on the wing and flocking had begun, one flock numbering about twenty birds. On the bottom of a drying pool was a mixed gathering of adult and youngsters. One of the adults was already losing its bands. Sandy, speckled first-flying plumage easily separated the two or three young birds. Nearby was a dotterel which puzzled us greatly and "which we felt ought to be *bicinctus*, but if it was, was certainly something of a freak."

The description in my notebook reads: "White forehead and superciliary stripe, with black running back from bill through eye. Single blackish band across chest; high about one third of an inch wide perhaps fainter in middle. Legs muddy green or greenish grey. Otherwise like a Banded Dotterel. No note heard. Size of Banded Dotterel. Markings clear cut; no smudginess. Certainly not a juv. *bicinctus*. The single band and the distinct white superciliary stripe made it unlike *bicinctus* going into eclipse, for there was no sign of the bigger chestnut band on the lower chest. Even C.A.F. thoroughly foxed. If not a Banded Dotterel, what can it be? Certainly not *hiaticula*, *alexandrinus*, *dubius*, *leschenaulti*." It had an air of paleness, missing in *bicinctus* at this season.

The migratory plover, now commonly called the Large Sand Dotterel *Charadrius leschenaulti* was noticed for the first time (Sibson & Bull 1946 a) in New Zealand in 1943. One was again found in 1945 (Sibson & Bull 1946 b). Subsequently, many local observers became familiar with the species (Sibson 1953) and it is now accepted as a rare but regular visitor. With its large bill and conspicuous eye-patch, it is not a hard bird to identify especially if other species of dotterel are at hand, as they often are, for purposes of comparison.

However, the smaller migratory dotterels in first winter or eclipse plumage are acknowledged to be a very difficult group. Perhaps the most difficult is *mongolus*. Later in the same summer, 1945-1946, as that in which I took notes on the unusual dotterel at Miranda, McKenzie (1946) reported on two puzzling dotterels which he watched at Ruakaka and considered might be *mongolus* beginning to assume breeding plumage. As *mongolus* was then unknown in New Zealand, it was wise to be cautious.

For most of its stay in the southern hemisphere, *mongolus* is a rather plain dotterel without a single salient feature. But before it

leaves for its Asiatic breeding grounds, it becomes highly ornamental in both sexes. On 6 May 1957 K. A. Hindwood, in his typically kind and thoughtful way, took me to Botany Bay, Sydney, where we were able to watch at close range with other waders a flock of c. 20 Mongolian Dotterels, most of which were very richly coloured in readiness for migration. Serventy & Whittell (1948: 147) mention "rufous red breast-band lined with black above," Vaurie (1965: 378-80) states that "the white throat is separated from the russet breast by a narrow blackish or dark brown line." What is especially significant is that, as nuptial plumage is assumed, the black edging above the rich rufous emerges last and during the post-nuptial moult is the last to fade, becoming what Macdonald (1973: 154-155) describes as "a narrow dusky band on upper breast."

If the enigmatic Miranda dotterel of late November was an adult *mongolus* in the last stages of moulting into eclipse and if the two dotterels described from Ruakaka in February were adults just starting to assume breeding dress, as happens in south-eastern Australia (Hindwood & Hoskin 1954), the riddle of their identity is solved and the solution is in accord with our present greatly increased knowledge of the species (Urquhart 1963).

With these thoughts in mind, it appears that the first sightings in New Zealand, not only of *leschenaulti* but also of *mongolus*, can be dated back to the mid-1940s.



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