

# NOTORNIS

is the journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

Editor: E. W. Dawson,  
P.O. Box 41-002,  
EASTBOURNE

---

VOLUME 23      PART 1      MARCH, 1976  
A PACIFIC BIRDS ISSUE

---

## RECORDS OF WADERS IN THE COOK ISLANDS

By D. T. HOLYOAK

In their useful paper on the birds of Penrhyn and Suvarrow, northern Cook Islands, J. & A. Batham (1973) recorded "Asiatic Whimbrels *Numenius variegatus*" from both islands. Whimbrel (*N. phaeopus*, of which *variegatus* is usually regarded as a subspecies) have not, hitherto, been recorded in the Cook Islands or elsewhere in southeast Polynesia, where they are replaced by the Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*). The Bathams do not list the latter species, although it is common in the northern Cook Islands. However, they comment that the call of the 'Whimbrel' they saw approximated the local name of 'Keewee.' This strongly suggests that it was Bristle-thighed Curlew they saw, as that species has a 'keewee' call whereas Whimbrel give a series of six or seven quick whistles.

These authors also list Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) for Suvarrow. This species has not been definitely recorded from the Cook Islands, although it has been found in small numbers in American Samoa (Stickney 1943) and the Phoenix Islands (Clapp & Sibley 1967). Substantiation of their report, therefore, seems desirable.

During a visit to the Cook Islands from July to September 1973 the following wader species were identified:

Lesser Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica*

Recorded on Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau, Suvarrow, Aitutaki, Manuae, Takutea, Atiu, Mitiaro, Mauke, Rarotonga and Mangaia; the Bathams record it on Penrhyn, and Burland (1964) recorded it on Palmerston. This is one of the commonest shorebirds of the region, second in abundance only to the Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanous*).

Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

One seen on Manuae on 31 August 1973 is the first record for the Cook Islands. It was seen in company with Lesser Golden Plover, from which it differed in its larger size, grey upperparts with no

yellow markings, white rump patch and white stripe at tip of wing, and black axillaries. This species has been recorded a few times in the Line Islands (Clapp & Sibley 1967), but has not yet been found in French Polynesia.

Sanderling, *Calidris alba*

Previously unrecorded in the Cook Islands. One was seen at Manihiki on 13 August 1973 and two on Manuae on 1 September 1973; all diagnostic features were noted.

Bristle-thighed Curlew, *Numenius tahitiensis*

Recorded from Rakahanga, Manuae, Takutea, Mitiaro, Mauke and Rarotonga; local people told me that it occurs on Penrhyn, Manihiki and Atiu; 29 were collected on Suvarrow in 1923 (Stickney 1943) and it was seen there in 1972 (R. Desforges, pers. comm.); Burland (1964) saw it on Palmerston, and it, presumably, also occurs on Nassau, Aitutaki and Mangaia, although there are no records as yet. Usually occurs in small groups, but several hundred were seen on Takutea on 3 September 1973.

Wandering Tattler, *Heteroscelus incanous*

Recorded on Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau, Suvarrow, Manuae, Takutea, Atiu, Mitiaro, Mauke, Rarotonga and Mangaia; Burland (1964) recorded it on Palmerston and local people reported it on Penrhyn; presumably it also occurs on Aitutaki, although there are no records. This species is generally the commonest wader in southeast Polynesia; the Bathams presumably overlooked it.

Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*

Recorded from Penrhyn and Suvarrow by the Bathams in 1968; R. Desforges (pers. comm.) saw several on Suvarrow in October 1972; my own records are of one at Manihiki, at least eight at Manuae and one on Mitiaro.

A few other species of wader have been recorded elsewhere in southeast Polynesia and will probably be found in the Cook Islands eventually. These are Semipalmated Plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus* (one collected in Phoenix Islands, Clapp 1968), Pectoral Sandpiper, *Calidris melanotos* (small numbers collected in Phoenix Islands, Clapp 1968; one collected on Scilly, Society Islands, Thibault 1974; recently collected on Rapa, Austral Isles, J.-C. Thibault, pers. comm.), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata* (small numbers collected in Phoenix and Line Islands, Clapp & Sibley 1967, Clapp 1968), Buff-breasted Sandpiper, *Tryngites subruficollis* (recently collected on Rapa, Austral Isles, J.-C. Thibault, pers. comm.) and Common or Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos* or *A. macularia* (one seen in Phoenix Islands, Clapp 1968). Grey Phalarope, *Phalaropus fulicarius*, have been seen at sea in the Line Islands (King 1967) and might occur further south.

## LITERATURE CITED

- BATHAM, J.; BATHAM, A. 1973. Field notes on birds observed on the 'motus' of two atolls (Penrhyn and Suvarrow) in the northern Cook Islands, 1968. *Notornis* 20 (2): 97-101.
- BURLAND, J. C. 1964. Some notes on the bird life of Palmerston Atoll. *Notornis* 11 (3): 145-154.
- CLAPP, R. B. 1968. Additional new records of birds from the Phoenix and Line Islands. *Ibis* 110: 573-575.
- CLAPP, R. B.; SIBLEY, F. C. 1967. New records of birds from the Phoenix and Line Islands. *Ibis* 109: 122-125.
- KING, W. B. 1957. Seabirds of the Tropical Pacific Ocean. Preliminary Smithsonian Identification Manual. 126 pp., illus. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- STICKNEY, E. H. 1943. Birds collected during the Whitney South Sea Expedition. 53. Northern shore birds in the Pacific. *American Museum Novitates* 1248: 1-9.
- THIBAULT, J.-C. 1974. Le peuplement avien des îles de la Société. Special Publ. Mus. Natn. d'hist. Nat., Antenne de Tahiti, et Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. Paris.

Dr D. T. Holyoak,

School of Biological Sciences, University of Sussex, Falmer,  
Brighton, Sussex, England



## NOTES &amp; NEWS

## CORRECTION

In the September *Notornis* review of Harper and Kinsky's *New Zealand Albatrosses and Petrels* it was stated that although the dark undertail of the Grey Petrel was shown in their sketch it was not referred to in their text. This is incorrect. On the contrary, the authors clearly emphasise on page 35 the value of the dark undertail coverts in identifying this bird in flight. This *lapsus calami* on the part of the reviewer is much regretted.

J. W.

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

At Kaikoura during the 1975-76 breeding season approximately 500 breeding pairs of Red-billed Gulls have been individually colour-marked. Would members of the Ornithological Society who sight these colour-marked gulls please send the combination, date and locality to:—

J. A. Mills,  
Wildlife Service,  
Department of Internal Affairs,  
Wellington.

If any member is willing to search regularly for colour-marked gulls in their locality would they make contact at the address given for further particulars.

An example of how the band should be read:—

Gull Left Leg  
Green over yellow  
over Aluminium

Gull Right Leg  
White