

adults was quite soft, reminiscent of the *click* call of the Fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*).

The nest, made of reeds and water weeds, was found about 5 m out into the water. It was presumably a floating platform with no visible attachment to other plants or dead wood in the water. It was devoid of cover and was easily seen.

On 19 March, the chicks, now seen by CSL to be a rich brown, were spending much of their time on their parents' backs where they stayed during dives, although sometimes coming up alone. On 25 March, the chicks were seen by Ulrich Walthert to be diving on their own and the adults to be aggressive to Paradise Shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*). By 2 April, however, one chick had disappeared, cause of death unknown, perhaps Harrier (*Circus approximans*) or eel. The remaining chick now had light markings on the head and whitish on the rump and under-tail areas. The adults were heard to call *cheuk-cheuk* eight or ten times rapidly as they approached each other. On 9 April, the chick, now about half grown, had a yellow bill, a mottled, dark brown crown, white with dark markings on the neck, and a very light brown general body colour. Both adults were feeding it and it was also diving itself.

The local duck-shooting season began on 15 April. On 16 April, only one adult was present. The chick was calling frequently and demanding to be fed, and diving for up to 10 seconds at a time. It had a yellow bill, dark brown crown and back of neck, white on face and breast, pale greyish-brown body.

On 22 April, no grebes were present. The chick would almost certainly not have been ready to fly and the real fate of the birds is not known.

C. S. LAUDER, 9 Winnie Street, Greymouth; D. P. MURRAY, Wildlife Service, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 144 Jollie Street, Hokitika

[Colour photos of adult and 5-week-old chick leave no doubt as to identity. — Ed.]



YELLOWHEAD NOT ENTIRELY INSECTIVOROUS

Since all the literature points to the fact that the Yellowhead (*Mohoua chrocephala*) lives solely on a diet of invertebrates (e.g. the Field Guide says 'so far as is known entirely insectivorous'), the following observation may be of interest.

In the early afternoon of 16 April 1978, halfway down the track (in mixed silver beech/red beech forest) between the Routeburn Falis and Routeburn Flats huts, I was attracted by a noisy party of about eight Yellowheads. Initially they were feeding among epiphytes on trunks and branches at about sub-canopy level but, in response to

my imitation calls, gradually came lower. Then periodically two or three of the party would fly to near ground level across the track to ripe orange fruiting heads of a "bush lily" (*Astelia fragrans*), where each one swallowed whole two, three or four of the quite large fruits. Sometimes one more aggressive bird kept the others at bay while it fed; at other times two fed together. It seemed to me in the end that every member of the party had sampled the fruits.

Following this short interlude, they moved off into the shrub layer, resuming their more typical invertebrate-hunting behaviour.

The fruit-eating episode was watched in good light from a distance of only about 5 m.

PETER CHILD, 10 Royal Terrace, Alexandra



COMMON SANDPIPER IN MANUKAU HARBOUR

The annual summer census of shore-birds 'on the Manukau' took place on 13 Nov. 1977. Early in the day there was steady light drizzle and visibility was poor. Out from Westfield, Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) and Knots (*Calidris canutus*) were dimly discernible till the rising tide forced them towards Harania Creek before they took off to cross the Isthmus by their traditional flight-lines over Otahuhu.

When we reached Tararata Creek, a short distance upstream from the new bridge, the tide was nearly full and an outer basalt reef which is a favourite resting place for shags, herons, waders, gulls and terns, was quite submerged. Not even a Pied Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) or an Oystercatcher (*Haematopus finschi*) remained. However, as we descended to a short, smooth beach we were surprised to see a single small wader with a clear white wing-bar rise and flit low over the water across the estuarine bay. The weather was now improving. The wader had the characteristic flickering flight of a Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*). It alighted on a boulder, the top of which was not quite covered by the tide, and within this limited space it ran, bobbed and appeared to search for food. From a distance of about 80 m we were able to watch it for some minutes. In every way it bore the stamp of a Common Sandpiper, a bird well known to us in many lands. Unfortunately, it was not heard to call as adults commonly do on their northward migration in spring. Even where they are numerous, Common Sandpipers are not strongly gregarious. It is a mark of the species to breed 'loners.'

The only wader which at all resembles *hypoleucos* is the American Spotted Sandpiper (*T. macularia*) in winter or sub-adult plumage. Though adults of the two forms in breeding dress are quite distinct, some authorities have relegated *macularia* to sub-specific status. *Macularia* has crossed the Atlantic on a number of occasions, but it does not appear to stray far out into the eastern Pacific, where its place