

SHORT NOTES

A record of a Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) breeding at one year old

The Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) is a small plover endemic to New Zealand. It breeds on braided riverbeds of the South Island and most of the population of about 5000 winters in the North Island, mainly on the harbours around the Auckland isthmus (Marchant & Higgins 1993). The breeding ecology of the species was studied in detail by Hay (1984), who noted that Wrybills do not breed until two or three years of age; "14% of birds hatched in the previous calendar year reach their natal area, usually in November, but these do not breed." (Hay, cited in Davies 1997). The earliest record of a yearling on the breeding grounds was 25 September, "...approximately one month after the start of egg laying" (Hay 1984). We report here a confirmed case of a Wrybill breeding at one year old.

In 1997, we began a colour-banding study of Wrybills breeding in the Mackenzie Basin, primarily to determine the impact of predation on adult survival and productivity. On 23 October 1997 in the Upper Tasman River (43°48'S, 170°08'E), we banded a chick (aged about 5 days) with metal band B-88629. On 30 September 1998, this bird was re-trapped in the Lower Tasman River (43°53'S, 170°08'E) about 7.5 km from its natal site. The metal band was replaced and the bird was colour-banded WO-BM. It was next seen in the Upper Tasman River on 04 November and again on 13 November, when its behaviour suggested that it had a nest. It was found incubating a 2-egg nest 1.5 km from its natal site on 15 November. WO-BM is a female and was paired with an unbanded male. The nest was lost between 30 November and 10 December (probably to predation) and so we were unable to determine whether the eggs were fertile.

This appears to be the first documented case of a Wrybill breeding at one year old. Among other New Zealand plovers, only the Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) normally breeds at one year; Pierce (1989) recorded 76% of one-year-olds breeding or attempting to breed. About 70% of Northern New Zealand Dotterels (*C. obscurus aquilonius*) breed at two years, although about 10% breed at one year (Dowding, unpubl. data). In the single wild population on South East Island, New Zealand Shore Plover (*Thinornis novaeseelandiae*) first breed at two or three years. However, this may reflect intense competition for breeding territories (rather than an inability to breed) because captive birds have bred at one year (Davis 1994).

It is not yet clear whether breeding by Wrybills at one year is a rare occurrence. Relatively few birds colour-banded as chicks appear to have been monitored closely on the breeding grounds at one year old (e.g. 12 in Hay's (1984) study). As our study continues we should gain more information on this point.

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Confirmation of a nocturnal aerial display by Auckland Island Snipe (*Coenocorypha aucklandica aucklandica*)

Miskelly (1987) documented the evidence for nocturnal aerial displays for most forms of *Coenocorypha* snipe, but the only evidence for such behaviour in the Auckland Island Snipe (*Coenocorypha aucklandica aucklandica*) was tail feather wear in four or five museum specimens. The aerial display of *Coenocorypha* snipe consists of a short series of disyllabic whistles, followed by a loud non-vocal roar, thought to be produced by vibrating tail rectrices as the birds dive at speed. Unusual tail feather wear in *Coenocorypha* snipe, including in the Auckland Island form, was attributed to stress on the rectrices during display flights.

In June 1998, I heard Auckland Island Snipe giving nocturnal aerial calls on three occasions. Between 0015 and 0115 hrs on 23 June above the western end of