

NEW WADER FOR NEW ZEALAND—LEAST SANDPIPER

By R. H. D. Stidolph, Masterton.

A diminutive wader, seen on a tidal mudflat on the northern side of the Wairoa River mouth, Hawke's Bay, on November 21, 1952, turned out to be a least sandpiper (*Erolia minutilla*), the first record of this species in New Zealand. The bird was seen under exceptionally favourable circumstances, at a distance of about 20 feet, through X8 binoculars.

I was watching a scattered party of eleven golden plover when a very small wader was noticed, which my wife described as "like a skylark." It was probing the mud near a golden plover. The latter chivied it, and it flew a yard or two, when the plover put it up again. This time it flew towards several godwits feeding in rather deep water. Several abortive attempts were made by this small wader to alight with the godwits but the water was too deep. Then, with a decidedly flicking movement of the wings, it flew towards me and pitched on the mudflat close to where I was standing. I needed no more inducement to peel off my footwear and wade across the shallows.

Approaching quietly, I reached within 20 feet of the bird as it fed; it paid no attention to my presence. In subdued sunlight and through the binoculars I had no trouble in taking notes of its plumage. The plumage as a whole reminded me of the sharp-tailed sandpiper (a fact which I noted at the time) and the possibility of the bird being a small example of that species was not overlooked. The bird had a rufous-tinged crown, a russet eye-stripe, russet or tan edges to the wing feathers, much darker, almost black feathers on the back, near-black middle tail feathers, seen in flight, (but not as black as those of the red-necked stint), and a russet wash across the chest, the feathers there being streaked darker. The bill was black and the legs and feet yellowish. I put the bird to flight and on taking wing it uttered "tweet, tweet, tweet"—this I wrote down on the spot in my note-book.

The colour of the legs, a dull though clear yellow, indicated that it was not the red-necked stint, which has black legs. Apart from this, the neck colouration of this bird, which appeared to be in breeding plumage, also differed from that of the red-necked stint. The diminutive size, the absence of any brownish colouration at the base of the bill, which is readily seen at close quarters on the sharp-tailed and pectoral sandpipers (several of these birds were seen two days later at Napier) and the call, showed that the bird could not have been a small example of either of these species.

The nominate race of the least sandpiper (*E. minutilla minutilla*) is a North American breeder, migrating southwards to as far as Brazil and Peru. The eastern Asiatic race (*E. minutilla subminuta*) breeds in eastern Siberia to Kamchatka and migrates southward via China and Japan to south-eastern Asia, the Philippine Islands, Malaysia and Northern Australia. It is extremely doubtful whether these two races can be separated in the field; either could straggle to New Zealand, though *subminuta* may be the more likely to reach these shores.

RINGING.—Members are requested to complete their ringing schedules and return them immediately to the convener of the Ringing Committee (Mr. P. C. Bull, 131 Waterloo Road, Lower Hutt). All rings used up to March 31 should be shown, together with all "repeats" and "recoveries." Advice would be appreciated as to whether the various operators expect their 1953-54 ringing results to be comparable to those being returned now. The schedules are required for the compilation of the annual ringing summary and an estimate of next year's requirements would assist in maintaining ring stocks at an adequate level.