

WADER SEEN AT NAPIER.

By D. H. Brathwaite, Napier.

On Saturday, July 12, 1952, in company with Mr. K. Schwabe, of Napier, I was counting a small flock of stilts on Ahuriri Lagoon when four godwits landed beside them. Within a minute or so they flew off again, and we were about to move on ourselves when my companion drew my attention to "another godwit" which had just landed in the same place. Although the bird seemed about the right size and build at first glance, something peculiar about it made me examine it more carefully through my binoculars. The bird was about 30-40 yards away, and the light conditions were almost perfect, enabling me to examine the bird in detail while my companion wrote down in my notebook the description as I gave it to him. Unfortunately, the bird was flushed by two boys who had approached unnoticed by us; the notes are therefore rather terse but are here quoted as written on the spot, though in different order and amplified by explanatory notes in parentheses:

"About the size of a godwit (actually judged by comparison with stilts, whose company it seemed to prefer); bill, much shorter, estimated as about half that of godwit, colour uncertain, perhaps reddish-brown (the quick head movements of the bird against varied backgrounds made the bill hard to see in detail, apart from length, but a fleeting impression of reddish colour at the base was obtained), straight (I once or twice had an impression that the bill was slightly decurved distally); legs about as long as those of godwit (in proportion to size), pale blue-grey in colour; clear pale lines along middle of crown and above eye, separated by broader dark-brownish bands; upper parts blackish, narrowly edged buff, with a rather spangled (or speckled) effect; under parts pale buff, appearing faintly marked with reddish-buff on sides of breast; in flight showed no noticeable pattern (i.e., pale rump or wing-bar), except that the primaries may have been darker."

We were shortly afterwards joined by Mr. G. Crawford and were successful in again locating the bird, which was watched for altogether nearly an hour. There was general agreement as to the general characters as described above, except that neither of my companions were able to confirm my impression of slight decurvature in the bill. When first flushed the bird gave voice to a very musical "quee-dlee," not unlike the call of a golden plover. When again flushed later on, it flew off with a hoarser (but still musical) "klee-klee-klee."

When feeding, the bird was not seen to enter the water, foraging on exposed tidal flats but actually appearing to favour dry sand and even ground with a sparse covering of vegetation (grass). It fed with quick pecking movements, rather than probing in the manner of a godwit. The gait was not unlike that of a godwit, though perhaps its movements were a little quicker and the pigeon-like movement of the head with each step a little more noticeable. The head was normally carried very erect, making the neck appear longer than in a godwit.

A perusal of literature available to me suggests that the bird can only have been a little whimbrel (*Numenius minutus*) though I would have expected the bill to have a more pronounced decurvature. However, if the illustration of the bill as given by Mathews & Iredale (Man. Birds Aust.) is accurate, it would account for my being unable to gain more than a brief and indefinite impression of the curvature, taking into account the bird's quick movements. The colour of the bill as given in the same work, "blackish-brown, base of lower mandible flesh-colour," would account for the glimpse of reddish colour mentioned above. The dimension of the little whimbrel and bar-tailed godwit given by Mathews & Iredale agree very well with our impressions of the relative size and proportions of the bird as compared with the godwit.

The bird has not been seen since.