

otherwise. They settled again at the same spot except for 15 that alighted on top of the battens of an intervening fence within 150 feet of where I stood. Of these 15 birds there were four that were not in the full plumage of the adult bird. One young bird was lightly mottled brown about the poll and face with darker patches round the eyes. This proportion of apparently immature birds, viz., 4 in 15, was higher than in the group generally. I was still unable to see clearly the colour of bill and legs except in respect of one bird on the fence, which had a dull orange coloured bill. An attempt to get a closer view of the birds resulted in their flying off to scatter over the paddocks to the south and west. A quick run to the Rangitaiki outlet brought to light another 31 black-fronted terns. Within twenty minutes a further 13 birds had joined up. It is feasible that later arrivals may have come from those already counted in the paddock, but I do not think so. The tide being full at this time, the birds were squatting in rather loose formation on the dry sand, and the dull hue of their plumage matching exactly their surroundings made a count difficult till they rose from the ground. As before, a few birds were feeding over the estuary. Disallowing the last-mentioned 13 birds, the tally for today is 129.

August 6.—There were no black-fronted terns to be seen in the paddocks or at the river outlets, and visits on subsequent dates gave no results.

It seems likely that the black-fronted tern has appeared here at intervals and in small numbers since R. B. Sibson's record of 1947. Mr Herd, the farm manager, says that in the winter before last (1950) he had seen an "odd bird or two," and last year (1951) "there were a few more," while this winter (1952) "they have been here in force."

The recent visit here of the black-fronted tern in such numbers gives weight to the theory that the bird may still be breeding inland. It is a fairly short and direct route northward to the coast via the course of the Rangitaiki River with a suitable winter retreat immediately at hand. If the opportunity occurs during the winter of 1953 it may be possible to record more nearly the dates of arrival and departure of the birds and to learn something of their feeding habits.

It is perhaps worth while to note the remarks of J. C. Bidwill "Rambles in New Zealand," 1841 (pages 71 and 81) in reference to the so-called "tropic birds" he saw "among the lavas of Tongadido," and about the lake "Rotuite," (probably Lake Rotoaira). Bidwill's description of the birds is rather hopeless but it was most likely the black-fronted tern that he saw. He said that the shallow lake abounded in a small type of fish about an inch long, which the Maoris dried for food.

It would be of interest to know to what extent any depletion of food supplies in more recent years and possible interference with nesting grounds by vermin or otherwise, may have affected the number of birds that have been seen inland of late years. On the other hand, where exactly have the recent visitors to the coast come from, and is it a matter of food supply, linked up with the changing environment, that has induced the black-fronted tern to occupy in increasing numbers as a winter sojourn, the restricted area of the Rangitaiki and Tarawera rivers estuaries?

STILTS NESTING AT ARDMORE, 1951-52.—Two adults and three young pied stilts of the previous season came back for an hour on 13/5/51. It is fairly safe to assume that these are the birds recorded in 1950-51. On 5/7/51 these returned, and with some additional adults at times, remained until nesting began. At this point the three young either left or were driven away. Records are: 31/8/51, nest, three eggs, bird incubating when found; 3/9/51, cow destroyed nest. This pair nested again and hatched four chicks on the following dates: October 11, two; 12, one; and 15, one. One chick was much smaller than the others and was probably the one hatched late.—A. F. Stokes, Ardmore.