

PROBABLE WHITE-CAPPED (LESSER) NODDY IN KAIPARA

At the invitation of Mr M. A. Waller a small group of Auckland ornithologists visited South Kaipara Heads on 11/10/53. M.A.W. was soon describing a black tern-like bird which on the day before, during the rough weather which had prevailed at the time of the London to Christchurch air race, had flown in from the north-west and made a clumsy landing in a big Norfolk Island pine growing on the top of the cliffs. The bird was so tired that M.A.W. climbed the tree to examine it more closely. It was quite black except for a conspicuous white cap, and its long beak was like that of a White-fronted Tern. It was about the size of a prion or a little bigger. From this description there was little doubt that the straggler was either a Common Noddy (*A. stolidus*) or a White-capped Noddy (*A. tenuirostris*), with the evidence strongly inclining towards the latter.

On 21/11/54 another visit was made to South Kaipara Heads and through the courtesy of Mr E. G. Turbott, of the Auckland War Memorial Museum, M.A.W. was shown specimen skins of both these noddies. Without hesitation he picked that of *A. tenuirostris* as agreeing with the bird which had flown into his garden. This species has not previously been recorded from the mainland of New Zealand. It has a wide distribution in the tropics and breeds in some numbers at Norfolk Island, which well may have been the provenance of this bird.

R. B. Sibson

NEW ZEALAND YELLOW BUNTINGS (YELLOWHAMMERS)

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Editor's Note: In the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 74, No. 9 (1954), and vol. 75, Nos. 1 and 2 (1955), Dr Harrison has published an important paper, 'Remarks on the Taxonomy of the Yellow Bunting, *Emberiza citrinella* Linnaeus', in which he discusses geographic variation in this species throughout the Continent of Europe, and also compares a small series of New Zealand specimens with the European races. The subspecies recognised are: (1) *E. c. citrinella*—Scandinavian Peninsula, Western Siberia and Baltic countries. (2) *E. c. sylvestris* Brehm—central Germany, Switzerland, much of the Great Lowland Plain of Europe, Italy, south-western France and probably northern Spain and Portugal. (3) *E. c. nebulosa* Gengler—England, eastern and south-eastern counties. (4) *E. c. caliginosa* Clancey—Scotland, Wales and Eire, intergrading with (3) *E. c. erythrogenys* Brehm—Jugoslavia, Bulgaria, and eastwards into Asia Minor and western U.S.S.R.

Because the *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* is not readily accessible to New Zealand readers, and because Dr Harrison modified his original pronouncement upon the racial affinity of the New Zealand birds, we here reproduce the section of his paper dealing with the New Zealand skins.

'The introduction of the Yellow Bunting into New Zealand, about which there is unfortunately no exact information as to the source from which the birds were obtained, makes a detailed study of the characters of birds taken in the Islands of unusual interest and importance. I have been enabled to examine a small series of both sexes through the kind offices of Mr C. A. Fleming. The writer believes that it is most unlikely that the original stock were of British breeding birds, but that the birds would have been trapped in the non-breeding season, and may therefore have included a percentage of Continental immigrants.

A study of the characters the specimens presented bears this out. The males examined do not wholly match Gengler's race, *E. c. nebulosa* (*sensu stricto*), i.e. from the eastern and south-eastern counties of England. They diverge from that form in the following respects: firstly, in the rather small sample investigated, the mantles are variable, both in colour and pattern.

In some, this region is rather brownish, but not so dark and uniform and not so heavily striated as in the populations in the extreme western half of England, Wales, and in Scotland and Eire, while the mantle striations tend to be somewhat heavier than in birds from the eastern side of England. On the upper parts, the specimens fit best into series of this species from north-western Europe, a point which thoroughly supports the hypothesis that the stock originated from immigrants to the British Isles trapped in the non-breeding season.

Secondly, the most significant feature is that the underparts of all the males examined are of an intensely bright yellow colour, this character exactly matching the central European form *E. c. sylvestris* and also the eastern race *E. c. erythrogenys*; they are, however, different from the latter in being less heavily marked with chestnut striations over the pectoral region and on the flanks; also the outer edges of the secondaries in the New Zealand birds match those of the central European birds.

It would seem that in the New Zealand population, under altered environmental influences and far removed from gene-interchange, we can see the effect of the elimination of the genes which are responsible for the extreme variability of the characters as seen in the populations in north-western Europe. The effect is that by the in-breeding of a stock now isolated and remote, the disclosure and importance of the central European form, *E. c. sylvestris*, as one of the cardinal racial genotypes, has been made evident. These birds, in fact, exemplify the phenomenon of autophoric reverse mutation, and the gradual elimination of heterozygous elements, which in the populations of north-western Europe, are constantly being re-introduced to maintain variability. Upon further consideration, following the examination of the large general series which has been available in the course of this research, the author is now of the opinion that the New Zealand birds should be regarded as more nearly approaching the central European population, *E. c. sylvestris* Brehm, rather than the nominate form *E. c. citrinella* Linnaeus.

The small series of New Zealand birds available does not allow of any useful analysis of measurements, but in the males the wings measure: 85 mm., 88 mm. (2) and 89 mm., which, it will be noted, is small when compared with topotypical *E. c. sylvestris*; an examination of a longer series of this species from New Zealand is very desirable before a more definite assignment is possible as to racial identity. (C/f Checklist of New Zealand Birds, 1953, p. 66.)

PIED FANTAILS (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) SEEKING SHELTER

At Sawyers Bay, Dunedin, on the afternoon of 8/6/55, two fantails (apparently a pair) flew frequently at the window of the kitchen of a house situated near a tree-lined creek. Snow lay deep on the ground, while the weather was cold and stormy. The birds also flew into the adjoining wash-house, round and out again quite often. Later, as evening approached, the kitchen window was left open just to see what would happen. Almost immediately the pair flew in, quite unconcerned at the presence of children playing or of tea preparations. They busied themselves with the odd flies resting on the ceiling. After that they apparently disappeared. However, as tea progressed, a squeaky noise was heard coming from wires stretched above a fuel stove and on which clothes were hanging to air. Investigation disclosed them sitting pushed close up to each other with their heads tucked into each other's neck feathers. At 7.15 p.m. one flew round and round the kitchen and found the last fly, with a tiny snap-snap of its beak. It was soon called back to its mate, which protested loudly at being left alone. They slept thus during the evening and through the night. Next morning they remained on their perch when lights went on about 7 o'clock, flew around often till 9 o'clock, but refused to go out of the open door or window. It was not till the day was clear and warm that they disappeared outside. These little birds seemed to have shown a knowledge of the desirable conditions inside the house