

## SHORT NOTES

### TATTLER (*Heteroscelus incanus*) IN MANUKAU

It is not often that an addition is made to the already long list of migratory arctic waders which have been recorded in Manukau Harbour. On 25/4/55 R. N. Buttle and I, together with three boys of the King's College Bird Club, D. P. Eyre, D. Monteith and D. J. Woodhams, found a Tattler on the biggest of the Karaka shellbanks. It was first noticed in flight with Pied Stilts, a bird about the size of a Knot (*C. canutus*), with a uniform grey upper surface. Separating from the stilts, it quickly settled on a shelly spit near three Red-breasted Dotterels (*C. obscurus*), whose traditional phlegm in the presence of human beings may have given it confidence. Here we were able to examine it for some time. Its shape and bearing and the way in which it ran and bobbed, at once suggested tattler; and this identification was confirmed when its legs, which were longer than those of a Knot, were seen to be dull yellow. The head, viewed from the side, was strikingly marked. A dark line passed through the eye. Above this was a clear white superciliary stripe and there was more white below the eye and just above the beak. Examination with a telescope revealed that the shading on the chest and upper flanks was really fine black barring. The underparts were white.

When the tattler was flushed, it flew to another shell spit, where it settled among stilts and other waders. Fortunately, as it rose it uttered a single high-pitched 'tweeth' such as appears to be characteristic of the Siberian Tattler, also known as the Grey-rumped Sandpiper (*H. incanus brevipes*). Authorities agree that the calls are the surest way of separating the two forms of tattler in the field (v. Turbott, *Notornis* 4, pp. 130-132). During the long stay of a Wandering Tattler (*H. i. incanus*) at Kawakawa Bay, Clevedon (v. McKenzie, *Notornis* 3, pp. 178-180 and 6, pp. 110-111), I had several opportunities of hearing its musical trill, which was quite distinct from the call of the Karaka tattler. On the evidence, this bird was a Siberian Tattler with the moult into breeding dress almost complete. When we walked it up again, it flew across the bay towards its former resting place among the Red-breasted Dotterels. During its flight it was chased by a godwit, which landed beside it and lunged at it. The tattler nimbly took evasive action and the godwit flew on. We were again able to examine it at close quarters with the telescope, but were unable to determine the length of the groove in the bill.

On 7/5/55 the tattler was again seen in the same locality by Miss M. Sansom, B. S. Chambers, D. A. Urquhart and myself. D.A.U. was the first to spot it, a lonely grey bird in a long line of resting godwits. When the godwits flew it joined a flock of resting knots and after much running to and fro it buried itself in the middle of them. When some knots left, it was for a short while alone on the flank. With its longer legs and bill and its clear superciliary stripe, the tattler was easily distinguishable from the knots. In the poor light the dull yellow of the legs was not easily seen. As it rose it called rather unmelodiously, in a manner reminiscent of a Pacific Golden Plover (*C. dominicanus fulvus*).

In New Zealand, Siberian or Grey-tailed Tattlers have been recorded with certainty only from Parengarenga (v. Turbott, *supra*); but a tattler seen by D. H. Brathwaite near Napier was probably of this form (*Notornis* 6, p. 147). On the coast of New South Wales at about the same latitude as Parengarenga, these tattlers are regular summer visitors, as many as a hundred sometimes occurring together, and a few may remain for the winter (v. Hindwood and Hoskin, 'The Waders of Sydney', *Emu* 54, pp. 237-239).

Although this tattler was not seen after May 7th in the bay where it was first located, it evidently spent the winter on the Karaka coast. For on 5/11/55, after a lapse of six months, some two miles to the east and opposite Weymouth, a tattler adjudged to be of the Siberian race (*brevipes*), and evidently the same bird, was found by Messrs H. R. McKenzie and J. Prickett; and on the next day D.A.U. watched it closely. The shore here

slopes gradually in a series of sandstone ledges: and the pools left in the hollows as the tide falls would seem to be an ideal tattler habitat, resembling that at Long Reef near Sydney, N.S.W. It should be mentioned that both H.R.McK. and D.A.U. have met with the Siberian Tattler at Parengarenga.

R. B. Sibson

### PIED STILT SWIMS THE CHANNEL

While the potential swimming ability of waders is well known, such observations are seldom published to assist the student of bird behaviour.

With this in mind, I record a Pied Stilt (*H. leucocephalus*) which buoyantly and unhurriedly swam across a watercourse about twenty feet wide at Ahuriri Lagoon, Napier, on 24/7/55.

It had been onshore with some other stilts which were cavorting excitedly, pursuing one another and leaping vigorously about. This group behaviour may perhaps account for the otherwise unnecessary swim.

B. H. Heather

### WHITE-FACED HERON NESTING IN NORTH AUCKLAND

A pair of White-faced Herons (*Notophox novaehollandiae*) frequented the eastern end of the Kaipara Flats from early June 1955 until early August.

On 21 July the pair were found to be nesting 35 feet from the ground in a 40ft kahikatea tree, one of a clump of about fifty trees. The nest was a very flimsy structure consisting of a mere handful of sticks, and Mr S. G. Smith, the owner of the land, had discovered the nest by finding two smashed eggs and one whole egg on the ground beneath the tree. During this and subsequent visits the heron remained sitting on the apparently empty nest while I was below the tree.

The heron continued to sit and considerably enlarged the nest structure and laid a fresh clutch, but on 14 August, accompanied by Mr J. Prickett, we found on the ground below the nest two eggs which had obviously been sucked but not smashed. There was no sign of the herons, but we discovered a White-backed Magpie's nest fifty yards away, and Mr Smith said that he had seen the magpies attacking the herons on several occasions.

There appears to be strong evidence to show that this attempt at nesting by the herons was frustrated by the depredations of the magpie. I also have photographic evidence to show that magpies have destroyed the young of both tui and pipit.

G. J. H. Moon

[This is the first record of the breeding of the White-faced Heron in northern New Zealand. During the breeding season of 1955, White-faced Herons were reported from two other localities in Kaipara, but breeding was not proved.—Ed.]

### BLACK-FRONTED TERNS (*C. albostratus*) IN KAIPARA

On 23/4/55 we were driving along the northern shores of the Kaipara Harbour when we came to a little bay called Tangaihi and saw a number of White-fronted Terns (*S. striata*) sitting on the piles of a derelict jetty in company with sixteen smaller terns. As some of these were sitting directly in front of the White-fronted Terns, we estimated their size as about three-