

those of the other shags. In early spring the extra competition provided by Little Shags increases the difficulty of finding suitable sites. In autumn the number of Pied Shags breeding reaches a maximum. At L. Waikare, in the Waikato, Fleming found Little Black Shags breeding at a date which indicated egg-laying about midsummer or soon after.

With the Little Shags breeding does not go on throughout the year. They appear to have a fairly rigid annual breeding cycle, with egg-laying at a peak in September or early October.

R.B.S., J.C.D.

## PROBABLE RECENT OCCURRENCES OF ORIENTAL DOTTEREL IN NEW ZEALAND

1

By H. R. McKENZIE

The Oriental Dotterel (*Charadrius asiaticus veredus*) is recorded by Oliver in *New Zealand Birds*, 1st edition, p. 286, as having been taken by him in 1908 on Sunday Island. This one specimen has so far been the only New Zealand record.

The two strange dotterel noted but not identified at Ruakaka, Northland, in 1956 (McKenzie, *New Zealand Bird Notes*, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 75), may well have been Oriental Dotterel. In this paper I mentioned *Charadrius mongolus* as a possibility, but I have since studied further literature and a skin of *C. mongolus* and am satisfied that the size as described in the above-mentioned article was much too large for the latter species.

At Kaiaua, Firth of Thames, on 7/3/53, with Mr and Mrs E. H. Southerill, of Christchurch, I carefully observed a bird which I am sure was an Oriental Dotterel. Closely associated with four New Zealand Dotterel (*C. obscurus*), it was studied at leisure by telescope at about forty feet. It was a little smaller than the New Zealand Dotterel, but of much the same proportions except that the legs appeared longer. The colour of bill, head and back were similar to New Zealand Dotterel in winter plumage. The greatest difference lay in the white throat and the strong grey wash on the lower neck and all of the breast. From the definite lower edge of the grey wash the colour was a dull white. In flight it was noted that its wings appeared to be as long as those of its companions, while the body was smaller. Subsequent reference to Oliver showed that the wing measurements are the same for the two species, while the overall length of the smaller bird is 5 c.m. less. This, and the grey wash on the breast, left little doubt of the identification. It was probably a young bird. A fully adult Asiatic breeder would be expected by this date to have acquired a more advanced state of plumage.

On 12/12/54 a party of ten birds was seen at Miranda, Firth of Thames, by Misses A. J. and A. E. Goodwin, M. L. Sansom and myself. They were on the edge of a flock of about 3000 godwit and about 7000 knots on a dry area of mudflat. Taken for Golden Plover (*C. dominicus fulvus*) at first glance, they were soon seen to have different action and features. The eye was caught particularly by their extreme activity at the time of high tide, when all the other birds were resting peacefully. In many years I have never seen Golden Plover act in this manner at such a time. They ran about, fed a little and 'bobbed' in dotterel fashion. Miss Sansom had closely studied Golden Plover only the previous day at Karaka and she too was quite certain that these birds were not of that species. Telescope and binoculars used at about 80 yards enabled the party to agree upon the following notes:

Feeding actively on edge of godwit flock; dotterel action; colour of face and head similar to New Zealand Dotterel; long legs; larger than Siberian Pectoral Sandpiper (*C. acuminata*); back like Golden Plover; front (of body) dark grey and brownish; one with lower edge of pectoral colour well defined as if still having some breeding colour; flew inland; called as they rose, "k-lnk". The call was similar to that made by a flying unidentified bird

seen by R. B. Sibson and me on 17/10/54 at the same place. It sounded like a minor of the yelp of an oystercatcher. Two weeks later twelve Golden Plover were found on the same lagoon, but this did not cause Miss Sansom and me to think that we had made an error: Golden Plover were present on each of several subsequent visits and their action and appearance served to convince us still further that the ten birds had been different.

The best opportunity for identification came on 15/1/55, at the same spot, when Miss Sansom, Messrs F. Murray, B. F. Duder, R. T. Duder and I found an odd bird among thirteen Golden Plover. Careful study at about 70 yards showed it to be similar to the ten birds seen on 12/12/54. Those of the party who had not seen the ten birds readily agreed that it differed from the Golden Plover. Later in the day Miss Sansom and I were able to study it by telescope at leisure at about 35 yards. Two Golden Plover in winter plumage within two feet of it enabled close comparison to be made and the following notes were taken. Compared with the two Golden Plover beside it:

'Bill similar in shape, size and colour; crown much darker, quite brown; side of head whitish, not buffy; dark through eye; back darker; belly whiter; chin and throat white, not light buff; neck and breast grey-brown, not buffy; darker on shoulder and side of breast area; large grey patch on flank; legs darker but colour not determined; more erect and of slimmer build; under-wing thought to be a strong grey, including axillaries.'

These field notes, though couched in different terms, agree with descriptions by Serventy and Whittell, *Birds of Western Australia*, Cayley, *What Bird Is That?* and Serventy, *Emu*, July 1938.

According to the Australian writers mentioned the Oriental Dotterel breeds in Mongolia and northern China, many wintering in Australia, especially the north-west, from the second week in September to mid-March. It could occur quite frequently in New Zealand without being noticed, especially when consorting with New Zealand Dotterel or Golden Plover.

## 2

By R. B. SIBSON and V. M. RUTHERFURD

At the beginning of February 1955 we spent three days at Parengarenga. Paua was our base and our main purpose was to watch waders. On the evening of 2 February we were sitting on the Te Pua peninsula opposite the Kaiata bank, where, as the incoming tide encircled it, some thousands of waders were gathering. Immediately below us was a slightly raised strip of sandy foreshore, dotted with patches of salicornia and samolus, where waders often pause before moving to Kaiata. On this occasion c. 150 Turnstones were spread over this resting place and with them were some Red-breasted Dotterels (*C. obscurus*), including a pair with a downy chick. When the Turnstones left, we counted besides the pair and chick, four other Red-breasted Dotterels. The owners of the chick were very agitated and their agitation manifested itself in various ways, crouching, screaming and rodent-run; and from time to time this behaviour affected the other dotterels.

It was now that we noticed another dotterel which puzzled us, for like many species of dotterels in juvenile or eclipse plumage, it lacked any salient characteristics. It was about the size of *C. obscurus*, but its proportions were different. It was not so squat, appeared longer in the leg, held itself more erect, and its head and neck were of finer build. There were subtle differences in the plumage too. Whereas the Red-breasted Dotterels had white foreheads, the forehead of this bird was pale brown, the crown and sides of the head darker except where pale lines showed faintly above and below the eye. The brown mantle was less speckled than that of the Red-breasted Dotterels and had a smoother look. Its underparts were off-white or very pale buff, whereas those of the Red-breasted Dotterels which had no nuptial colour, were dazzling white. A dark line showed along the edge of the wing and from the rear the bird had a narrow sharp-pointed appearance. There was nothing distinctive about the bill.

In the presence of the Red-breasted Dotterels, one of which was seen to make a run at it, the stranger was uneasy and alert, and sometimes nervously bobbed its head. Unfortunately when it flew it went into the sun so that we were deprived of the opportunity of noting any further features. However from our knowledge of plovers and dotterels in New Zealand and after consulting the relevant literature, we are forced to the conclusion that the 'difficult' wader which we watched near Paua and which we have attempted to describe could only have been an Oriental Dotterel (*C. asiaticus veredus*).

## REVIEWS

*NEW ZEALAND BIRDS*, by W. R. B. Oliver (revised and enlarged edition). A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1955. £6/-/-

Ever since 1930 Oliver's *New Zealand Birds* has been the standard work, and so the appearance of a new edition, revised and enlarged, is a notable event. As is pointed out in the preface, so much ornithological work has been done during the last twenty-five years that revision has involved rewriting a great deal of the book, but on the whole the plan of the first edition has been retained. There are some short introductory chapters dealing with structure, migration, classification and similar topics. Then, after the main systematic part of the book, are sections dealing with the Moas, the other extinct birds, and the introduced birds. There is an extensive index. The book is profusely illustrated by photographs and drawings, many new ones being added in this edition, and by a series of coloured photographs instead of the former coloured plates of paintings.

In a work of this kind it is usually easy, by turning up subjects with which one is especially familiar, to pick on omissions and debatable statements, but it is somewhat unfair to do so in a general review. The attempt to present a summary in a convenient form of what is known about our birds has certainly succeeded: this book will be the reference work on the birds of New Zealand for many years to come and will have to be on the shelves of all who are seriously interested in birds. Dr Oliver puts forward views on classification, especially with regard to the dimorphic species, which will not meet with the agreement of all taxonomists. Non-biologists do not always realise that changes in classification are attempts to get at the truth, not mere gratuitous tiresomeness, and it is to be hoped that the differences between Dr Oliver's system and that used in the Chicklist will not cause any reader to become more averse to classification than ever.

The success of the attempt, mentioned in the preface, to be also a book useful 'not only for the professed ornithologist, but also to all interested in wildlife, including the tourist and tramp', is more questionable. The handling of the material is not adapted for field use; field characters and identifications are not stressed; and the keys, which are freely provided, are ones suitable for the museum. Nor is the format of the volume adapted for field use. It is certainly a handsome one, but it is large and heavy, and it is also expensive. A great deal could have been done to avoid these disadvantages, without any loss to the contents, by the use of different paper and by the elimination of some of the repetitive illustrations. The coloured plates especially must have been expensive, and they could have been omitted with no loss at all. Books have increased in price enormously of late years, but even the five volumes of the *Handbook of British Birds* together retail at £7. It is a pity that every effort was not made to reduce the price of this volume to within the reach of as many as possible. It is however unfair to expect a reference book for the library to be also suited to the jacket pocket and to the purse of the field naturalist. Oliver's *New Zealand Birds* will remain for many years unchallenged in its field, but there is still room in New Zealand for a small, cheap, practical handbook on birds for use out of doors.

B.J.M.