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NOTES ON SOME RARE BIRDS RECENTLY RECORDED IN HAWKE'S BAY

By D. H. BRATHWAITE

During 1954 and the first half of 1956 some interesting records of rare birds have been made in Hawke's Bay, and the writer also has further comments to make on birds previously recorded.

AUSTRALIAN COOT (*Fulica atra australis*): Among the notes of his observations at Lake Tutira, by the late Rev. F. R. Robertson, is the following reference to a sight record of this species. He states, 'As we walked round the bay on the s(outh) side of the pines we heard a number of pukeko. Some of these flew across to the prom(entary) on which the silver birches are growing (below the new church). As we walked round, a pair of mallard and a pair of greys moved out from the raupo into the bay, and with them a bird which was at first sight a pukeko, but (a) it was swimming, (b) it took the lead, (c) instead of showing a red plate it showed a white one. It was clearly not a pukeko. On 14/9/54 I returned to the lake and soon found the bird feeding off the end of a little strip of reeds on the n(orth) side of this bay. I was able to add another diagnostic

feature, (d) it dived again and again for weed. I got into conversation with the Hon. Ranger, Mr Gunn, and he took me round in his boat, but we did not locate the bird. The next day I made my way through some undergrowth and had a good view of the bird at a range of c.20 yards. I have not seen its legs. The plumage is duller than that of the pukeko.'

BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius melanops*): This bird, reported for the first time in New Zealand in an earlier paper (*Notornis*, 6, p. 146), made a second appearance in exactly the same spot in 1955. The date when it first came back is not known, but I first saw it on July 2, and it was later shown to B. D. Heather (July 16) and Miss K. Paviour-Smith (July 31). I saw it again on August 20, and it was again seen by G. Crawford on August 27 and September 11. It will be noted that the first of these two latter dates is only two days after the species was identified at Longburn (Andrews, *Notornis*, 6, p. 185), so it seems reasonable to assume that at least two individuals have been in New Zealand in 1955.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*): Nothing further has been seen or heard of this species, but I have recently seen a description of *C. m. subminuta* by G. M. Henry (*A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon*, p. 318, 1955), which appears to confirm my suggestion that separation of the two races of this species in the field might prove to be possible. He states that, 'Although in winter plumage it is very like the Little Stint, it may easily be distinguished, provided a good view is obtained, by (a) brown, not white, forehead; (b) grey-brown breast; (c) back and scapulars boldly streaked dark brown; (d) its legs, which are olive-yellow, or greenish, with long middle toe (about an inch).'

I have also seen a specimen of this race, obtained in the Philippine Islands by Dr R. A. Falla, which, in so far as the brownish forehead is concerned, agrees with this description; the bird seen by me and described earlier (*loc. cit.*, p. 149) appeared to be more like the Red-necked Stint in this respect—i.e. rather white on the forehead and round the base of the bill—and my notes describe the legs as 'yellow'. Whether it would be wise, even now, to ascribe the bird to one race or the other, I am not prepared to say, but these notes are published in the hope that any observer fortunate enough to record this species again will find them of assistance in examining the bird.

WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias leucopterus*): A small tern was seen on the Ahuriri Lagoon on 13/11/55, and again on 18/3/56. From previous experience of the species at Miranda on 28/2/53, I was fairly certain from its flight and general appearance that it belonged to this species, but to make sure I not only made a quick sketch, but returned later with a copy of *Notornis*, containing the series of sketches by Dr C. A. Fleming (*Notornis*, 6, p. 71, 1955) and found that the bird conformed to these in every respect, except that the black around the nape passed through and slightly ahead of the eye. The narrow, club-shaped median patch on the nape was especially noticeable.

BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (*Eurystomus orientalis pacificus*): On 29/4/56 I received a telephone call from Dr D. A. Bathgate to the effect that a strange bird had been seen at Havelock North. From his description I suspected that it belonged to this species, and arranged to meet him and visit the locality where the bird had been reported. It had been present in the orchard of Mr Duncan Fleming, Napier Road, Havelock North, since April 25, and we were fortunate enough to find it still there, perched on the topmost limb of a tree, from which it periodically flew down out of sight, presumably to catch insects. It had the proportions and stance of the species, which I had seen in Australia in 1951, with short legs, a rather plump body and a broad, flat-crowned head. The feet were reddish in colour, but the bill was greyish in colour, rather than red, and somewhat narrow, broadening at the gape; this, combined with the fact that the colour of the

plumage seemed duller than in adult specimens I had seen, suggests that it was a juvenile.

As the species is reported to migrate northward to Indonesia in March, its occurrence in New Zealand in April seems peculiar. So far as I am aware, this is the first record for Hawke's Bay, the 1891 record for the 'Wairoa district' mentioned in both editions of Oliver's *New Zealand Birds* applying to the locality of that name in Northland.

ASIATIC BLACK-TAILED GODWITS IN THE FIRTH OF THAMES

By R. B. SIBSON

It was perhaps a little unfortunate that the first claim of the Asiatic Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa l. melanuroides*) to be added to the New Zealand list depended on a single bird which was abnormal in that its moults took place unseasonally (*Notornis*, 6, pp. 241-242).

This unsatisfactory position has now been rectified; for two other Black-tailed Godwits, identified by several observers as *melanuroides* as distinct from *haemastica*, are known to have spent the summer of 1955-56 on the Miranda coast of the Firth of Thames. Here on 4/12/55 a census of shore-birds was taken by several members of the O.S.N.Z. In the afternoon, although the tide had been dropping for some time, a small group of stilts and godwits remained in a hollow among the shell ridges, just north of the now derelict lime-works. When they were flushed, I saw that among them were two Black-tailed Godwits, one of which as it rose showed a white underwing. On this occasion the colour of the underwing of the other was not noticed, but both had a white alar bar, conspicuous in flight. They settled and began to feed in the channel, now reduced to a trickle, of Miranda Creek. The soft mud prevented any further close examination on our part.

These two birds were next seen on 2/1/56, when as the result of a very high tide the Miranda lagoon was packed with waders. Although on the ground the black-tipped tail of these godwits is not easily seen, J. C. Davenport and I were able to pick them out by the smooth grey-brown colouring of their upper parts. They tended to keep to the fringe of the flock of Bartaills, but when they moved further into the flock it was the darker shading of their upper parts which enabled us to trace them. Not far away, and quite conspicuous, was the aberrant Black-tailed Godwit in nuptial plumage; but on no occasion were the three birds seen together. We were now joined by Mr and Mrs J. Prickett. As the tide dropped the great gathering of waders broke up; but the two Blacktails in which we were especially interested were among the last birds to leave the lagoon, so that we had ample time for studying them. Compared with a male Bartail they appeared slighter in the body and taller in the leg. Their bills were rather fine. When they rose, we all noted the very white underwing thinly edged with black, and the obvious white alar bar.

On 15/1/56 they were still present in the same locality and were watched at close quarters by H. R. McKenzie, D. A. Urquhart and A. C. Hipwell, who after a car had been driven within about 25 yards of them secured two good Kodachrome 35 mm. transparencies, copies of which have been deposited in the Dominion and Auckland War Memorial Museums. Half a mile away on the southern side of the creek, the third Blacktail in its aberrant breeding dress was also seen.

I visited Miranda again on 19/2/56, accompanied by H. R. McKenzie and Commander E. P. Wilson, U.S.N. The two Blacktails were resting near some stilts within a few yards of where they had been seen on 15/1/56; and though the tide had been falling for some time they were not in any hurry to start feeding. They showed no obvious signs of