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 Bartails, 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

starting to assume breeding dress, whereas most male Bartails were reddening and, indeed, some already appeared to be fully red. This was the last occasion on which these two Black-tailed Godwits were seen, and they evidently left the Miranda coast. As it happened, the number of godwits which wintered in the Firth was abnormally small; and it is felt that in view of the special watch which was kept for the Blacktails by several observers, they would not have escaped notice. If, as seems likely, they were first-year birds, they may well have wintered somewhere in northern New Zealand.

SHORT NOTES

STARLINGS (*STURNUS VULGARIS*) IN THE ROLE OF POLLINATORS

Birds, in their search for food, frequently assume the role of pollinators and dispersal agents for the plant world. Starlings, although almost omnivorous, periodically fill the role of pollinating agents in their search for nectar. In some countries, migration of the vast hoards of starlings, it has been noted, coincides with the flowering season of certain families of plants, such as the *Malvaceae, Bombacaceae* and some of the large-flowering *Leguminosae.* Although many of these flowers are adapted to the needs of other visitors, the starlings frequent them for the copious nectar produced and in doing so may cross-pollinate the flowers by-passed by the normal pollinators. Likewise, the completion of the flowering season marks the disappearance of the starlings.

In New Zealand, as is well konwn, starlings were introduced to cope with some agricultural pests, but unfortunately their keen appreciation for fruit has relegated them to the 'black list' of pests, in spite of their appetite for nocuous insects. However, it is not in this role that I wish to discuss them, but as pollinators. Of recent weeks (December-January) I have frequently noticed the forehead, crown and throat of starlings besmeared with pollen. At first I was under the impression that the birds had been fighting and that the discoloration on the head was due to wounds. But in view of the sociable nature of the species, fighting had to be ruled out as a cause. Closer examination revealed masses of pollen. The source of the masses of pollen had now to be located and the plant or plants identified. Observation soon revealed that numbers of starlings visited the flax bushes in swamps and elsewhere. The discoloration was due to flax pollen (*Phormium*).

The question which arises from this small observation is: 'What effect will this mass feeding of starlings on the flax nectar have on the distribution of the Tui (*Prosthemadera novae-seelandiae*) in course of time?' Flax is one of the many sources of food of the Tui. Both species are pugnacious, but since one is 'solitary' and the other gregarious, will the starling exclude the Tui from such areas? Again, the habitats of the two birds are 'normally' different; the Tui is more or a forest bird only coming into the open to feed, whereas the starling is a bird of the open country, seldom if ever invading the bush. These are questions which only the future can answer.

C. McCANN

[In the vicinity of Auckland, starlings have frequently been seen feeding on the flowers of flax (*P. tenax*) and pohutukawa (*M. excelsa*). The Tui here is increasing as a bird of gardens and parkland.—Ed.]

BIRDS ON OAIA 1953-4

Oaia Island lies nearly a mile offshore at the south end of Muriwai beach. The following notes were made during visits which I made with members of the Muriwai Surf Club.

Gannet (*Sula serrator*). 29/11/53. Eggs 151. Black chicks 26. White chicks 163. Fluffy chicks 7. 21/9/54. Nesting mounds 295. Eggs new-laid 2. 30/10/54. Most nests occupied. First eggs chipping. Three eggs had been cast out. 31/10/54. First chick hatched.