

and 17/3/57; 14 on 20/4/57. No winter counts made. 100+ on 29/10/57.

KNOT – Only five on 22/10/56, when Godwits were in thousands. None recorded on a census on 4/11/56; 15+ on 18/12/56; some hundreds on 11/1/57; 2000+ on 1/2/57; perhaps 5000 on 16/2/57; c. 2000 on 17/3/57; 300+ on 20/4/57.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER – One on 29/10/57.

CURLEW SANDPIPER – One with Wrybills in Higham's marsh on 4/8/57, perhaps the same juvenile as was seen at Puketutu causeway in April.

RED-NECKED STINT – One on 22/10/56; two on 11/1/57 and 26/1/57; three on 23/2/57 and 17/3/57; four on 20/4/57; one on 4/8/57 had evidently wintered; five on 29/10/57.

PIED STILT – 22/10/56, Oaklands Road, four pairs on winter floodwater, one on nest, one brood of three seen. c. 12 on 4/11/56 near Yates' dam, a regular spring resort for non-breeders. The open Karaka coast is generally without Stilts in spring; but some are coming back by Christmas: e.g. 41 on 18/12/56; c. 500 on 17/3/57 in Higham's marsh. In winter hundreds frequent the more sheltered creeks: e.g. c. 200 near Shark Island; some non-breeders may linger near here: e.g. c. 50 at Whangamaire Creek on 14/9/57.

CASPIAN TERN – c. 30 non-breeders on 22/10/57; c. 83 on 18/12/56; 160+ 17/3/57, 60 being in Kidd's marsh.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN – Six on Karaka shellbank making noises which sounded like a nesting colony on 22/10/56; c. 40 at Puhinui on 4/11/56; 26 on 1/2/57 on derelict jetty at Kidd's; c. 10 on 17/3/57. There are breeding colonies on the outer Awhitu coast and at Manukau heads.

HARRIER – Two nests located in rushes by the sea, both had clutches of four eggs in mid-October.

OBITUARY

W. R. B. OLIVER

New Zealand lost one of its most versatile naturalists by the death on 16 May 1957 of Walter Reginald Brook Oliver, D.Sc., who was Director of the Dominion Museum from 1928 to 1947.

Practically all phases of natural science claimed his interest, and although he had the cool, calculated outlook of the scientist, he was always ready to listen and to assess any information forthcoming from an amateur observer. His quiet, unassuming nature and a certain coldness of manner somewhat obscured his undoubted genuineness. In the thirty years in which I had known Dr Oliver I had never found any difference in his demeanour – he was always courteous, ever ready to be helpful and most approachable. His scientific training and background were no deterrent to his seeking the advice or the opinion of the amateur naturalist on any problem that was exercising his mind. His enthusiasm was remarkable, especially when in the field. Although many years my senior, it was an effort to keep abreast of him when he was climbing a hillside, intent on a botanising or bird observing quest. Only about five years ago he told me that he had planned work to occupy him for another fifteen years. Had he lived that time, he undoubtedly would have planned another fifteen years ahead.

Born in Tasmania in 1883, he came to New Zealand in 1890, and later to Tauranga, where he told me he remembered Mount Maunganui when there was one house there – the pilot's. After attending the Tauranga High School, he went to Victoria University College, where he graduated M.Sc. with honours in botany. For some years he was engaged as a Customs officer in Auckland. After serving with the Forces in the First World War,

he rejoined the Customs, but soon afterwards was appointed to the staff of the Dominion Museum, becoming director in 1928. Ever since, the name of Oliver has been a prominent one in New Zealand scientific circles. Among the honours he attained was the award in 1936 of the Hector Medal for botanical research. He was president of the Royal Society of New Zealand, 1952-54, of which body he was also elected a fellow; president of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, 1934, and New Zealand State secretary for the Union from 1914 until his death—43 years—and a foundation member of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

To the general public, perhaps Dr Oliver is best known as the author of *New Zealand Birds*, published in 1930, in which he presented all the vital information available up to that time on the native and introduced birds of New Zealand, a work entailing a prodigious amount of research and compilation. This book he enlarged to a much bigger and practically rewritten second edition, published in 1955. He also published in 1949 *The Moas of Australia and New Zealand*, a monographic work, and *Genus Coprosma*. The most important of the many papers he wrote on scientific subjects was perhaps his presidential address to the R.A.O.U., 'Avian Evolution in New Zealand and Australia' (*Emu*, 1945). He also edited a revised edition of Cheeseman's *New Zealand Flora*, 1945.

He was twice married and is survived by his widow and by a son and two daughters of his first marriage.

R.H.D.S.

SHORT NOTES

SOUTH ISLAND PIED OYSTERCATCHERS AWAY FROM THE SHORE IN THE NORTH ISLAND

In the South Island, particularly in the southern parts, Pied Oystercatchers (*H. o. finschi*) resorting to green fields or ploughlands are not an unusual sight. In the North Island, however, where large numbers are present between January and August, and smaller flocks of non-breeders remain between August and December, they are almost entirely birds of the tideline; and I had been familiar with them for more than a decade in several localities before I saw any away from the shore.

In recent years these oystercatchers have started to frequent Upper Manukau above the Onehunga-Mangere bridge, where there are two or three miles of shore ideally suited to them, except that there is no shellbank, reef or coastal roost from which they will not be driven by the highest tides. On 22/11/53 I was surprised to see eleven S.I.P.O. fly over the high stone wall which separates the extensive sports-ground of Waikaraka Park from the rocky fore-shore. When I looked over the wall I found that others had preceded them, so that nineteen were resting unconcernedly on one of the cricket pitches. Red billed and Black-backed Gulls habitually use this sports-ground; and sometimes, during big tides, a few Stilts, Godwits and Caspian Terns resort to it. On 31/12/54 about thirty S.I.P.O. had come up into a freshly ploughed field with many Red-billed Gulls and a few Godwits and Stilts. Again on 7/10/55, a big tide had driven twenty-four S.I.P.O. into the same ploughed field; and with them were three of the larger N.I.P.O. (*H. reischekii*), which seemed curiously out of their element in such an agricultural setting.

The winter of 1956 was exceptionally wet. On the south shore of Manukau the wintering waders spent more time than usual in the low-lying paddocks on the landward side of the sea-wall. On 15/7/56 more than 4000 waders, Godwits, Knots, Wrybills and Stilts, had flown inland, where a single oystercatcher joined them, while a flock of about 800 S.I.P.O. remained faithful to their shellbank. But on 12/8/56, although the tide was not unduly high, the shellbank was deserted and about 600 S.I.P.O. and a single Black Oystercatcher (*H. unicolor*) flew into the rain-sodden paddocks. I was told that during August many S.I.P.O. made a habit of leaving the shore for these green pastures.