

and 125 Spotted Shags were counted as the 'raft' drifted past across a line. That there were at least 150 birds would be a conservative estimate, as diving was going on as they passed. In 16 years I have never seen anything like this (W.A.W.).

L.E.W. observed these 'rafts' on 23, 24 and 25 May. Mostly they consisted of 150 to 200 shags, but on 25 May a very large 'raft' drifted from near the Southern Endowment to the main channel near the Oil Berth. It was impossible to make an accurate count, due to the taking off and alighting of the birds and the packed mass of the raft itself, but a thousand shags would be a conservative estimate of the number in this 'raft' together with about 150 Black-backed Gulls. If a launch arrived close to the birds, they rose in front of it and immediately settled behind it. In some instances the 'rafts' drifted right up into the steamer basin. It appeared that once feeding was exhausted in one area, the birds in front lifted one by one and settled in a new position, often quite some distance away. Gradually the birds took off until eventually the whole mass had shifted and was now feeding in the new area. Sometimes long lines of shags could be seen moving to another feeding ground. Then they would settle on the water and the whole procedure would be repeated.

The master of the tug *Otago* told L.E.W. that in all the years of his experience on Otago Harbour he had never seen such a congregation of shags. He added that they were feeding on a species of small fish (unidentified) and that the Black-backed Gulls were enjoying some free feeds by annoying the shags so much that the shags disgorged the fish.

Renewed rough weather from 27 May broke up any further runs.

L. E. WALKER, W. A. WILLIAMSON

AUSTRALIAN BARN OWL IN WESTLAND

The first New Zealand record of the Australian Barn Owl (*Tyto alba delicatula*) was from Barrytown, Westland, in August 1947 (Falla, 1948). The present, apparently the second such observation, was about one mile south of the Haast River mouth, and one half-mile from the sea. In October or November 1955, J. Buchanan and his father, both residents of Okura, struck an owl down with their car as it rose ahead of them from the road, with a black rat in its talons. The bird was then examined and found to be larger than the Morepork and of considerably lighter colour. No one in Okura township, including the schoolmaster, had ever seen anything like it. With Mr F. Delaney, who was also curious about the bird, J. Buchanan recently visited the Dominion Museum, where he had the chance to discuss briefly the birds of this area. In describing the owl to us he was very clear on the following points: (1) it was much larger than the Morepork; (2) it was lighter in colour than either the Morepork or the German Owl; (3) it had very large white eyes with a darkish ring about them; and (4) although the breast was light, there were small dark spots on it. This description was confirmed in writing by H. J. Buchanan (letter, 15 June 1957). J. Buchanan was shown several birds in the study collection. First the Morepork, which he instantly recognised. Next the Laughing Owl (a specimen with a light face), which he not only did not recognise, but pointed out the differences between the Laughing Owl specimen and the bird that he had seen. Finally, he was shown a miscellaneous collection of owls from outside New Zealand and he unhesitatingly pointed to the Barn Owl, lying in a box containing several other species of owls all larger than any New Zealand owl. On this and on still another (mounted) specimen he pointed out the special points mentioned above which he had observed for several days (before the carcass had to be disposed of) in the Westland casualty. We, therefore, have no hesitation in putting on record the occurrence of the Australian Barn Owl one mile south of the Haast River near its mouth.

This specimen is of interest in that it is another example of the process of steady drift to New Zealand of even more birds from Australia. We suspect that, with numbers of bird-watchers increasing, such records of stragglers will increase.

We are especially pleased to see such an accurate record come from a junior member (14 years), and this record should bring again to the attention of members of the Society the great value in encouraging in every way the keeping of careful records by even its most junior members.

R. A. FALLA, T. RINEY

SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS IN SOUTHERN NEW ZEALAND

Spur-winged Plovers (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*) are now well established in Southland. Frequently, when one is motoring and spies a swampy area, a searching look will reveal some. For instance, on the much used road (18 miles) from Invercargill to Bluff, in each of four areas, Clifton, Awarua (two wet areas) and at Ocean Beach, a pair may usually be seen (30/10/57).

I have notes on the following breeding areas:

1. Colac Bay — at least three pairs nested July 1956; two pairs 1957 (30/10/57).
2. East end Lake Waituna — one pair nested 1957.
3. Invercargill aerodrome — one nest 1957 (three nests 1956).
4. Scott's Gap — 2; one nest 1957, 8/10/57 chicks seen; one nest on farm adjoining school.
5. Nicol's farm, Dunearn, on Aparima River flat — many birds in area, three nests.
6. Naylor's farm, Cromel River, Lumsden — one nest: four eggs 14/9/57.
7. Riverton — one nest.
8. Gummies Bush — one nest.
9. Fosbender's farm, New River Ferry — at least three pairs nesting, 17 counted on 30/4/57.
10. Lower Maitara, Erin Park Farm — one pair nested 1956; 15 birds seen on one day; two regularly in one paddock.
11. Bainfield Road, Invercargill — one pair nested, chicks on 13/10/57.
12. One Tree Point — one pair 'obviously nesting'.

Other reports of the presence of Spur-winged Plovers have come to me from: Waiwera, Otago, 2; South of Te Anau, 2; New River Ferry, 2; Lake Hayes, 2; Prison Farm, Otatara, 5; Dipton, 2; Otatara, 2; Lake Wanaka (head of lake), 1; Greenhills, 2; Lake Manapouri, 5; Awarua (Jamieson's farm), 3; Tisbury, 3; Lumsden, 2; Wallacetown (Price's farm), 7.

OLGA SANSOM

CRESTED GREBES ON THE LOWER MATAURA

The unexpected sight of two Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) on the Maitara River near Erin Park in late September 1957 caused Mr S. Lobb to put a toll-call through to the Southland Museum. Many local residents saw them, and Mr Lobb visited the museum to confirm the identification with the aid of a stuffed specimen. This is what Mr Lobb says about them: 'One bird has a darker mark under the throat and a lighter body colour than the other. They are similar in size. In flight they have a fast wing-beat, low on the water, and show white on the upper wing. I saw one bird flatten its crest before diving. The time they were under the water varied from twenty to thirty-five seconds, and when they were feeding they surfaced for only short periods. The Black-billed Gulls (*L. bulleri*) which breed locally often harried the grebes, but when harried, a grebe would dive and often come up with something in its bill. They were still on the river in early October.'

OLGA SANSOM

[European Great Crested Grebes habitually resort to estuaries and tidal waters in winter. It may well be that New Zealand Crested Grebes desert their mountain lakes for the coast more often than is realised. One was recorded in Blueskin Bay on 29/1/53. — Ed.]