

# NOTORNIS

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## SOME RECORDS OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS IN NEW ZEALAND, 1957

By Dr. R. A. FALLA

The frequency of vagrant records has been remarked often and in an earlier paper (Falla 1953 p. 37-8) I discussed its relationship to the eventual establishment of new breeders. There are very few years in which some stray Australian birds are not recorded in New Zealand, but some periods are remarkable for the numbers of individuals and of species involved. The early months of 1957 appear to have been one such period, and this paper is concerned with a description of specimens and reports received at the Dominion Museum. Mrs. O. Sansom, Director of the Southland Museum, Invercargill, has been indefatigable in securing specimens and reports, and I am indebted to her for most of the material on which the paper is based. Mr. K. Miers of the Wildlife Division, Department of Internal Affairs, has generously provided some records of field observation from data which he has assembled.

### AUSTRALIAN LITTLE EGRET. *Egretta garzetta nigripes* (Temminck)

Mrs. Sansom forwarded two specimens which had been shot in Southland early in the shooting season. The first was an adult female found on the Matura Lagoon on 8th May, 1957. It is in good plumage with straight dorsal plumes extending just beyond the tail and the long plumes of the foreneck well developed. The bird's bill was black, yellowish on the basal half of the lower mandible. The legs and toes were completely black viewed from the front but were light olive on the back of the tibio-tarsal joint and the soles of the toes. Lores and eyelids were greenish yellow, irides bright yellow. Dimensions — Wing 255 mm.; tail 86; tarsus 96; middle toe and claw 62; culmen 84. (Dominion Museum registered number 8967).

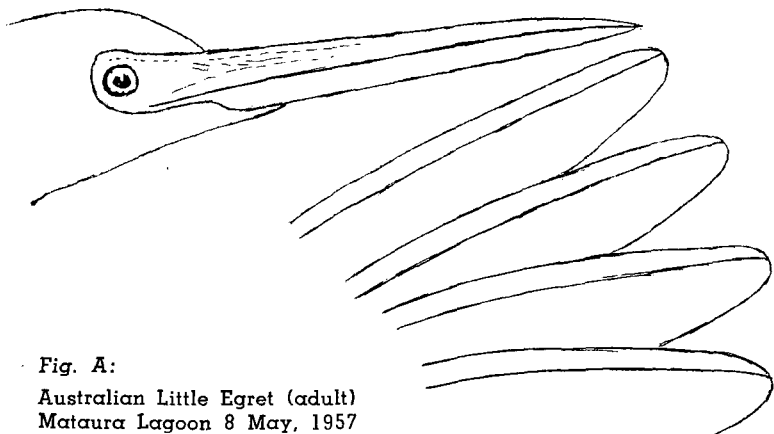


Fig. A:

Australian Little Egret (adult)  
Matura Lagoon 8 May, 1957

The second specimen, although fresh, was unfortunately in fragments as the body had been plucked and torn by a harrier before it was found, near Invercargill, at the same time (8th May) as the last. It was a young female bird and appears to be a Little Egret but differs in several respects from the adult bird described above. As the line diagram (Fig. B) shows, it has a shorter stouter bill and the four outer primaries are quite different in shape. The white plumage is suffused with salmon buff along the outer scapulars and strongly on the tail and under tail coverts. The bill was deep yellow, blackish only on the terminal half of the upper beak. The facial skin was red, but this may have been indelible blood stain on original yellow. Irides were light yellow and feet light olive green, stained blackish in front and on top of toes. Dimensions — Wing 241 mm.; tail 73; tarsus 102; toe 61; culmen 75.

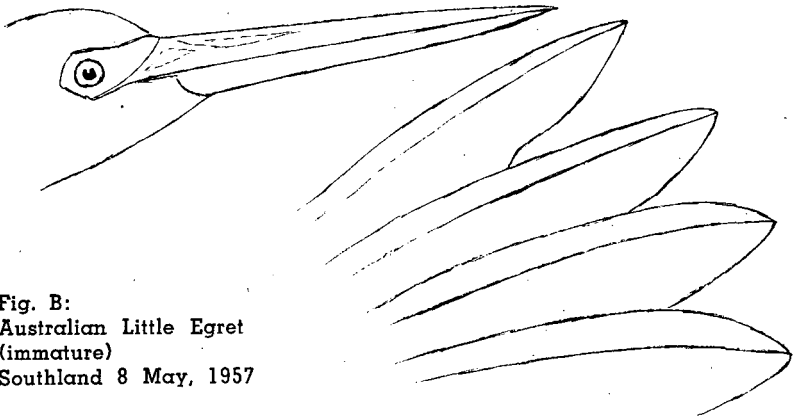


Fig. B:  
Australian Little Egret  
(immature)  
Southland 8 May, 1957

AUSTRALIAN WHITE IBIS. *Threskiornis aethiopica strictipennis*  
(Gould)

Some interesting sight records, photographs, and one specimen confirm a scattered invasion by the White Ibis. Mrs. O. Sansom describes the first Southland record as follows: "May 23rd, 1957, Mr. F. F. Allan, Otautau, rang the Museum to report a strange bird, 'a big heavy bird, greyish body, black head, long black curved beak, long neck, poking about water then flew up into a tree. Something like a bittern.'" After inspecting it and deciding that the bird was a White Ibis, Mrs. Sansom on 27th May received a dead specimen from Tuatapere. It had been shot on 24th May, and was therefore not the bird seen on 25th at Otautau. It was sent to the Dominion Museum and is described below. On 29th May came a further sight record at Te Tua, Te Wae Wae Bay, and an interesting account from Mr. R. Paulin, Doubtful Sound, who confirmed that a White Ibis had appeared there on 12th April and remained till 18th May, on which date it was seen to fly to a considerable altitude and head east. It was possibly one of the birds seen a week later in Central Southland.

Early in June Mrs. Sansom received a report from Mr. R. Phillips who recorded four birds answering the description of ibis at the mouth of the Rangitikei, North Island, and about the same time Mr. J. Prickett

of Auckland photographed one at Kinohaku, Kawhia, and published the photograph. From the dates of record these northern birds could have been the same individuals as the Southland records, but it is more likely that they were different, for there was still an ibis on Nicholson's Farm, Royal Bush, Southland, observed regularly between mid-August and 14th September, when it was photographed. It, or another one, was reported by Officer Bros. of Drummond to have been scavenging for after-birth at lambing time on 17th September. A further report received by Mrs. Sansom was from Mr. Beachman, who saw two at close range four miles from Hokitika, Westland, on 30th September.

Without exception the descriptions and photographs are all of immature birds, and so is the specimen. In adults the head and neck are naked and black, in all races of *T. aethiopica*, but are feathered in the first plumage. In the Tuatapere specimen, a young female (D.M. 8932), the forehead, lores, space round eye and gular area are black and naked, the rest of the head and neck fully feathered, blackish on crown and hindneck and clothed with white-based dark feathers on cheeks and sides of the neck, giving these areas a speckled appearance. The feathers of the rest of the neck are white like the breast. Bill black, pale at tip; iris dark brown, feet dark iron grey. The plumage pattern appears to be the same in immature *T. a. aethiopica* and is concisely described by Meinertzhagen (1930, p. 437). Gould (1848) made a loose and incomplete description of the young of the Australian bird as having the neck partially clothed with "white feathers" (presumably on an otherwise naked neck) and this has been frequently repeated (Sharpe 1898, p. 10, Oliver 1955, p. 399). The dimensions of the Tuatapere specimen are wing 335; tail 100; tarsus 98; toe 85; culmen (arc) 150; or 155 (curve) all in millimetres. The weight of the bird was 3 lbs. 4 ozs.

Earlier New Zealand records, when described, appear also to have been young birds. The description of one held in captivity in Nelson (Moncrieff 1925, p. 371) resembles the more recent records.

#### GLOSSY IBIS. *Plegadis falcinellus*

Records of this ibis in flocks of a dozen or more have been regular for some years, concerning mainly Blenheim and Foxton districts. The 1957 records have been more scattered geographically and have been of pairs or single birds. On 26th June Mr. Arthur Simmonds of South Featherston saw two on the shores of Lake Wairarapa at close range. One was slightly larger than the other.

#### AUSTRALIAN COOT. *Fulica atra australis*

Coots can now be regarded as established in considerable numbers in Southland. The annual shooting season usually produces a few specimens shot in error. In 1957 Mrs. Sansom reported nine dead birds from Southland in the first week of May and others were seen alive by shooters. Others were shot near Blenheim and on Lake Wairarapa. It is not imperative to postulate a fresh invasion of coots in this year. Indeed if the report given to Mrs. Sansom by the late Mrs. W. Printz of Pahia is to be relied on they were not uncommon in Southland in 1890. However the number of North Island locality records expanded in 1957, and there was a noteworthy southerly movement from Australia into Tasmania recorded by Sharland (1958, 43).

It is perhaps significant that the R.A.O.U. Branch Report by M. Sharland (*loc. cit.*) recording an influx into Tasmania in 1957 of new arrivals from the north lists 40 or 50 White Ibis, Royal Spoonbills, Little Egret, and Pacific Heron, in addition to a substantial increase in the numbers of Coots.

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## FOOD OF YOUNG BLACK-BILLED GULLS (*LARUS BULLERI*) IN A BREEDING COLONY, NORTH CANTERBURY

By ELLIOTT W. DAWSON

During the years in which Acclimatisation Societies and so-called sportsmen have held sway in the management of New Zealand wild life, one or another species of bird, whether native or introduced, has been given a "black mark," and, without giving it much of a chance to justify its existence, has been summarily dealt with. This happened, for example, some years ago in the case of the Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo novaehollandiae*) with the result that, even in these more enlightened days, one can easily see that to many "trigger-happy" individuals it makes no difference that there are eight or so different species of shag frequenting our lakes, rivers, and shores. They are all just "shags" to these people. The work of Falla and Stokell (1937; 1945), and of Dickinson (1951), on the stomach contents of a number of shags at least gave some more conclusive idea of what might compose the diet of these birds in various places and at various times. At the moment the bird with the black mark seems to be the Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*), but, if one is to judge by the comments and letters in various newspapers (*cf.*, for example, 'Christchurch Star Sun,' Oct. 23, 1956), opinion is not entirely uniform as to whether this bird, in New Zealand, deserves the black mark with which it has been branded. It is interesting, in this connection, to read Nicholson's remark on this species and its habits in England (Nicholson, 1951: 42-44).

In a similar way, about 1930, even the Black-billed Gull, for a short time, had a black mark put on it. E. F. Stead (1932: 56) tells us how this took place in Christchurch. To use his words, "They do not come into Christchurch on foraging expeditions as does the Red-billed Gull in Auckland, and perhaps this is not greatly to be wondered at, for on one occasion, when a small flock came to Hagley Park, they were shot under orders from the local Acclimatisation Society, because they