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MARSH SANDPIPER IN MANUKAU— A NEW BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND

By R. B. SIBSON

In Manukau Harbour the summer and autumn of 1959 were a particularly fruitful time for waders and ducks at the large, shallow pools which were created by the building of two new sea-walls linking Puketutu Island with Mangere to the north and Ihumatao to the south.

On the evening of 24/3/59, I visited one pool which the experience of the past three months had shown was perhaps the most profitable corner of the hundreds of acres of fresh or brackish shallows available. At the head of this pool near the explosion crater which lies below Mangere Mt., there are seepages of fresh water which, as it trickles from the adjacent slopes over the now reclaimed flats, has produced verdant patches of Flannelweed (*Enteromorpha Sp.*), Bachelor's Buttons (*Cotula sp.*) and Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia sp.*). Recent cyclonic rains had increased the flow of the seepages. On this evening some scores of Stilts were gathered at the head of the pool and many Wrybills, Banded Dotterels and at least seven Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were scattered over the swampy seepage area; while a White-winged Black Tern, which from its long stay in the vicinity has some claim to be recognised as the *genius loci*, was passing to and fro catching insects only a few inches above what was obviously an ideal feeding-ground.

As I came within about two chains of the Stilts, with the westering sun behind me, I noticed among them a smallish wader with unusually long legs and a thin, straight bill about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. Its upper parts appeared dark grey contrasting with the clear white of its underparts, throat and face. The legs were much longer than those of a Wrybill or Curlew Sandpiper, but I could not be sure of their colour. It seemed pretty clear that the bird before me was a *tringa* of a kind not previously recorded in N.Z.; and at first I suspected it might be a Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), a palaearctic wader which has been widely, though not commonly, reported from Australia (v. Hindwood & McGill, *Emu* 53, 1-13). Fortunately, when it was flushed it flew away from me and showed an almost white tail and a white inverted V up the back, so that I was now certain that the bird was a Marsh Sandpiper or Little Greenshank (*Tringa stagnatilis*). Perhaps I should mention that twenty years ago I was familiar with both Wood and Marsh Sandpipers in Europe, particularly on the islands of the Aegean, where I met the two species together on their spring migration northwards.

Its size and flight-silhouette differentiated it at once from any other wader known in New Zealand. In flight its legs trailed so far behind the tail that with its very white underparts it resembled a miniature Stilt. Because of its disproportionately long legs it is not true to say that the Marsh Sandpiper is a small edition of the Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*).

After flying a few chains it settled on a patch of ooze where I was able to watch it feeding near some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. It was interesting to note that as it feeds in very shallow water its long legs cause it to tip its back and tail sharply upwards in what might almost be called a diagnostic attitude. In deeper water it does not hesitate to wade up to its belly in order to feed off the small organisms which are swimming near the surface. I was specially struck by the whiteness of the face, throat and underparts; and from the lack of spotting on the throat which an adult should have at this season, I am inclined to believe that this bird is a juvenile, about nine months old. The real darkness of the wings is best seen in flight, when the downbeat of the wings is strong and incisive and there is a marked pause between strokes.

It was an alert bird. Once it jumped and flew a few yards alone, revealing the white up the back and bobbing nervously with its head when it landed. Though the Marsh Sandpiper is perhaps the most elegant of the smaller waders, for a moment just before settling it has an angular, gangling appearance.

During the ensuing week this bird was generally found in the shallows at the head of the pool among Stilts, which were evidently the company it preferred, though it barely reached up to their bellies. When the Stilts flew in alarm, it went with them, sometimes leading the flight. Only once was it seen to go off on a longish flight independently, but it soon returned. The Marsh Sandpiper is essentially a wader of fresh and brackish pools, not of the tideline.

Not surprisingly, this rare visitor attracted much attention and was well seen by Mr. and Mrs. B. D. Heather, Mr. and Mrs. J. Prickett, Mrs. R. B. Sibson and Peter Skegg, on March 27th and 28th. On Easter Sunday, March 29th, Mr. H. R. McKenzie studied it under most favourable conditions and was able to confirm all the points of identification mentioned above and to add that the colour of the legs was greenish. On April 5th it was under observation for a considerable time by Messrs. E. F. Dodson, J. C. Davenport, A. Ringer, Tim Ledgard and several boys from King's College.

On April 25th, the Marsh Sandpiper was at first a little difficult to find, as it was in deep water on the outer fringe of a multitude of Stilts, but it was eventually well seen by Mrs. L. Fooks, Miss M. C. R. McIntyre, A. C. Hipwell, N. M. Gleeson and myself. It was still present on May 13th, when Peter Skegg and I approached within a chain of it. In the meanwhile photographs had been obtained by Messrs. J. Prickett and D. A. Urquhart.



PRATINCOLE RECORDS IN NEW ZEALAND

By. R. A. FALLA

On 14th May, 1959, Mrs. P. Moncrieff, of Nelson, forwarded to the Dominion Museum the body of a Pratincole which had been shot near Appleby and later forwarded to Mrs. Moncrieff by Mr. E. Rogers. Mrs. Moncrieff's tentative identification of the bird as an Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) is confirmed by an examination of the specimen. It is an adult male in good plumage, the dimensions in