

## MORE INSTANCES OF ANTING

I was interested to read the reports regarding "anting" in birds. I saw two similar occurrences early in the year 1959 in Hastings.

On the first occasion I noticed three Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) acting in an unusual way. They were grouped at the edge of a concrete footpath, and were very agitated and excited.

I was able to get quite close to them and saw that they were picking up ants and apparently tucking them swiftly into the feathers under their wing. During this process the wings were kept half extended and the birds were almost sitting right back on their tails. All their movements were characterised by urgency, almost amounting to a frenzy.

I had a look at the ants and they too were very excited and boiling up out of the entrance to their nests. Many of them were winged and getting ready to swarm.

Two days later I saw a similar incident in an adjacent street. This time the birds were Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

Again there was the same frenzy of action which led to my almost being able to stand on the birds before they flew away; and I was able to identify large numbers of winged ants present in the swarm on the footpath.

Whether the birds were picking out only the winged ants or not I don't know. But I was impressed by the fact that something about the ants had, in both cases, triggered off the birds' reactions and impelled them into this urgent and extraordinary display of "anting."

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## TEREK SANDPIPER IN KAIPARA

In the late afternoon of 3/5/59 we were scrutinising Banded Dotterels (*C. bicinctus*) and Wrybills (*A. frontalis*), as they fed widely scattered over the sandy tidal flats of mid-Kaipara between Okahukura and the 'island.' Here the area over which shore-birds can feed is immense, especially at low tide, when a thin film of water may remain in very shallow but quite extensive depressions in the firm sands. For the season of the year the weather was typically south-westerly with big variations in the light. Sometimes the westering sun shone brightly from a clear sky, sometimes it was hidden by swiftly passing light clouds.

In one of the depressions at a distance of about 120 yards, we noticed four Bar-tailed Godwits together with a much smaller wader which had vividly yellow or orange legs. In the shimmering light the size and shape of its body could not be accurately estimated; and our first impression was that the legs were long enough for the bird to be a tattler (*Heteroscelus*), but unusually bright. As we drew nearer, we realised that the yellow legs were reflected in the glassy surface of the water and so appeared nearly twice as long as they really were. We could now see clearly the proportions of the bird and its long slender upcurved bill; and it was obvious that the bird was not a tattler, but

a Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*). After feeding by itself for some time, it flew, calling several times with a clear rippling trill; and settled among the scattered Wrybills. A Terek Sandpiper still in New Zealand in early May is likely to be wintering.

Nine months later, on 1/2/60, a Terek Sandpiper, presumably the same bird, was closely seen on the same stretch of foreshore by Mr. J. Prickett, David Fenwick and R.B.S. A gusty north-easter was blowing and there was a lot of sand in the air. As the rising tide crept over the sands, the Terek Sandpiper flew in and joined about eighty Wrybills which were sheltering in the lee of a hummock which was stabilised by a thin covering of wiry grass. It stayed with them when some Turnstones (*A. interpres*) and Red-breasted Dotterels (*C. obscurus*) flew away. Later four Red-necked Stints (*C. ruficollis*) arrived and with them the Terek Sandpiper could be studied at leisure at a range of about a chain.

Kaipara thus becomes the third of the large 'harbours' of the Auckland province from which the Terek Sandpiper has now been reported. Since 1951, when McKenzie found this distinctive sandpiper for the first time in New Zealand (v. Notornis IV, 212), the only two years when it has not been recorded are 1955 and 1956. (One bird repeatedly seen at Miranda in the early summer of 1954 most probably stayed at least till March, 1955). It would be interesting to know how many Terek Sandpipers have reached New Zealand in the last decade. The Auckland records refer probably to not fewer than six individuals; but the count is complicated because on a number of occasions these Sandpipers have been known to winter, viz. two in the Firth of Thames in 1952 and one in 1954; one in Manukau in 1957; and a bird found in spring is not necessarily a new arrival but may have been in New Zealand already for about a year.

At the southern limits of its range, the Terek Sandpiper reaches the Cape Province of South Africa and sometimes the southern coast of Australia. It is very rare near Sydney. Oliver (1955) includes Tasmania in its range, but there is no mention of it in Sharland's 'Tasmanian Birds' (1958).

The increasing number of records of the Terek Sandpiper in New Zealand may represent a genuine extension of its wintering range, and not just wider coverage by more critical observers. In northern New Zealand these active sandpipers have usually been found attached to flocks of Wrybills, with which they appear to have a natural affinity. Close scrutiny of these flocks near Auckland began in 1940; but though stints and some of the rarer sandpipers and dotterels were found from time to time with them, more than a decade elapsed before a Terek Sandpiper was reported. Resting Wrybills are tame and approachable; and the Terek Sandpiper is such a distinctive bird that an experienced observer ought not to overlook one if it has joined a flock of Wrybills, as it is likely to do if there are any about.

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