PIED STILTS' SHORT INCUBATION AND FLEDGING PERIODS

On 25/8/59, a pair of Pied Stilts *(H. leucocephalus)* was seen making a nest in a wet hollow, the site of the first nest of 1944.

Aug. 27th, 2 eggs; 28th, 3; 29th, 3 at 8 a.m.; 30th, 4 at c8 a.m.

Sept. 21st, 6 a.m., one chick almost out of egg. The other three eggs chipped a little. 6 p.m., one chick two yards from nest and two others just hatched, being still wet.

Sept. 22, 7 p.m., three chicks away from nest. The fourth egg still chipped. The bill of the chick was seen moving.

Sept. 23rd, 6 a.m., last chick had hatched.

Sept. 24th, last chick dead one foot from nest. Its hatching was abnormal, so is not further treated.

The incubation period, from Aug. 29 or 30 to Sept. 21, was either 23 or 22 days, depending on whether the last egg was laid after 8 a.m. on Aug. 30, and whether incubation began on 29th or 30th. It is unlikely that the bird started to sit before Aug. 29 as all the eggs chipped on the same day, Sept. 21. It seems highly probable that the incubation period was only 22 days.

On Oct. 18 the three young Stilts all flew. The hatching to flying record, Sept. 21 to Oct. 18 is definitely 27 days. These chicks grew very fast and were fine specimens.

Summary

The incubation period was almost certainly not more than 23 days and is thought to have been really 22. The shortest record previously was 23 days for one chick only of a brood in 1947 (N.Z.B.N. III, 108). Previous records have been 23 (one only) to 27 days, with an average of 25.

The hatching to flying period was 27 days, also the shortest yet recorded. The shortest periods previously were 29 days for one brood and for one chick of another brood *(Notornis* IV, 119). Earlier records were 29 to 37 days and averaged 32.7, excluding winter breeding.

A. F. STOKES

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TATTLER AND HUDSONIAN GODWIT IN THE HEATHCOTE-AVON ESTUARY

On 17/7/60 a Tattler *(H. incanus)* was present with about 3000 Oystercatchers *(H. o. finschi)* and 115 Godwits *(L. lapponica baueri)* at the high-tide roost near the entrance to the Heathcote-Avon estuary. A strong south-west wind was blowing and the Tattler was standing with the Godwits, maintaining its foothold with difficulty; in fact, it seemed literally to be sheltering behind them. Characters particularly noted were the yellow legs; a dark line through the eye, white face, uniform dark crown and back; faint bars on upper flanks but otherwise no markings on the underparts. It was evidently a young bird. If adult, it should have assumed breeding plumage and left New Zealand in March or April instead of staying over a southern winter. After its discovery by E.G.T., it was closely studied by several members of the O.S.N.Z. when they were carrying out a quarterly wader count.

It could not be found amongst the larger waders when approximately monthly observations were made during the following five months (E.G.T., J. R. Jackson and E. H. Southerill). It was possibly missed owing to the numbers of birds present. However, it is likely that it

shifted to roost amongst gulls in the north of the estuary, or shifted quarters to adjacent areas, viz. Waimakariri lagoon or Lake Ellesmere.

What was presumably the same Tattler was again found by R.B.S. on 10/1/61 on the South Brighton sandspit at full tide. It was standing on dry sand up the beach about fifty yards from the water's edge, the only smaller wader among about 1500 very approachable Godwits. Yellow legs, dark line through eye and white superciliary stripe were conspicuous features. It was more nervous than the Godwits, bobbed its head and ran among them till it was lost to sight. Shortly after, it was seen in flight at the head of a small group of Godwits and a doube call-note, not loud but somewhat resembling that of a distant Oystercatcher, was heard twice. As the tide began to ebb, the Tattler fed, especially among floating and stranded green sea-lettuce (*Ulva* sp), often running quickly, while a fence of protecting Godwits continued to drowse. At no time while it was under observation did it associate with Oystercatchers. No barring on the underparts was noted; but there was faint shading on either side of breast and lower neck. Though the length of the groove in the bill could not be discerned, there seems to be little doubt in view of the distinctive double note that it belonged to the Siberian race *brevipes;* the call of the American race *(incanus)* is a longer rippling series of notes. Sight records of *brevipes* have been made previously in Parengarenga (1950-51 and Manukau (1955-59) and of *incanus* in Kawakawa Bay, Clevedon (1948-49). The Siberian race regularly visits eastern Australia and according to Sharland (Tasmanian Birds, p. 58) occurs every year in the Derwent estuary near Hobart.

This constitutes the first record of a Tattler for the South Island and the Heathcote-Aven estuary becomes the southernmost point which this arctic wader has been known to reach.

E. G. TURBOTT
R. B. SIBSON

On 18/8/60, during a short stay in Christchurch, I paid a visit to the Heathcote-Avon estuary. At high tide most of the waders had congregated at the eastern side of the estuary, not far from the estuary bar. As I approached, Bar-tailed Godwits were flying off in small flocks and parties to the early-exposed mudflats nearby, whilst on a shelly sandbank further on over 2,000 S.I. Pied Oystercatchers in two flocks waited for the tide to recede further. About 20 Godwits still roosted with these, but they flew off as I drew near and as they flew past me I noticed one very dark godwit amongst them. The flock flew back past me along the tideline and settled about a hundred yards away, but in the time that the flock was flying away from me I had time to see that the dark godwit had a black and white tail. I immediately followed up the flock and observed it both on the mud and in flight. The black-tailed godwit could be picked out fairly easily from the others with its dark grey-brown neck and chest, and uniform upperparts of the same colour. On being put to flight the black auxillaries and sooty underwing were very conspicuous, thus proving that it was a Hudsonian Godwit *(L. haemastica).* In all respects it was very similar to the bird seen at the Manawatu estuary earlier this year.

On being flushed a third time the Hudsonian Godwit flew to a mudflat now exposed well out in the estuary and could not be

observed further. Its alar bar was distinct and irregular, and the white or buffy tip to its tail was not seen. It was probably an immature bird, as it was either in eclipse or juvenile plumage. Evidently it was spending the winter in New Zealand.

M. J. IMBER

(All previous records of the Hudsonian Godwit in the South Island have come from L. Ellesmere. According to the Checklist the last of these was in 1921.—Ed.)

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TROPICAL TERNS ASHORE ON THE AUCKLAND WEST COAST

On 22/5/60 the remains of a White Tern *(Gygis alba)* were found on Bethell's Beach (Te Henga) on the Auckland west coast by two schoolboys, N. J. Ledgard and B. Jones, who accurately identified the remains and brought them to me. The specimen is very battered, but enough is left to enable a certain identification to be made. The skull, with its distinctively upcurving lower mandile, is intact; the feathers are strikingly white and four surviving primaries show the dusky shafts which are mentioned in all authoritative descriptions of this small white tropical tern. Feet and tail are missing; so that the only significant measurement which this specimen provides is of the exposed culmen, 39 mm.

The bird had obviously been ashore for some time and must have strayed south into the Tasman, possibly from Norfolk Island in late summer or autumn, the season when other tropical sea-birds such as Bosun-birds, Frigate-birds, Brown Boobies are most frequently reported off the New Zealand coast.

The half-dozen previous records of the Sooty Tern *(S. fuscata)* in New Zealand all seem to show that it may be expected off the coast of the North Island in late summer especially after a northerly blow. It was therefore with some surprise that I was asked to examine two specimens which had been driven ashore in the third week of August, 1960.

During a stay at Bethells from August 16-20, 1960, Mr. N. M. Gleeson patrolled the beach daily, usually finding a few prions *(P. turtur, salvini, belcheri)*. On August 19 he picked up, soon after it came ashore, the first Sooty Tern *(S. fuscata)* to be recorded in New Zealand since 1951. Then on 23/8/60 M. J. Hogg, N. J. Ledgard and P. D. G. Skegg visited Muriwai to find that the beach was strewn for some miles with wrecked sea-birds, most of which must have been cast ashore in the previous week. The wrecked birds were mostly tubinares of southerly origin and included, among many others, Gray-headed and Buller's Mollymawks, prions of five species and single specimens of Blue *(H. caerulea)*, Gray *(Pr. cinerea)* and Westland *(Pr. westlandica)* Petrels. Curiously out of place among these frequenters of colder seas was a second Sooty Tern.

Both specimens, which appear to be adults in full breeding dress with very long tail streamers, were measured.

	Date	*Wing*	*Tarsus*	*Bill*	*Tail*	*Depth of fork*
(a) Bethells	19/8/60	298	21.5	42	206	114 m.m.
(b) Muriwai	23/8/60	297	21	47	201	108 m.m.

The measurements of these two birds for wings and tail do not agree very closely with those given by Oliver (1955, p. 342).

R. B. SIBSON