

flew away. Its call as it rose in flight was written down as 'tik-it,' less incisive than the typical note of a Banded Dotterel and lacking its carrying quality. A single soft 'tik' was also heard. On 27/1/61 when the haunt of this Mongolian Dotterel was visited for the third time, the bird was still present, so that the names of A. Blackburn and H. R. McKenzie could be added to the list of those who had satisfactory views of this Asiatic straggler, the first of its kind to be recorded in New Zealand. I am indebted to D. H. Brathwaite and R. B. Sibson who put at my disposal the notes which they made on the spot.

M. J. HOGG



(b) LITTLE WHIMBREL — Among the many rare species recorded at Farewell Spit was a Little Whimbrel (*Numenius minutus*). This was seen by us on the day of the census, January 24th, on the inside of the Spit at about the 11 mile mark. The following summarises the notes taken at the time.

The bird was standing on a patch of sand amongst *Salicornia*. At first glance it was thought to be a Golden Plover. Then the appearance of the bird did not seem quite right as the neck and head were much finer and the neck longer. The bill also was longer and finer with a downwards curve at the end, colour black. The back coloration was a deep rich mottled black and golden similar to that of a Golden Plover but the mottling was heavier. The undersurface was a deep buff with very slight mottling if any. The colour of the legs could not be determined as they were hidden by the *Salicornia* but did not appear to be exceptionally long.

The bird was put to flight to see if there was any distinctive flight pattern but nothing stood out. Fortunately the bird called as it flew off. Our rendering of this was a sharp "weep . . . weep" in slow succession followed by a pause and then a repetition. The bird flew off down the inside of the Spit towards the lighthouse. A measurement was taken of the imprint of the mid-toe left in the sand and this was 34 mm.

R. WIBLIN & B. D. BELL



WINTER OCCURRENCE OF JUVENILE GANNETS IN NEW ZEALAND WATERS

By P. A. S. STEIN

In their "Migration and Dispersal of New Zealand Gannets" (*Emu*, September, 1958) Wodzicki and Stein set out evidence to show that gannet chicks reared in New Zealand depart from their home rookery at the age of about 15½ weeks, leave the neighbourhood, and eventually make their way across the Tasman Sea to Australia. Although a number feed along the northern coasts for a few weeks, by late May or early June only an occasional straggler remains.

These young birds grow up in Australia. Their stay there varies from two to four seasons. During this time they change their brownish-

grey speckled feathers for the white plumage of the adults. They return to their home rookery at the age of four years and upwards. Occasionally, as shown by banding, a bird returns in its third year, but it does not breed. In general appearance these non-breeding sub-adults are indistinguishable from the breeding birds.

Any bird therefore in greyish-brown plumage found round the coast between late June and Christmas has not been to Australia and is a rarity whose presence should be reported.

On 23/8/60, Peter Skegg, Michael Hogg and Nick Ledgard walked for some miles along the west coast beaches near Muriwai, Auckland, with the idea of examining any birds washed ashore. They collected nearly a hundredweight, including a number rarely seen here. Among them was a juvenile Gannet.

Examination of its abraded tail-feathers showed that it had grown up in a very rocky colony, and had spent the full development time there. The neck and head feathers had not commenced their first change so that it was nearing six months in age. It had not been long dead, showed no external injury that could have caused death, but was very light as if from lack of food.

Counting back six months from August 23rd brought us to a hatching date about the end of February. Could this give us some clue as to the colony from which the chick had come?

In most seasons at Horuhoru fewer than ten eggs are laid in early August. Any chicks surviving from these half-dozen or so early hatchings are ready to depart for overseas in the first week in January. Only a few very early chicks have been seen departing before January 14th. On the other hand very few eggs are laid after mid-November. Two eggs hatched on January 8th and January 9th, 1950, and both chicks lived to depart late in April. These were the only January hatchings recorded until this year when a chick hatched on January 11th, 1961. Usually there are fewer than ten chicks left on the Island at the end of March; this year there were four, of which three were then ready to depart. The fourth would remain by itself until late April. Most chicks depart then between mid-January and the end of February. Twenty or thirty late chicks may depart in March but only an exceptionally late chick is still on Horuhoru in April.

Careful counts at Mahuki, fifty miles to the north, have shown that development there is about a week in advance of Horuhoru, while at the Coromandel group, fifteen miles to the east of Horuhoru, development is a fortnight later. Oaia on the west coast is three weeks behind Horuhoru, and at the Plateau (Cape Kidnappers) the difference is about five weeks. A chick departing in May would thus be a very late bird. If the bird found by the three boys had obeyed the rules that seem to govern the departure of other gannet chicks, it cannot have left its home rookery before June. It certainly cannot have come from a northern colony. Without knowing egg-hatching dates for the Nuggets and Little Solander it is useless to speculate further.

On August 28th, Peter Skegg and Michael Hogg made a second west coast traverse, this time in the vicinity of Whatipu. Again they collected a big assortment of dead birds; again they found among them the fresh corpse of a juvenile Gannet. This bird showed no

abrasion of tail-feathers: it must have spent its growing-up period on fairly soft ground. It was just a little younger than the Muriwai bird. This makes the task of reconciling its dates with those of known colonies still more difficult.

On October 7th a third item was added to the series. Mr. F. C. Kinsky was passing to the east of D'Urville Island in Cook Strait when he saw a mixed flock of birds working over a shoal of fish. Of 98 Gannets counted, at least 30 showed plumage phases which were different from the adult. A few of these were still very close to the speckled appearance seen at the age of six months.

Was the 1959-60 season such a late one that some gannet chicks failed to attempt the Tasman crossing, or is it possible that some of the southern Gannets do not go to Australia at all?

[Mr. P. A. S. Stein, whose address is 9 Cameron Street, Auckland, W.I., would be grateful if any winter sightings of Gannets in brown juvenile plumage, especially in the south, or the finding of such birds ashore, could be reported to him promptly.—Ed.]



OBSERVATIONS ON ROCKWRENS NEAR THE HOMER TUNNEL

By M. F. SOPER

In November, 1960, I photographed Rockwrens at Homer Tunnel. In all, six pairs of birds were located and three nests. The habitat was scree, rockfalls, snowgrass, and low scrub. Of the nests, one was in a man-made rock wall in a general habitat of snow tussock and boulders; one was in an extensive bouldery rockfall virtually free of scrub; and one at the foot of a rock and scree slope over-grown with low dense scrub, the nest being situated under a big scrub-surrounded boulder. The remaining three pairs of birds were found respectively in a big rockfall; in a scrub-covered scree slope; and in an area of rock, veronica scrub, and snow tussock near an isolated patch of bush.

All six pairs of birds showed a marked difference in plumage. One, the presumed male, had a bright green back — more olive on the forehead; a pronounced creamy-white eyestripe above the eye, which, when viewed from the front projected outwards like eyebrows and ended in a little tuft; lower eyelid pale buff bordered below by a thin black line; a rich yellow patch on the flanks; the alula black and forming a most attractive dividing line between the yellow flank and the green back; the under-surface buffy; the legs flesh-coloured. All markings were neat, distinct, and clear-cut. (v. Plate XXXIV).

The female was generally an olive brown, "greenish"-brown above; eyestripe fawn; lower eyelid pale buff with the dark line below present but not noticeable; alula dark brown; flanks yellow; under-surface buffy-white a lighter patch on the secondary wing feathers forming a distinct V pattern when the wings were closed and the bird viewed from above. This pattern was not noticed in the male in the field though it can be seen in the photographs as a dark brownish patch. In general the colour areas merged into one another with none of the