

## GREENFINCHES EATING COTONEASTER BERRIES

The Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) is an uncommon visitor to my Titirangi garden, but on 5th-7th April, 1960, three birds, adult male and female, and an immature female, were observed eating cotoneaster berries. They visited the bush each day about 8.30-9 a.m., and stayed on it for up to fifteen minutes. Though the berries were apparently equally attractive for some time before and after the dates mentioned, no other birds were seen to eat them, nor did the Greenfinches return.

A. T. EDGAR



## AN EXTINCT SEA EAGLE IN THE CHATHAM ISLANDS

According to records going back as far as 1866, there is good evidence from a number of localities in New Zealand that a species of Sea Eagle has been seen from time to time. From the descriptions given by observers, and from a specimen in the Dominion Museum said to have been taken in New Zealand, Oliver listed the White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) as an occasional straggler to New Zealand (1). Mrs. Perrine Moncrieff has now amassed considerable evidence that eagles of this sort may have occurred from time to time in certain regions of the South Island, and I am indebted to her for the use of her notes (2).

The usual range of *Haliaeetus leucogaster* is "Coasts of India, Ceylon, Burma and the Malay Peninsula and through the entire Malay Archipelago to Australia, Tasmania and western Polynesia." (3).

My work on the subfossil birds of New Zealand and the Chatham Islands at the British Museum (Natural History) has revealed a number of novel features, one of which is the indication of small populations of birds such as falcons, owls, Kaka and Kakapo, not recorded as living birds or preserved in Moriori tradition.

The latest novelty to be found consists of the bones of a large raptorial bird which I have identified as belonging to a robust species of *Haliaeetus*. From Oliver's conclusions on straggling sea-eagles in the New Zealand region, it seemed likely that these bones would belong to *H. leucogaster*, the species occurring closest to the Chatham Islands.

However, following a detailed examination of a large series of *Haliaeetus* skeletons kindly made available to me in the Bird Room of the British Museum (N.H.) by Mr. J. D. Macdonald, and in the University of Cambridge Museum of Zoology by Dr. K. A. Joysey, I find that the Chatham's eagle is quite distinct in features of the tarsometatarsus and pelvis from the White-bellied Sea Eagle, and, indeed, from all the southern forms of this genus excepting *H. vociferoides* of Madagascar and possibly Mauritius — another interesting parallel between the fossil birds of the Malagachian-Mascarene region and the Chatham (4). The species which the Chatham's bird most closely resembles are *H. leucocephalus*, the Bald Eagle of North America, and *H. albicilla*, the White-tailed Sea Eagle of Northern Europe and Asia.

The tarsometatarsus is usually a good criterion for distinguishing osteologically between eagles but the two northern species are not quickly separated in this way. The Chatham Island bones are, in the series I have before me, quite constant in their differences from these two species and they appear to represent a hitherto unknown member of the genus.

This new form of Sea Eagle was collected on the Chatham Islands in beach deposits of Quaternary age by H. O. Forbes in February, 1892, and it is quite unlike either the White-bellied Sea Eagle (*H. leucogaster*) ranging into Australia and western Polynesia or the Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*) of Australia, and is very different, in size at least, from the other New Zealand Extinct Eagle (*Harpagornis moorei*), a bird as big as the gigantic fossil *Teratornis* of California.

## LITERATURE CITED

1. OLIVER, W. R. B., 1955 — "New Zealand Birds."
2. MONCREIFF, P., 1953-1961 — "The Mysterious Bird of Prey," Manuscript Reports.
3. PETERS, J. L., 1931 — "Check-list of Birds of the World," Vol. 1.
4. MILNE EDWARDS, A., 1896 — Ann. Sci. Nat. (Zool.), (8) 2.

ELLIOT W. DAWSON



## GREY PLOVER AT LAKE GRASSMERE

On 20/1/61 I travelled to Blenheim with Messrs. E. K. S. Rowe and F. C. Kinsky, en route to the Farewell Spit Field-study Course. We stopped at Lake Grassmere, in order to visit the colonies of terns and gulls which breed there. As we drove along one of the embankments, several Godwits and some smaller waders flew away from a low island about 60-80 yards from us. On our way back we stopped at the same spot to see if they had returned. There was no sign of the Godwits, but we could see several smaller waders feeding, of which all except one proved to be Turnstones. The other bird was of a kind which none of us had ever seen.

In colour it was a nondescript grey, too long in the leg to be a Knot and in build not unlike a Golden Plover. This, together with the stoutness of the short bill, led me to suspect that it might be a Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), so I warned my companions to watch for the black axillaries if the bird flew. A few minutes later it took off, flying towards our right and displaying clearly to all three of us the black axillaries, which were even more conspicuous than I had expected them to be. Although the bird seemed to lack the speckled appearance shown in various field-guides, and looked greyer on the breast, the missing of such minor details of plumage could be attributed to the poor light. The heavy bill and the black axillaries left no doubt in my mind as to the identification.

This is the second acceptable record of the Grey Plover in New Zealand and the first for the South Island.

D. H. BRATHWAITE



## GREY-BACKED STORM PETREL AT MILFORD SOUND

On 17/2/61, during one of the breaks at Milford Sound between work in the Tutoko Valley on Kakapo investigation, a small sea-bird was brought to me for identification. This bird had flown against the lighted window of the radio hut near the Milford Hotel. The bird was a Grey-backed Storm Petrel (*Garrodia nereis*) and as it was uninjured it was released down the Sound the following day.

The general plumage was sooty black with a large extent of grey down the back. The lower breast and abdomen were white. The bill and legs including the feet were black. It was considerably smaller than the more widely known White-faced Storm Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*).

BRIAN D. BELL