

MANAWATU — (a) RANGITIKEI ESTUARY

N.Z. CRESTED PENGUIN — 1 fragmentary corpse by the old river-mouth on 11/12/60.

LIGHT-MANTLED SOOTY ALBATROSS — 1 corpse on nearby beach on 28/8/61.

FAIRY PRION — 1 passed southwards along the beach on 2/1/61 in a fresh north-westerly wind.

SOOTY SHEARWATER — Thousands migrating northwards off the estuary on 14/5/61 at the visible rate of about 12 per minute. Some came close inshore. None were found dead on the adjacent beach on this date, but a considerable number were wrecked within the following two weeks with westerly winds.

BLACK SHAG — Small numbers present throughout the year. Highest count was 17 on 4/4/61.

LITTLE SHAG — Regularly come down to the estuary to feed at low tide on fishes trapped in the old riverbed, which is about 1 mile long and very shallow in parts at low tide. Flounders are abundant here and it may be on these that the shags feed. Highest counts are 9 on 21/1/61; 10 on 4/4/61 (3 Little Pied Shags).

BLUE REEF HERON — Rarely seen along this part of the coast though it breeds on the rocky coast further south from Paekakariki. 1 seen in the estuary on 19/2/61, 4/4/61 and 14/5/61. It fed alone, taking fishes at the edge of the old riverbed, but occasionally roosted with White-faced Herons at high tide.

WHITE-FACED HERON — 2 or 3 normally seen in November and December, 1960. A post-breeding influx in summer: 8 on 2/1/62 (4 juv.); 12 on 19/2/62 (4 juv.); 6 on 12/3/61 (2 juv.); 4 on 31/3/61; 3 on 14/5/61; none on 28/8/61.

GREY DUCK & MALLARD — During summer and early autumn a flock of 20/30 Mallard frequented the estuary. Numbers increased in late March: 12/3/61 — 5 Grey Duck and 30 Mallard; 31/3/61 — c. 50 Grey Duck and c. 70 Mallard. 14/5/61 — 21 ducks of both species present, very scary because of shooting; many more were seen flying around out at sea, where they were taking refuge from shooters. 34 Mallard on 28/8/61.

SHOVELER — A few associated with the Mallard in early summer; 3 on 27/11/60; 2 on 11/12/60 and 2/1/61.

S.I. PIED OYSTERCATCHER — None seen in the estuary this year.

N.I. (VARIABLE) OYSTERCATCHER — 2 to 4 present in November and December, 1960, at least 1 pair (black) of which attempted breeding. There was a post-breeding influx, a good flock gradually building up: c. 10 on 2/1/61; 9 on 19/2/61; 13 on 12/3/61; 15 on 31/3/61; 25 on 4/4/61 (3 pied, c. 6 black, c. 16 smudgy); 6 on 14/5/61 and 28/8/61, all in pairs.

GOLDEN PLOVER — 11 present by 13/11/60. Counts throughout summer and early autumn varied between 10 and 12. 14 on 31/3/61, the last record for the season.

BANDED DOTTEREL — c. 16 on 13/11/60; c. 20 on 11/12/60; c. 25 on 2/1/61. A large flock present in the non-breeding season: c. 140 on 19/2/61; c. 130 on 14/5/61; c. 25 on 28/8/61.

WRYBILL — c. 8 on 13/11/60; 3 on 27/11/60; none on 11/12/60 or 18/12/60; 1 on 2/1/61. This estuary appears to be more attractive to Wrybills than is Manawatu Estuary. By March a good wintering flock had built up: 27 on 12/3/61 and 14/5/61; 21 on 28/8/61.

ASIATIC WHIMBREL — 2 present by 13/11/60 were regularly seen till 4/4/61. Typically they were the most shy waders in the estuary; generally they fed apart from other waders on the firmer, early-exposed mudflats where crabs are most abundant. Small crabs probably form a major part of their diet here. 1 still present on 14/5/61 with Godwits.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT — c. 65 on 13/11/60. Counts thereafter to March varied between c. 60 and c. 70; c. 45 on 31/3/61; c. 20 on 4/4/61 and 14/5/61; c. 16 on 28/8/61.

TURNSTONE — usually odd birds on passage in spring. 1 on 13/11/60 and 11/12/60.

KNOT — 30 on 13/11/60; 3 on 27/11/60; 2 on 11/12/60; 1 on 2/1/60 and 19/2/61. 1 seen on 27/11/60 and 11/12/60 still showed some red below.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER — seen only on passage in spring this year. 1 on 13/11/60; 2 on 27/11/60.

RED-NECKED STINT — A small flock gradually built up over the summer: 3 on 13/11/60; 6 on 11/12/60; 7 on 18/12/60; 8 on 2/1/61; 10 on 12/3/61 7 on 31/3/61. 2 showing reddening forenecks by 12/3/61. 3 on 14/5/61; 2 wintered; 2 on 28/8/61.

PIED STILT — c. 25 on 13/11/60, 27/11/60 and 11/12/60. An influx after the breeding season: 55+ on 2/1/61. Numbers fairly constant at c. 60 after this to May. No mid-winter count was made. None seen on 28/8/61.

ARCTIC SKUA — 1 passing south off the estuary on 17/12/60; 1 passing north on 19/2/61. Both of the dark phase. Probably both on migration.

RED-BILLED GULL — Very scarce at this estuary. None definitely recorded this year; probably a few amongst c. 50 small gulls on 4/4/61.

BLACK-BILLED GULL — A few normally present. 2/4 in November, December and January. c. 12 on 19/2/61; c. 8 on 12/3/61; c. 40 on 4/4/61; c. 12 on 14/5/61; none on 28/8/61.

CASPIAN TERN — c. 6 from November to January. 27 on 19/2/61; c. 35 on 4/4/61; c. 10 on 14/5/61.

LITTLE/FAIRY TERN — 1 first seen on 13/11/60 was seen on every visit thereafter to 14/5/61. This was a juvenile as the plumage indicates:

Forehead white; crown whitish, streaked black; nape glossy black, the black extending forwards through the eye to about half-way between eye and bill on the lores. Bill blackish, feet dark reddish-brown. The wing showed a conspicuous pattern in flight; primaries and fore edge of wing dark grey, brown mottling on the wing coverts.

There was little change in plumage by 14/5/61; most of the brown mottling on the wing had disappeared, and the bill was slightly yellow at the base. It was not seen after this.

This bird no doubt belongs to the same species as those small terns regularly seen in the Firth of Thames and elsewhere in summer. The Fairy Tern has been reported at Rangitikei Estuary on 12/11/48 (N.Z. Bird Notes 3, p. 211). The Firth of Thames small terns are believed to be the migrant species *S. albifrons*, which has not been previously recorded in Wellington Province.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN — 400+ on 2/1/61 at low tide fishing in the rivermouth and resting on the beach. Later they moved off northwards into a fresh north-westerly wind and only c. 30 remained after high tide. c. 10 on 19/2/61; c. 60 on 12/3/61; 12 on 31/3/61.
KINGFISHER — A few in the estuary in autumn and winter: 1 on 31/3/61 and 14/5/61; 2 on 28/8/61.

— M.J.I., I.G.A.

(b) MANAWATU ESTUARY

GIANT PETREL — 1 passing northwards off the estuary on 25/6/61.

BLACK SHAG — A small post-breeding influx. c. 20 on 30/4/61 is this year's highest count.

LITTLE SHAG — Up to 3 occasionally.

WHITE HERON — 1 on 30/4/61 in the upper estuary. They prefer the riverbanks nearer Foxton: 2 here in October, 1960.

WHITE-FACED HERON — Regularly seen in small numbers. Highest count was 8 on 30/4/61.

ROYAL SPOONBILL — 4 still present on 13/11/60; 1 on 26/11/60 and 3/12/60; 3 from 11/12/60 to January '61; 2 from 25/2/61 to 25/3/61. The autumn influx lasted through April: 3 on 1/4/61; 8 on 14/4/61; 26 on 30/4/61 is the highest count to date for this estuary, but some moved on; 18 on 5/6/61 and throughout the winter to August.

BLACK SWAN — 3 on 21/10/60; 2 on 28/10/60; 4 on 26/11/60; 2 on 28/12/60.

GREY DUCK AND MALLARD — Large numbers, mainly Mallard, often seen in the upper estuary where they breed.

SHOVELER — Rarely seen here; a pair on the south mudflats on 11/12/60.

S.I. PIED OYSTERCATCHER — Only 3 present from late October to late December 1960. 9 on 3/1/61; 36 on 25/2/61 with little variation to 14/4/61, when 35 were counted. c. 30 wintered to July; 10 on 18/8/61.

N.I. (VARIABLE) OYSTERCATCHER — Very scarce this year. Usually 1 to 3 were counted; 6 on 13/11/60 (1 pied; 1 black; 4 smudgy) and 28/12/60; 5+ on 18/8/61 included 2 pied birds.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER — 29 present by 13/11/60 when one was still in almost full breeding plumage and another was quite black below. Highest counts during the summer were c. 33 on

11/12/60 and on 7/1/61. 21 still present on 3/4/61. All had departed by 14/4/61. Some were very black below by 25/2/61.

BANDED DOTTEREL — Few late spring. c. 25 on 3/12/60; c. 60 on 3/1/61; about 200 present from late February to early June, after which the pre-breeding dispersal began. Highest count was c. 210 on 5/6/61. The post-nuptial moult was virtually complete by 25/2/61 and bands were beginning to appear again on 3/4/61. 30+ on 9/7/61; 8 on 18/8/61.

WRYBILL — 1 in breeding plumage on 13/11/60. None on 26/11/60 and 11/12/60. Increasing numbers during the northward migration period: 2 on 28/12/60; 5 on 3/1/61; 8 on 25/2/61; 11 on 4/3/61. Thereafter 5 or 7 were regularly seen throughout autumn and winter.

ASIATIC WHIMBREL — 1 stayed for a short period on passage in late autumn, and probably wintered in northern New Zealand. It was seen on 30/4/61 and 5/6/61.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT — Numbers increased through November and December to reach a peak in January, viz. c. 200 on 28/10/60; c. 245 on 11/12/60; c. 280 on 3/1/61; c. 220 from 25/2/61 to 19/3/61, after which the main departure took place: c. 85 on 25/3/61; 41 on 14/4/61; c. 28 on 5/6/61; 15 on 18/8/61.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT — A single bird again present throughout the summer was first seen on 21/10/60 and regularly thereafter. Some doubt exists as to whether this is the same bird as was present during the previous summer and winter.

On 14/1/61 it was seen feeding six miles up Foxton Beach with some Bar-Tailed Godwits. Previous observations suggest that it may have fed frequently or even regularly on the beach at low tide. It was last seen on 25/3/61, when in well-developed breeding plumage.

TURNSTONE — Infrequently seen at this estuary. 1 on 13/11/60 and 11/12/60.

KNOT — Present in larger numbers than usual in spring; 61+ on 13/11/60 was an exceptionally high count. c. 15 on 26/11/60. Counts were erratic and small after this. Last summer record was 10 on 4/4/61, of which 5 were reddening. 1 on passage on 30/4/61.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER — Fewer seen this year than in previous years. 1 first seen on 13/11/60 associated with Golden Plovers until 2 more arrived in March. 2 on 4/3/61; 3 on 19/3/61 and 3/4/61.

1 was heavily streaked below and much darker than the other 2 by 19/3/61.

CURLEW SANDPIPER — 4 on 4/3/61 and 3/4/61. 1 still present on 30/4/61, probably wintered elsewhere in New Zealand. All were in pale plumage throughout their stay here and this, together with the buff edgings to the feathers of the back and scapulars, suggested that they were immature. They associated with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Banded Dotterels.

This is the first record of this species from this estuary and from the Wellington Province.

RED-NECKED STINT — 1 on 13/11/60 is the first spring record at this estuary. This species clearly prefers Rangitikei Estuary.

PIED STILT — Numbers variable throughout the year. c. 20 on 28/10/60; c. 30 on 3/12/60; c. 60 on 28/12/60; c. 100 on 3/1/61; 50+ on 25/2/61; c. 30 on 19/3/61, 1/4/61 and 14/4/61; 50+ on 30/4/61; c. 140 on 5/6/61 was the highest count for the year; c. 40 on 9/7/61 and 18/8/61. There is evidence here of 2 peaks with the main one in May/June, as noted last year.

RED-BILLED AND BLACK-BILLED GULL — Throughout the year there were generally slightly more Red-billed than Black-billed Gulls, the ratio being about 7 to 5. c. 12 from October to January; c. 20 on 25/2/61; c. 120 on 25/3/61; c. 80 on 1/4/61; c. 60 on 14/4/61; 28+ on 5/6/61; c. 55 on 9/7/61; c. 155 on 18/8/61, about equal numbers of each species.

BLACK-FRONTED TERN — None seen at either of the estuaries this year and apparently very few visited the Wellington west coast during their non-breeding season.

CASPIAN TERN — Counts were generally lower than last year. c. 6 present on most visits. 21 on 3/1/61; 24 on 14/4/61.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN — A few occasionally come into the estuary in summer and autumn. 120 on 8/1/61 and c. 130 on 19/3/61 at the rivermouth.

KINGFISHER — Present in the estuary from autumn to end of winter. First seen on 1/4/61. Normally 2 or 3 counted. Last seen on 18/8/61.

GOLDFINCH AND LESSER REDPOLL — Seen in the upper estuary in moderate numbers in autumn feeding on the seed heads of *Salicornia* and of estuarial grasses, sedges and rushes. Several hundreds on 30/4/61; c. 30 on 5/6/61.

— M.J.I., I.G.A.

SHORT NOTES

DABCHICK NESTING IN A BOATSHED

After an initial setback, a Dabchick (*P. rufopectus*) nesting in a boatshed at Tokaanu, at the southern end of Lake Taupo, has successfully reared some young birds.

The Dabchick first laid two eggs on 1st and 2nd November, 1959, in the nest which was placed nine inches above the water and two feet back from the edge of the water, under the loading platform in a boatshed. A rise in the stream destroyed this nest and forced the bird to build another six inches higher; but in the process she lost one egg over the side into the water, and the egg which she did save was infertile. It is not known how she transferred this egg to the second nest.

In 1960 the bird again nested in the same place and in early November laid two eggs. The hatching period was between three and four weeks. The two young chicks were seen with the parents which used to stay in the boatshed overnight.

The female Dabchick became quite tame, coming into the boatshed when called. She did not appear to be unduly disturbed when the motor was started alongside her.

— R. J. BIDDLE