

SHORT NOTE

Unusual riverbed birds in the Eglinton Valley, Fiordland

We often watch riverbed birds near the junction of Dunton Creek and Eglinton River 37 km north of Te Anau. This site, which is c. 70 ha of shingle flat split by braided channels with Russell lupin (*Lupinus polyphyllus*), mat plants and grasses, is inside Fiordland National Park (R. W. G. Dalgish, pers. comm.). Regular breeding birds are Black-billed Gull (*Larus bulleri*), Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*), South Island Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus finschi*), Spur-winged Plover (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*), Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) and a few Black-fronted Tern (*Sterna albobriata*). Gull and tern nests are often destroyed by spring floods.

On 3 October 1983, a cool overcast day, we saw a small dark bird flying like a Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica neoxena*) over the river flat. We watched the bird with binoculars for 53 minutes as it covered a span of 500 m over Dunton Creek, shingle flat and sheep pasture. Our field notes follow: Smaller than the Chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*) flying near it. General shape that of a Welcome Swallow but more compact with shorter, pointed wings, which were angled back; tail only slightly forked. Dusky blue on top of head, broad white rump, smudgy throat and upper breast, underparts whitish from upper breast to undertail coverts, dark-tipped tail, tiny dark bill. Flight fast and erratic, combining steep fluttering climbs, large swoops and glides 2-25 m above the ground. Twice the bird came within 5 m of us. Our identification of an Australian Tree Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*) has been confirmed by W. J. Cooper and R. R. Sutton (pers. comm.).

On 21 November 1983 we saw a Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) feeding on the edge of Dunton Creek and were searching for others when we saw an unusual tern with conspicuous black head and underparts and light airy flight. This White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) was smaller than the Black-fronted Terns that flew nearby. Its head, breast, belly and wing linings were black, its back was dark grey, its upper wing coverts and tail were white, and its bill was darkish. It flew downstream, dipping several times, to the Eglinton River before disappearing across pasture.

There are no previous Fiordland records of White-winged Black Terns, but they have been recorded in inland Southland at Otautau and near Monowai in 1945 (*NZ Bird Notes* 2: 46-47), Mararoa River in 1961 (Heather 1964, *Notornis* 11: 63) and near Lillburn Valley in 1967 and odd records there 1932-1967 (*Notornis* 19: 60, OSNZ Recording Scheme). Australian Tree Martin and Wrybill have not been recorded in Fiordland or inland Southland (OSNZ Recording Scheme; OSNZ Bird Mapping Scheme 1969 — 1979; W. J. Cooper, R. R. Sutton, W. M. Jukes, pers. comm.). Therefore these three species are new records for Fiordland National Park.

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