

Banded Dotterel breeding at Stewart Island

Oliver (1955, *New Zealand Birds* p.260) says of the Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*): "Stewart Island, not known to breed". Likewise, the other usual references do not include Stewart Island in its breeding distribution. In personal observations and inquiries over many years, I have failed to produce evidence of its breeding there. In 1983, Ida Collett of Halfmoon Bay, after extensive inquiries of local residents, including well-known long-time naturalist Roy Trill, wrote to me that "there is no written record that it does breed here".

Thus the following observation from the diary of Rhys Buckingham (pers. comm.) is of considerable interest:

"26.11.1980 (1515 h) walking along West Ruggedy beach southwards from a cave, past the bluff (a high-tide impasse) to the first big creek near the south end. One Banded Dotterel chick with three adults nearby; the adults moved up to the chick as if attempting to protect it. I had a good look at the chick in my hands — it would have been just a day or two old. There was no sign of nests or other chicks."

Although the Banded Dotterel is regularly reported on Stewart Island, which has large areas of potential breeding habitat, this seems to be the first positive evidence of its breeding there.

PETER CHILD, 10 Royal Tce, Alexandra

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Fairy Terns at Taporā, Kaipara Harbour

On 22 June 1985, while counting waders near Taporā, Kaipara Harbour, we noticed a group of 10 small terns. They were roosting next to, but not mixed with, a group of waders consisting mainly of Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) and Pied Stilt (*Himantopus h. leucocephalus*). While we examined these terns, a White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*) landed among them, emphasising their small size.

On consulting *The new guide to the birds of New Zealand* (Falla *et al.* 1979), we determined that the small terns were Fairy Terns (*S. nereis*). Seven were adults with orange legs, yellow bill and black eye patch not reaching the base of the bill, features which distinguished them from the Little Tern (*S. albigrons*). Three were immature with dull grey-brown legs and mottled crowns, the black cap being incomplete. We watched the birds for about 30 minutes, during which time two New Zealand Dotterels (*Charadrius obscurus*) moved freely among them.

According to Falla *et al.* (1979), the Fairy Tern is "Now known as a breeding bird in New Zealand only from Northland, where probably fewer than ten pairs attempt to nest". The Classified Summarised Notes in *Notornis* suggest that numbers have not increased greatly since 1979, and they contain few breeding records of *S. nereis*. A winter flock of 13 Fairy Terns with 12 Little Terns was reported 7 years ago at the site of our present observation (R. B. Goffin, 1978, *Notornis* 25: 331).

Observers of shorebirds at other Kaipara sites did not record small terns on the day of our count. For several years the Wildlife Service has been trying to protect the nests of Fairy Terns, and the presence of immature birds among this flock may be an encouraging sign.

SIMON CHAMBERLIN, *RD 1, Matakana, and*
JOHN DOWDING, *16A Moore St, Birkenhead, Auckland 10*

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Cattle Egrets near Antarctica in April

On 24 April 1985, during the voyage of SRV *Totorore* from the Antarctic Peninsula to Punta Arenas, Chile, two Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) were seen in 61°23'S, 63°39'W, flying north.

One bird tried to land on board but fell into the water. After about a minute it managed to take off again and make a successful landing. It was emaciated and weak and, although it was kept warm and force fed with sardines and oil, it died after two days. The specimen is now at the Instituto de la Patagonia. It had dark legs with yellowish on the rear of the tibiae, and it had a tinge of buff on the crown.

Measurements were: length 480 mm, bill 53.9, gape 74.7, wing 258, tail 93, tarsus 84, mid-toe 81.

The birds were seen after a northeasterly gale with snow and sleet, sea temperature 1.4 °C, air -1 °C. By this date the Bransfield Strait was already blocked by pack ice, and so if the egrets had been in the South Shetland Islands or on the Antarctic Peninsula, as seems likely, they had left their departure for the north very late.

G. S. CLARK, *c/o. Totorore Expedition, Homelands Organic Orchard, Kemp Road, Kerikeri*

This record refers to the African subspecies *B. i. ibis*, which now breeds and migrates widely in South America, not the Indian subspecies *B. i. coromandus* that occurs in New Zealand and Australia. See similar records in *Distribution of Cattle Egrets to the Falkland Islands*, I. J. Strange, *Le Gerfaut* 1979 — Ed.

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A probable record of Audubon's Shearwater from Rarotonga

On 14 October 1983, at about 5 a.m., while waiting to leave Rarotonga by air, I watched a shearwater in the loading lights adjacent to the aircraft for about 30 minutes. The bird appeared suddenly in the zone of very bright light produced by the loading lights (one situated high up on a standard) and circled repeatedly in the general area over and in front of the aircraft, rather than being attracted to the actual lights. Its flight was sometimes quite close to the ground, and it was undeterred by the considerable activity all around the aircraft. It disappeared and reappeared out of the dark, and I watched at least five appearances.

Visibility was good as the bird was so close and in such strong light. The weather was fine and clear. Features noted were its typical shearwater shape, its comparatively small size and its stiff shearwater flight with alternating flapping, gliding and banking. Field marks: gleaming white (flashing in lights) underparts, black (or possibly brownish black) upperparts, black semicollar coming slightly down sides of neck (but not as prominently as the Fluttering Shearwater *Puffinus gavia*), and white underwings. Unfortunately the colour