

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.

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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.

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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

of the undertail coverts was not recorded (variable from dark to mottled white in Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*, distinguishing this species from the Little Shearwater *P. assimilis*, which has pure white undertail coverts). The impression gained was of a size larger overall than that of *P. assimilis* but definitely smaller than that of *P. gavia*. Wing beats were distinctly slower than in the whirring flight of *P. assimilis*.

These observations seem sufficient for the bird to be recorded as Audubon's Shearwater. Further comments on the field characters of Audubon's Shearwater may be of interest. The extensive dark mottling often present along the leading edge of the underwing (well shown in a photograph in Jenkins 1973) is variable, being much reduced in one of a breeding pair of this species from Canton Island in the Auckland Museum, collected by G. A. Buddle on 6 June 1937 (Buddle 1938). The amount of dark edging on the anterior underwing of *P. assimilis* is variable in material from New Zealand in the Museum collection. As noted above, the extent of the dark undertail-covert shading in Audubon's Shearwater is also variable, this area sometimes showing a large amount of white (see photograph in Jenkins 1973 and the above two specimens in the Auckland Museum). These two characters are thus probably unreliable for Audubon's Shearwater to be distinguished from the Little Shearwater in flight. Further, the pale line above the eye, often mentioned as a field character for some races of the Little Shearwater, varies considerably in the New Zealand material in the Auckland Museum.

Audubon's Shearwater is widespread in the tropical Pacific. The only records from the Cook Islands area are those of Holyoak (1980), who saw about ten at sea in the southern Cook group in July and August 1973 and five at sea in the northern Cook group in August 1973. In addition, T. G. Lovegrove saw a shearwater identified as probably Audubon's offshore from the south-eastern end of Rarotonga on 4 September 1981 (a small shearwater, dark above, white below, with flashing white underwings; other seabirds offshore at this time were Herald Petrels *Pterodroma arminjoniana*, noddies and White Terns).

As races of the Little Shearwater breed in the Austral and Kermadec groups, stragglers to the Cook group could be expected, but records to date suggest that this species (like Audubon's) does not normally disperse far from its breeding islands and that its normal range is south of about 25°S latitude (i.e. well to the south of Rarotonga). However, stragglers of the Little Shearwater are recorded from the Marquesas, Marshall and Hawaiian areas (King 1967).

Finally, further records of seabirds attracted to the lights at Rarotonga airport may be expected as it is close to the north coast of the island where, because the reef is close inshore, the lights may be visible from well out to sea.

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