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## SHORT NOTES

### COMMON SANDPIPERS IN FAR NORTH

On four occasions, we have seen two Common Sandpipers (*Tringa hypoleucos*) at Pirini Creek on Rangaunu Harbour.

On 12 January 1982, we saw a single bird perching on a small mangrove. It rose from its roost, calling *twee-twee-twee*, and flew with a short jerky flight, gliding to land in adjacent mangroves. On 13 January, two flew out of the mangroves and landed nearby on the exposed tidal flats beside Pirini Creek. We watched them feeding on crabs, stretching their necks forward to stalk, rapidly pecking several times, and running quickly in search of more prey. They ran with their bodies hunched and head outstretched.

On 15 and 19 January the two were feeding near Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*), Knots (*Calidris canutus*) and Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) out near the water's edge on the exposed tidal flats. On all occasions, the sandpipers were feeding on dried-out *Zostera* flats during an incoming tide.

Over the past 6 months, we have seen these sandpipers, godwits, knots and Turnstones roosting among mangroves, along with many native wader, swamp and bush birds. Perhaps if ornithologists were to investigate these areas more often, some of the more uncommon migrant waders of this habitat such as the Common Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper (*T. stagnatilis*) and perhaps the Wood Sandpiper (*T. glareola*) could be found.

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### A TRANSIENT COLONY OF RED-BILLED GULLS

The transience of a colony of Red-billed Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) was seen this summer on Rangaunu Harbour, Northland. On 24 October, 15 pairs had started nesting on Walker Island in the middle of the harbour, and most had laid eggs. By mid-November, however, all had shifted to a rock off Rangiputa, where 78 pairs were nesting, with eggs in 73 nests. All the nesting material had gone

from Walker Island, but the gulls had shifted after a northerly storm in late October, when waves had swept across the nesting area.

On 20 November, gulls were seen flying from Rangiputa to Walker Island with nesting material. The whole colony had shifted back to Walker Island, and by 12 December, 153 pairs were nesting there. This shift had occurred soon after very high spring tides, and this time they nested higher in the marram above high water spring mark.

When we visited Walker Island on 8 January, we found no nesting Red-billed Gulls, and we did not find them nesting elsewhere around the harbour. In January, the Red-billed Gull population on the harbour had declined markedly, and they had apparently moved elsewhere or dispersed after three unsuccessful attempts at nesting. This final desertion of the harbour may have been prompted by curious sightseers over the Christmas holiday period.

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#### SOOTY TERNS ON AUCKLAND'S WEST COAST

The southward movement of Cyclone Tracey down the east coast of Australia during the end of February and the beginning of March 1980 appears to have brought to New Zealand a small number of Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*).

While returning from South Head, Kaipara Harbour, on 5 March 1980, S. Chamberlain, J. & I. McCaw, S. M. Reed, N. Rothwell and I, travelling in two vehicles, were counting flocks of White-fronted Terns (*Sterna striata*) along Muriwai Beach, when I noticed in one flock an odd tern, notably darker than the White-fronted Terns.

On stopping our vehicle, we watched this bird feeding with the White-fronted Tern flock over the breaking waves and approaching the beach.

The following description was made:

Forehead white, crown, nape, back, upper wing and tail dark brown-black; bill black. A black line went from the bill through to the eye, where it joined the cap. The underparts were white, except the underwing, which appeared sooty grey. The tail was deeply forked.

This bird was larger than the White-fronted Terns.

On 9 March, a beach patrol on the same stretch of beach produced three beach-wrecked Sooty Terns and S. M. Reed has told me that one bird was seen roosting with White-fronted Terns.

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