

WHITE-BACKED MAGPIE *G. t. hypoleuca*

S. Auckland and BoP, gaining ground. Maungatautari, some evidence that magpies are attacking N.Z. Pigeons (PCML). Taramakau, Rotomano, Matai, present 20 years; slow to increase (CSL). Te Anau, max. 3 on 15/12 (JVM). Bannockburn, 15 on 17/2 (MLB). Southland, scattered but regular sightings. Invercargill airport, 2 on 15/5 (PMM, OJL).

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Te Poi, E of Matamata, 4 in July (ARL). Appleby, 3 sightings between 11/7 and 20/12 (KLO). Ward, 1, Sept-Nov (TJT). Kaikoura, up to 15, 21/6-7/12 (BE). Pebbly Hills, 2 with magpies on 18/3 (PMM, OJL).



## SHORT NOTES

### A MONGOLIAN DOTTEREL IN BREEDING PLUMAGE

The Mongolian Dotterel (*Charadrius mongolus*) is well known in New Zealand as a difficult species to identify with confidence. Too few reach New Zealand annually for many observers to learn not to be confused by some of the deceptive variants of the Banded Dotterel (*C. bicinctus*) out of breeding plumage.

Not so with a bird we saw at Farewell Spit on 16 May 1980. Seen at first from a distance as it fed in shallow water near a Banded Dotterel, it looked rather like a Knot (*Calidris canutus*) in oddly coloured breeding plumage. Seen closely by telescope, it gave a startling impression of rich reddish orange surrounding a striking pattern of black and white from face to chest. Field descriptions of the breeding plumage of the eastern races *C. m. mongolus* and *C. m. stegmanni* are few and mostly of birds seen in transit in partial plumage. Moreover, the painting in Plate 28 of *The new guide to the birds of New Zealand* (Falla *et al.* 1979), although generally accurate, is incorrect in several respects. Therefore, we give as full a description as we could take before the bird flew.

The bird was slightly larger and stood taller than the Banded Dotterel it was near. It had a broad black mask that extended from ear coverts to ear coverts across the face, enclosing the eyes, which did not stand out, and the base of the bill. Above and slightly to each side of the bill, a small sharply outlined white patch was set into the mask, the two patches separated by a narrow vertical black line, giving the bird a bizarre cross-eyed appearance.

Rich reddish orange extended broadly round the head above the black mask, down the sides of the neck, as a deep band across the chest, and back on to the flanks. In addition, the whole grey-brown upper surface seemed to be suffused with reddish orange.

A very narrow black line ran from the rear of the facial mask

down the side of the neck and across the chest, setting the reddish neck and chest off sharply against the white chin, malar regions and throat, which stood out prominently as a cleanly white half-shield below the black facial mask. The lower part of the chest band had no abrupt margin but faded gradually into the white of belly and under-tail. On the flanks, the chest colour extended well back and seemed to form vertical bands of bright reddish orange, interspersed with grey and white. The bill was black and, compared with the Banded Dotterel's, short and deep. The legs were slate grey.

When the bird flew, it repeatedly gave a monosyllabic call, very distinct in sound from a Banded Dotterel's, deeper, with a rather rail-like quality, and with a clear rolled *r* in it, reminiscent of but much less prominent than the rolled *r* in the normal call of the New Zealand Dotterel (*C. obscurus*). The bird joined the general movement of waders going to roost on the flats among the Ocean Beach dunes adjacent to the Mullet Creek catchment. It roosted near to but stayed apart from a scattering of quiet Banded Dotterels and a noisy party of brightly plumaged subadult Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), but it could not be approached closely again. It was not found there the next day, nor was it seen elsewhere on the spit between 12 and 18 May.

By its brilliant colour and its complete and black, not brown, facial mask and line down the neck and across the breast, the bird was a male. By its brilliant colour, the white patches in the facial mask, and the black line separating the white of the throat from the colour of the chest band, the bird was of one of the two eastern Siberian subspecies *mongolus* and *stegmanni*. The western subspecies *altifrons* and *pamirensis* have subdued colouring, a fully black facial mask, and no black line on the chest. Because the bird was noticeably larger than the Banded Dotterel, because its colour was strongly reddish and brilliant to well down the chest and back on to the flanks, and because the upperparts were distinctly suffused with reddish, it is highly likely to have been of the subspecies *stegmanni*. This subspecies breeds in north-eastern Siberia in the mountain valleys of Kamchatka, on the coasts of the Chukotskiy Peninsula, and on the sand dunes of the Commander Islands. The main month of northward migration of Mongolian Dotterels through the Malay Peninsula, Japan and eastern USSR is May.

Plate 28 of the *New Guide to the birds of New Zealand* is inaccurate in that the bill is too long and the narrow vertical black line from the bill to the black on the forecrown is omitted. Our bird differed also in that the black on the forecrown line and ear coverts was much broader; the reddish orange was much brighter, was broader above the facial mask, did not end sharply on the lower chest but extended further down and merged gradually into white, extended well back on to the flank, and suffused the brown upperparts.

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