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SHORT NOTE

FIRST SIGHTING OF CHESTNUT-BREADED SHELDUCK IN NEW ZEALAND

On 11 December 1982 Canterbury region members of OSNZ visited the western shore of Lake Ellesmere. While watching a group of predominantly male Paradise Shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*), Kathleen Harrison drew our attention to one bird that had a chestnut breast instead of a black breast.

It was suggested that the bird might be a Chestnut-breasted Shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*) and so we made detailed observations before the bird flew off with the Paradise Shelducks. None of us was already familiar with the species.

At first sighting the bird was viewed from about 300 m using telescopes and gave frontal views only. The bird seemed slightly smaller than most of the Paradise Shelducks in the flock and seemed slightly finer in the neck. Description: Head, neck, back and underparts black; breast and mantle chestnut brown and well demarcated from the black neck and underparts; legs and bill black, and a prominent white ring around the base of the bill and a narrow white ring around the eye. In flight, the bird showed a similar wing pattern to that of the Paradise Shelduck with large white shoulder patches and white underwing.

Some of us saw it again later in the day, a rear-end view showing that the chestnut tertials formed a coloured patch on the lower back when the wings were folded.

The following day PS, KH, B. R. Armstrong and C. F. J. O'Donnell returned to the area and soon saw the bird on a shallow brackish pond, again accompanying Paradise Shelducks. Both species fed alike, by swimming slowly with head in the water.

Frith (1967) reported that in a sample of 200 Chestnut-breasted Shelducks all females, both adult and juvenile, had white at the base of the bill but so had 21% of males. Nearly all females, of all ages, had white eye rings but no males did and so he concluded that this

character was a reliable guide for sexing. The amount of white around the eye was not considered to be adequate for ageing purposes.

Both sexes may have a white neck ring but it is always wider and more noticeable in males. The breast colour in males is described as cinnamon brown (Frith 1967) and buff (Pizzey 1980) and in females as chestnut (Frith 1967, Pizzey 1980).

On the basis of breast colour, lack of white neck ring, presence of white eye ring and white ring at the base of the bill we conclude that the bird was a female Chestnut-breasted Shelduck (alternative name, Australian Mountain Duck).

This is the first confirmed sighting of this species in New Zealand. However, Oliver (1955) recorded a specimen in the Canterbury Museum collection which had been shot at Lake Ellesmere. Neither the annotated checklist of New Zealand birds (Kinsky 1970) nor the amendments (Kinsky 1980) accepted this species to the New Zealand list.

This specimen came from the O'Connor collection and a check of his catalogues shows that he purchased the specimen in Christchurch. The locality is recorded at Lake Ellesmere but no date is given. However, in his systematic catalogue, which was presumably compiled later, O'Connor himself questioned the locality and this presumably led to its non-acceptance by the checklist committee.

In Australia the Chestnut-breasted Shelduck occurs mainly in south-west and south-east Australia, being particularly numerous in Tasmania (Pizzey 1980). Tasmania annually receives an influx from the mainland during the summer and in drought years. It is possible that the Lake Ellesmere bird was a migrant caught up in the persistent strong westerly winds that prevailed during spring and early summer 1982.

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