

effort throughout, may be preferable but are harder to achieve. At Fletcher Creek, Dawson *et al.* (1978) detected significant differences between April 1974 and April 1976 in the counts for nine of the eleven most abundant species. Besides difficulties with different years there are differences between observers, which Dawson *et al.* found to be statistically significant, though small.

If the figures in Table 1 are reliable, then the lowland forest of the Ohau Gorge compares very unfavourably with that of north Westland, both in abundance of birds and in diversity — Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*), Robin (*Petroica australis*), New Zealand Pigeon, parakeet (*Cyanoramphus*) and Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) were counted at Fletcher Creek in April. Despite its lowland location, proximity to the sea (16 km) and continuity with a large tract of forest, the Ohau Gorge is not the prime habitat for forest birds that it probably once was. This may be partly because the forest is much modified and partly because it is a small and remnant lowland area in a block of forest that is mainly montane. That Ohau Gorge should seem to support lower densities of Bellbirds than kanuka forest is puzzling because many nectar-bearing plants present at Ohau Gorge (e.g. *Knightia*, *Alseuosmia*) are absent at Kowhai Bush, and within Kowhai Bush, Bellbirds seemed most numerous in an area with the densest and most diverse vegetation (Gill 1980).

I thank D. G. Dawson for commenting on a draft of this note, and Anne Wilson for typing the final manuscript.

B. J. GILL, *Auckland Institute & Museum, Private Bag, Auckland 1*



A CENTRAL OTAGO PECTORAL SANDPIPER

Seasonal flood-meadows with lush spring productivity are attractive places to waterfowl, wading birds and opportunistic species like the Pukeko (*Porphyrio p. melanotus*) and Spur-winged Plover (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*).

'Taieri Lake,' 5 km from Kokonga, near Ranfurly, Central Otago, is such a habitat. It is the site where a suspected Japanese Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) was seen some years ago and where the Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) has been recorded on more than one occasion (see *Notornis* 16: 62).

In a good season, i.e. one with plenty of water, there are normally hundreds each of the common duck species (including Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons gracilis*), Spur-winged Plovers, Pied Stilt (*Himantopus h. leucocephalus*), and South Island Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus finschi*), as well as smaller numbers of Pukeko, White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*), Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*), with various other smaller species around the periphery and the ubiquitous Harrier (*Circus approximans gouldi*) scouting overhead. It is an area where prolonged and regular study

of many aspects such as seasonal changes, flocking, and moult would prove very rewarding.

Spring 1982 was a wet changeable season producing such favourable conditions, and when my wife and I visited this spot on Christmas Day the species listed were all present in substantial numbers. While I was walking around the soggy grassy perimeter of the 'free-standing' water, a pipit-sized bird flew slowly past me into a fresh westerly breeze calling a fairly penetrating reedy *chirrit*. Realising it was something unusual I followed its progress, and over the next hour and a half (during which it was flushed several times) we made the following observations.

Habits: Occasionally solitary, but tended to keep company with one or more Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) on the shorter damp pasture beyond the zone of lush flood-meadow. Fed continuously, with a simple pecking motion, among the pasture grasses, not in water or muddy areas. Very alert, with slender neck periodically stretched up, giving it a tall appearance relative to the dotterels. It walked briskly but was not seen to run. It showed no aggression to the dotterels or to other species.

Size: Compared with the Banded Dotterels, about same height, tail somewhat longer, head much finer, neck and upper breast much slimmer; quite a different build.

Colouring: Rather drab above, overall appearance generally speckled greyish-brown; crown somewhat darker but plain. A pale greyish-white superciliary stripe with a grey-brown line through the eye. Speckles and streaks of paler grey-brown on upper breast ending in a fairly distinct demarcation separating this from the white of the underparts. No speckling visible on the flanks. Some variation in shades on the upper wing, but no pale wing-bar distinguishable in flight; underwing pale plain greyish-white. Rump dark brown medially with white side patches; upper tail dark brownish with blackish tips.

Bill: Slender, slightly longer than head, straight with a slight suggestion of decurvature throughout its length, mostly blackish but with yellowish flesh at the base.

Legs: Difficult to determine among the grass, but we eventually decided they were pale brownish or yellowish olive; did not extend beyond the tail in flight.

Voice: The only call heard, usually singly but on one occasion three times in succession, was the reedy *chirrit*.

Because of the general colouring (lacking rufous tinges which characterise *C. acuminata*), breast demarcation, stance and attraction to marshland, we concluded that this was a Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*).

PETER CHILD, 10 Royal Terrace Alexandra