

SHORT NOTES

INLAND BREEDING OF BLACK-BILLED GULLS IN SOUTHERN HAWKES BAY AND NORTHERN WAIRARAPA

Throughout the 1960s, varying numbers of Black-billed Gulls (*Larus bulleri*) were seen on the bed of the Manawatu River between Dannevirke and the Manawatu Gorge. During the 1970s, these gulls have bred, several times at least, on this stretch of the river and also in the Pahiatua district further south.

The small North Island population of the Black-billed Gull breeds wholly on the coast, except for a few on the southern shore of Lake Rotorua. On 29 January 1969, however, I found a small colony with 7 nests and 11 half-grown chicks at the mouth of the Waimarino River at the southern end of Lake Taupo between Motuoapa and Turangi. I have not seen them there since, but they may well have bred elsewhere in the district, where there are few observers. Records in *Notornis* over the years show that the Black-billed Gull breeds usually at estuary mouths from Gisborne to Porangahau and in recent years in the eastern Bay of Plenty and at Miranda, Firth of Thames. These breeding sites are more characteristic of the Red-billed Gull (*L. novaehollandiae*).

The following are, as far as I am aware, the first North Island records of the Black-billed Gull breeding on inland shingle riverbeds in the manner of the gull's main population in the South Island. Many hundreds of Black-billed Gulls from the South Island spend the winter on the Manawatu/Wellington west coast and at Lake Wairarapa. Are these new colonies, then, offshoots of South Island birds or of those that breed on parts of the Hawkes Bay coast?

This inland breeding may now be regular. To draw attention to it in case it becomes more widespread on the suitable rivers of the eastern and southern North Island, these notes are brought together to record such events as are known.

On 18 November 1972, during a survey for dotterels, H. Elder and S. Quin found a small colony on the Manawatu River near the Ballance bridge east of the Manawatu Gorge. The colony contained 30 nests, mostly with 2 eggs. On 16 December, L. Gurr and S. Quin counted 32 empty nests, 6 nests with 2 eggs either infertile or hatching, some 30 chicks, and 55 adults.

In late October 1975, R. L. Cotter of Ruawhata recorded a colony on an island in mid-stream of the Mangatainoka River, about 3 km upstream of the Pahiatua bridge. No notes were kept. When a similar colony was reported in October 1976, the site was visited on 18 October by R. N. & S. D. Cotter and M. L. Falconer but all nests had been destroyed by floodwaters. On 1 January 1978, R. L. Cotter

recorded 10 empty nests, 4 eggs, and 2 dead chicks. Other chicks were probably present because the adult gulls were aggressive, many arriving from further downstream. Pied Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) were nesting on the same mid-stream island. On 8 January, the Cotters, M. L. Falconer, and A. Gollop found 14 empty nests, 1 nest with 2 eggs, and 1 with a rotten egg, 8 large downy chicks and 16 adults on the same island in the Mangatainoka River, together with nesting stilts.

On 28 October 1976, L. Gurr counted up to 60 adults at the Pahiatua sewage ponds, finding 3 empty nests and 11 with eggs. On 26 September 1978, R. N. & S. D. Cotter counted over 200 Black-billed Gulls at the Pahiatua sewage ponds and on 16 October found 17 nests, 26 eggs, and 41 birds in one of the ponds, which was empty except for seepage water.

On 7 December 1977, a colony was found by J. R. Drake and M. R. Menzies on the riverbed at Oringi, about 10 km south of Dannevirke, with 20 nests, 33 eggs, and 41 adults. This colony was destroyed by an unknown cause (not flooding), but on 21 December a second, larger colony was found several kilometres downstream at Kumeroa with 80 nests, about 27 small chicks and over 100 eggs. On 29 January 1978, over 60 chicks were thought to have been successfully raised, and on 11 February R. A. Creswell and S. Creswell (nee Quin) found only 19 juveniles and 18 adults still present.

Floods in November and December 1978 prevented a thorough search of the riverbed, but on 20 January 1979 a colony was found about 5 km upstream of the 1977-78 site by V. Kappely of Woodville. There were 60-70 adults and 80-90 chicks, some still downy, others almost full fledged. These were watched for 3 weeks, and when last seen on 9 February by M. R. Menzies, had moved about $\frac{1}{2}$ km downstream. About 80 chicks were thought to have been successfully raised.

In the 1979-80 season, the gulls again occupied the Kumeroa site of 1977-78. On 6 December M. R. Menzies and I counted 26 nests and 48 eggs. Pied Stilts (6 nests and 15 eggs) were on the same island and two Black-fronted Dotterels (*Charadrius melanops*) seemed to be breeding in the area. On the same day, we found a smaller colony at Oringi, containing 14 nests and 20 eggs, on the same site as the ill-fated colony of December 1977. Again this colony was destroyed by an unknown cause within a few days of its discovery.

Unfortunately, a flood on 28-29 December destroyed the Kumeroa colony, though 12 downy chicks were just mobile enough to survive. They were last seen on 30 December, 29 adults still being present. On 29 January 1980, no nests, chicks or adults were seen.

A flock of 80-100 non-breeding birds was seen on 16 December 1978 on the aero club's field just south of Dannevirke, and varying

numbers have been seen throughout the 1978-79 and 1979-80 summers near the new Dannevirke sewage ponds.

I am grateful to R. N. Cotter, S. Creswell and L. Gurr for permission to include their observations.

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ARCTIC SKUAS CHASE WADERS AT MIRANDA

On the morning of 7 October 1979 at about 0720 hours I was at the Old Limeworks at Miranda, Firth of Thames, watching two Spur-winged Plovers (*Vanellus novaehollandiae*) in the company of about ten Pied Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*). They were feeding on the fringe of a small pool near the seashore.

Looking northwards I saw two skuas silhouetted against the low sunlight. I watched them through my telescope (20-45x) as they chased White-fronted Terns (*Sterna striata*) but was unable to identify them. They left the terns and flew towards me and I switched to binoculars (8x30) as they came closer. They crossed the far side of the pool about 10 m away, flushing two or three stilts. As they flew above me I had an excellent view of both birds. One was completely dark, the other having a collar of yellowish streaking, and each had sharply pointed tail-feathers projecting about 3 cm from the rest of the rounded tail, marking them as Arctic Skuas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).

They circled around the pond again, and as I watched, the paler bird swooped on a rising stilt. As it was hit, the stilt was jolted and I saw two white feathers come floating down, but its flight was not visibly affected. Because of the position of the stilt's body and the speed of the action I did not see what the skua had struck the stilt with.

Hearing the loud calling of a Spur-winged Plover behind me I turned to see the darker skua pursuing it over the shellbanks parallel to the shore for about 20 m and then out to sea. The other bird followed soon after, and I did not see any other skuas that day. I understand that there are very few records of skuas chasing other birds over land in New Zealand.

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SEASONAL FLUCTUATIONS IN THE NUMBERS OF BAR-TAILED GODWITS ON NELSON HAVEN

The flock of Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) on Nelson Haven uses the salt flats on either side of Sewerside Drive as a high tide roost. During spring tides all the birds are found in this area as they have a preference for soft ground. Only once have they been seen on the Boulder Bank at spring tide and that was because of