

A GREAT KNOT IN MANUKAU HARBOUR

At Karaka shellbanks, Manukau Harbour, on 18 March 1979 while I was watching waders with M. S. Field and C. R. Veitch, my attention was taken by a medium-sized plump bird resting apart from others on a bank. Its in-between size and glimpses of its longish bill puzzled me until, as the tide fell and birds began to bathe, preen and feed, it flew showing white rump and white wing-bar and alighted in front of a flock of Lesser Knots (*Calidris canutus*). Its identity then became clear, when observed in conjunction with the smaller birds. It was a Great Knot (*C. tenuirostris*).

After a muddy stalk I was able to watch it closely through my x 15-60 telescope. It fed head down facing me, showing a very heavily streaked crown and mantle. The breast was so heavily spotted as to appear almost black, and there was some less dense spotting on the flanks. The remaining underparts were white. The back was grey, the short legs dull yellowish green, and the longish bill was slightly decurved towards the tip. The feeding action was very similar to that of the Lesser Knots. This bird was still present on 1 April 1979 when it was resting in a line of Least Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) and Lesser Knots.

Great Knots are seldom seen in New Zealand, the first occurrence being in October 1967 (Andrew, *Notornis* 15: 207-210) at the Manawatu Estuary. Single birds were recorded in the Firth of Thames in March 1971, September 1972, and March 1973, with a pair there in February/March 1972, while a single bird was seen at Karaka in April 1972 (Class. Summ. Notes, *Notornis* Vol. 19 & 20).

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WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERNS, NAPIER 1972

The following records belatedly the unusual build-up of White-winged Black Terns (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) that occurred at the Ahuriri Lagoons at Westshore, Napier, in the late summer and autumn of 1972; it also records the few notes we kept at the time.

In 1971, only one bird was present, from early February to late March, the last record being 20 March. It frequented the Harbour Board Marsh on the south side of the outfall channel. It was feeding on both 7 and 27 February along the muddy edge of the marsh, its bill straight down as it dipped and rose close to the water. On the 7th, when it reached a certain point it would climb well up into the wind, return at a height to the starting point, and then repeat the feeding method. It did this five or six times before coming to rest on a piece of board. After a short rest, it fed again, followed by

another rest. On the 27th, instead of rising into the strong wind and returning to its starting point, it merely turned and fed back low down, dipping and rising. It landed on the board with two Red-billed Gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*). Later, while resting on the bank, it made a threatening move toward a Red-billed Gull that walked past by stretching its neck and bill toward it. We described the bird's wings in flight as being fawn, paler in the centre and with a black edge on the secondaries. At rest, its bill was thick and blackish, the legs short and black, the head white with a black patch behind the eyes and a well-defined blackish line over the head, the breast and belly white. On 20 March, we saw the bill as red when the bird flew over us several times. As well as feeding low over the water as usual, it fed high up, apparently catching insects bigger than midges that were swarming about in whirling masses.

In 1972, our first sighting was of 5 birds on 3 January; 4 were over the Westshore ponds and one on the Harbour Board Marsh. On 22 January, 6 were at first on the ponds but later at rest together on a sand flat on the marsh. They did not rest long as some began moving about, waddling rather like pigeons on their short legs. They seemed to be taking food from the *Salicornia* plants and snapped their bills at any Pied Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) passing too near. We noticed a shallow tail-fork in flight. Their heads had a black band over the top from ear to ear and another down the back of the head. On 6 February, we found 6 together at the ponds; one was perched on a fence post, and the others were on the ground preening. Their heads looked black with a wide black line down the back of the neck. One flew and began hovering a metre or less above the water; it made a gentle splash dive and came up with a tiny fish; three more dives were unsuccessful. On 12 March we saw only one at the ponds.

On 15 April, during a census of waterbirds on the Ahuriri wetlands by Hawkes Bay members of OSNZ, we saw a total of 13 White-winged Black Terns spread out over the water upstream of the pump-house. Two were in full breeding plumage, the head and body black, the tail white, the wings dusky white above and black below with about 3 cm of white edge. Nine others had beginnings of black under the wings and were altogether darker grey than the birds seen on other occasions. The last two, seen well up the channel, were darker grey again but not black.

The final sighting was of 2 birds at the Harbour Board Marsh on 13 May 1972. Both were greyish white and therefore apparently different birds from the 13 of 15 April.

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