

A DUNLIN AT KARAKA SHELLBANKS

On 23 June 1979 I was at Karaka shellbanks, Manukau Harbour. As the tide fell steadily small flocks of Knots (*Calidris canutus*) fed 20-30 m from the banks. Among these was a distinctly different and smaller bird in bright breeding plumage. The head was pale, wings and back were bright orange-rufous, and on the belly was an obvious black patch. The bill, longer than that of a Knot, was slightly decurved at the tip and deep at the base. The legs were black. There was no doubt in my mind that this was a Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*). Nearby Knots tended to chase it a little, although this did not make it leave. The bird was seen occasionally by various members until September.

More detailed study showed the crown to have chestnut streaks on it extending part-way down the hind neck where they faded. There was a white eye-stripe. Throat and upper chest were also white. Faint streaking down the side of the neck and lower breast was visible only at close range. The edge of the folded wing showed fawn. Feathers of the large wing-coverts were orange rufous, brown centred, and edged whitish. This pattern was repeated on the lesser coverts. Here, due to the feather size, the patterning was less obvious. Sides of rump



FIGURE 1 — Dunlin in breeding plumage.

Photo: A. Habraken



FIGURE 2 — Dunlin (back) and Wrybill (front).

Photo: J. A. Brown

were white. In flight, a dark stripe extended down the centre of the back and tail. Under-wings were white. The black belly patch started low in the breast, was squared off below and just in front of the fore-wing, then extended to just behind the legs. Here, on both sides it tapered off to a point. The fore section between the legs appeared smudgy and came to a rounded point. The feathers around the upper tibia were clearly seen to be white, most evident when the bird was feeding and walking.

On 28 June I heard the bird call as it flew, *trrree* or *trrii*, with a slight roll and stopping abruptly. This was the only call heard. The Dunlin usually roosted in among the Knots but tended to feed with the wintering Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) flocks. Its method of feeding in very soft mud was similar to that of Red-necked Stints (*C. ruficollis*) but had an even quicker "sewing-machine" action. It was often seen to feed in soft mud or on surfaces which held a thin film of water. It was also seen on sandy half-exposed shell and around the edges of tidal pools. I believe this to be the first Dunlin to be recorded in full breeding plumage in New Zealand.

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