



# OSNZ news

Edited by PAUL SAGAR, 2/362 Hereford Street, Christchurch, for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.).

No. 8

September 1978

Deadline for the December issue will be 20 November.

**NOTE: Next deadline is earlier to try to beat the Christmas and January shut-down of printers and have NOTORNIS and OSNZ NEWS out early in 1979.**

## DACHICKS

The 1978 inquiry into the NZ Dabchick has gone remarkably well, with North Island members putting in a lot of time, often with meagre results, in order to help form an overall picture of the status and habits of this species.

We began with a series of questions, to which we now have much better answers. If members can stand it, we need another year's effort to confirm and clarify these answers.

1. Is the NZ Dabchick extinct in the South Island? Answer, apparently yes. Was it ever strong there? Possibly not (see Oliver).
2. Does the North Island population reach a total of 1000? Answer, yes. Estimated total (very rough, see below) 1150-1400 birds.
3. Are Australian grebelets taking over? Answer, in North Island, not yet. Several of both Hoary-headed and Little Grebes were encountered but were apparently individuals. See CS Notes for records in both islands.
4. Is autumn/winter flocking a general habit? On Volcanic Plateau, on Northland dune lakes, in Manawatu and Wairarapa and perhaps southern Hawkes Bay, yes. Complicated by many birds that remain on summer lakes and ponds in small numbers.
5. Do birds move far afield? In Northland and on Volcanic Plateau, apparently not. In Manawatu/Wairarapa there is an influx which is apparently far too large to be from local sources — where they are from remains a mystery. High-country farm dams inside steep gullies are not known to be Dabchick habitat and lowland numbers in Taranaki and Hawkes Bay are far too few to be the main source.
6. Are sewage oxidation ponds widely used? Answer, apparently a Manawatu/west Wellington/Wairarapa phenomenon; few seen on these ponds elsewhere. Tony Palliser's observation that all the major flocks of Volcanic Plateau gathered in the warmest waters, near natural hot springs may suggest a reason why some ponds and lakes are favoured in winter over others; water temperature may vary from pond to pond, affecting food supply as well as comfort. This could easily be investigated next year.
7. When do birds flock most? In general, flocks build up during February/March and are at peak from May to July, with this year a sharp drop in early August (delayed to September in 1977 — see March *Notornis*).
8. Breeding season? Extended. At Waimeha, Waikanae, CAF's "home pair" raised two broods, the last of which were pushed off only late in April. At Wairongomai, north of Otaki, there were still two chicks in late March (BDH) while at nearby Ohau lagoon your editors saw a chick being carried on its parent's back on 2 September. On the Rotorua lakes, breeding through the winter is reported by Tony Palliser and Ray Jackson — young seen in July, eggs in early August, courtship displays from April to August.
9. Plumage and eye colour questions are starting to make sense but there are differences of opinion among observers still. Autumn juveniles and adults become alike and easily confused with non-breeding Hoary-headed, with their non-chestnut neck and breast, paler backs and often whitish chins. Eye colour is pale in juveniles and fades in adults after breeding, becoming bright yellow again when breeding plumage is assumed in July. Volcanic Plateau flocks contained at least 50% birds in breeding plumage in all months, so the pattern is different there.
10. General distribution? Largely as prophesied by members.

Northland: apparently isolated population of 150-200 birds largely confined to west coast dune lakes from Dargaville to Muriwai; few elsewhere and few seem to wander in winter. Up to 53 on Kereta lakes, February to August.

Volcanic Plateau: found on many lakes during winter, often in pairs; some large counts in June/July 45 Rotoehu, 51 Rotoiti, 76 Rotorua, 28 Tarawera, 25 Rotomahana, 126 Tokaanu (Taupo); nearly 500 birds actually counted but major lakes could not be covered without boats: cautious estimate up to 800 birds likely.

Waikato/Bay of Plenty: surprisingly, no sign of influx from Rotorua area, despite some most suitable sites. Mainly occasional single birds.

Taranaki: no evidence of flocking despite some good sites; none seen in north or central Taranaki; a few scattered pairs in Hawera, Waverley and Waitotara districts.

Wanganui: apparently few (e.g. Lake Kaitoke); no evidence of flocking.

Gisborne/Wairoa: fewer even than usual; 2 singles in Wairoa district, 4 in Ruatoria/Tolaga Bay district, none at Tiniroto lakes.

Hawkes Bay: up to 6 at Tutira, 9 at Ahuriri ponds, 4 at Waipukurau; only flock 21 at Lake Roto-o-Kiwa in June. No information from Dannevirke south to Porangahau and Pahiatua.

Wairarapa: very low numbers this year (28 max. on 2 April, down to 15 on 11 June, 6 on 6 August), in contrast to recent years — see March *Notornis*.

Manawatu/west Wellington: small groups remained on many dune and riverside lakes, while record large flocks appeared in several places (see *OSNZ News* No. 7), totalling 274 on 11 June.

Rough estimates: northland 150-200; Volcanic Plateau 600-800; South Taranaki/Wanganui 30; Manawatu/Wairarapa 300; Gisborne/Hawkes Bay 50. Total 1150-1400.

We thus already have a fairly good base line against which to measure any major changes in the future. Another year's field work should considerably improve the accuracy of our knowledge.

## Regional activity

We have no up-to-date report from Far North, South Auckland, Manawatu or Hawkes Bay.

**Auckland:** Gwenda Watson has led a highly organised campaign to get regular reports on all oxidation ponds (North Shore, Mangere, Waiwera, Orewa, Wellsford, Helensville), most acclimatisation lakes, Waitakere Ranges dams and the Muriwai dune lakes; also strategic farm dams such as MALCOLM WALLER'S at South Kaipara Head. Of particular value has been the ready and remarkably tolerant help of the AUCKLAND FOUR—WHEEL—DRIVE CLUB, especially J. CAMPBELL, D. HILL, B. MANSELL, D. NUNN, L. NUNN, M. NUNN and J. SHEEN, in providing a vehicle and driver to check the scattered middle group of Muriwai lakes which had a small but significantly changing group of dabchicks. Members who have taken part include: D. BAKER, K. BARROWS, P. BARROWS, T. BILBOROUGH, D. BINNEY, K. BOND, D. BOOTH, H. BOUTELL, J. BROWN, S. CHAMBERLIN, C. EXLEY, P. FOOKS, B. HADDON, J. McCALLUM, C. MISKELLY, L. PARKES, N. PEACHMAN, R. PEACHMAN, A. PRICKETT, S. REED, N. ROTHWELL, C. SCHISCHKA, G. SCHISCHKA, B. SEARLE, C. SEARLE, F. SHORT, J. SKINNER, T. SKINNER, J. STANILAND, C. TAYLOR, M. TAYLOR, B. WALLER, G. WATSON, J. WELLS, and the KINGS COLLEGE BIRD CLUB.

**Waikato:** A great deal of hunting revealed only a juvenile at Matamata sewage ponds (R. LACEY), a pair with 2 juveniles at Ngakura (H. ROOK) in February, one at Lake Wahi (T. HATCH) and two at Lake Waipapa in April (M. TAYLOR) and one at Mangaiti Rd (E. TAYLOR) in April/May and one on Hamilton Lake in July (T. CROCKER). Other reports from Taupo.

**Volcanic Plateau:** a major effort particularly from TONY PALLISER, RAY JACKSON, MIKE DAY and GRAHAM PEARSON to cover a fearful quantity of lake shore, to produce impressive figures and interesting comments on breeding, plumage and behaviour. Lack of boats (and of helpers) meant a large underestimate of major lakes.

**Taranaki:** a regular survey of likely lakes and sewage ponds from Waitara and New Plymouth south to Stratford yielded no dabchicks.

**Gisborne/Wairoa:** rather futile searching by JIM HENLEY, ARCHIE BLACKBURN, TED JONES and MAVIS WILLIAMS from Gisborne and by GEOFF FOREMAN and BRUCE HENLEY

from Wairoa to produce a handful of dabchicks, the most being 6 at Tutira in July.

**Hawkes Bay:** work by MARY CRAVEN, PAT BOLT, JANET LLOYD, CARA SAXBY, JOHN HASTIE and KATHLEEN TODD in May/June revealed a few birds near Havelock North and Waipukurau and the flock of 21 at Roto-o-Kiwā.

**Wairarapa:** BOB STIDOLPH, COLIN SCAD—DEN, DAVE SIM and CHRIS LUSK carried out surveys, extended by occasional visits by Wellington members.

\* \* \* \*

#### CATTLE EGRETS

This report can only be incomplete as records for the count weekend of 26-27 August have not been received from Hawkes Bay, Blenheim, West Coast and Otago and are at second hand from Nelson.

Totals from other regions, with last year's in brackets:

**Southland** 22 CE (21), 1 White Heron (0), 1 Little Egret (2), 0 Royal Spoonbill (2). (Roger Sutton)

**Balclutha** (S. Otago) 1 CE (0). (Ian McLaren)

**Canterbury** 20 CE (14), 7 WH (13), 0 LE (2). (Pau Sagar et al.)

**Marlborough** Kaikoura 0 CE (10); Blenheim 6 in June (12).

**Nelson** Takaka 20 CE (15); Appleby 20 (8).

**West Wellington** 0 CE (0), 3 WH (0).

**Manawatu** 18 CE (15); 1 WH (2); 2 LE (0); 15 RSp (18); 1 White Ibis (0).

**Wairarapa** 0 CE (7).

**Wanganui** 0 CE (9).

**Gisborne** 17 CE (4); Wairoa 0 CE (1), 3 WH (1)

**Taranaki** 6 CE (26); 2 LE (2).

**Bay of Plenty/Rotorua** 3 CE (7), 2 WH (2).

**Waikato/South Auckland** 67 CE (97), 13 WH (8), 1 Gl. Ibis (0).

**Auckland** 9 CE (4), 4 WH (7), 3 LE (3).

**Far North** 30 CE (25), 8 WH (14), 2 LE (2), 2 RSp (2), 1 Gl. Ibis (0), 1 Yellow-billed Spoonbill (1).

**INTERIM TOTALS:** Cattle Egret 233 (293); White Heron 39 (83); Little Egret 10 (22); Royal Spoonbill 17 (49); Glossy Ibis 2 (7); White Ibis 1 (4); Yellow-billed Spoonbill 1 (1).

These totals are clearly well below the expected for our resident White Herons and Royal Spoonbills, lacking birds in districts which have not reported and also confusion as to whether to count them or not, caused by clumsy advice in **OSNZ news** whose editor was prejudiced toward CE mainly (which he admits freely).

It might be best to enlarge on the 1978 developments in December issue by which time we hope there is a clearer picture. In northern regions, birds seemed, after an initial wander around, to desert many of last year's sites and come together in fewer, larger flocks. A noticeable increase in Nelson and Christchurch/Ellesmere, matched by a corresponding drop in Marlborough. No change in Southland. A sharp drop in Taranaki and in Wairarapa, a drop in Waikato and Bay of Plenty with a corresponding rise in Gisborne. Slight rise in Far North and Manawatu. Overall, the total may be slightly lower than in 1977 so that the trend to annual increase has halted.

We hope to have full lists of those who took part in this year's census in December issue. Congratulations on yet another successful venture. We hope it was less strenuous than last year. We realise that in some districts it

is not the best time to count White Herons in particular but it is probably best for Cattle Egret. If preferred by all regions, we could try the weekend before school holidays next year (if we are to do it next year).

#### Late Additions:

Nelson region: CE 34 (20), WH 7 (13), LE 4 (2), RSp 12 (22).

West Coast region: CE 15 (20), WH 13 (7), LE 0 (1), RSp 17 (0).

These bring the grand totals, excluding Hawkes Bay, Blenheim and Otago, to CE 227 (293), WH 46 (83), LE 14 (22), RSp 46 (49) plus ibises.

The Okarito heronry has still to be checked.

\* \* \* \*

#### Identification parade

On 6 August, J. LE LIEVRE, M. LE LIEVRE, B. PREECE and J. PREECE lined up on the shore of Foxton No. 1 Lake, about 4 km NW of Foxton. The police were not there but at one corner of the lake were a Cattle Egret, a Little Egret, a White Heron and a White Ibis. All were within 30 m of one another and were either feeding on the mud and pasture at the lake edge or perching on a fence in the lake nearby. This is probably the first such parade in New Zealand.

\* \* \* \*

Among specimens cast up on Bay of Plenty beaches by the August storms was a Kaka (Paddy Latham). Where does that go in the **Distribution Atlas**?

\* \* \* \*

As part of degree requirements at agricultural universities, students must spend their vacations on farms. In August CHARLOTTE HEATHER was invited to the farm of Mr G. Hoare at Parakai, near Helensville; this turned out to be the only farm in the Auckland region where there were Cattle Egrets — nine — apparently unknown to Auckland members at the time. One up for the Massey Bird Group and heredity. Apparently there had been 12 in the area earlier, reported to the newspaper and somehow in the process converted to 24.

Speaking of newspaper editing, ROY WESTON was chagrined to find his careful text altered to say that the Cattle Egret closely resembles the White-faced Heron with its short yellow bill and grey or yellow legs. No wonder RRs get so many reports that turn out to be White-faced Herons. The Southland publicity was immaculate, the value of having friends at court.

Among misprint howlers in the current **Notornis** that one was tempted to leave was the one that said "The value of the scheme in giving opportunity for individual activity is shown by the detailed observations Christ has made." We hope it has been corrected.

\* \* \* \*

#### South Island Robin study

Members may recall the Grey Warbler/Shining Cuckoo study being carried out at Kowhai Bush near Kaikoura (**OSNZ News 4**) Ralph Powlesland of the Zoology Department, University of Canterbury, has completed two years study of the Robin, also at Kowhai Bush, as part of his Ph.D. thesis. Ralph has supplied us with details of his study.

Two years have now been spent observing Robins at KOWHAI Bush near Kaikoura. The

observations are being made towards a time-budget which describes how the Robin's behavior is ordered through the day and eventually, the year. Robins were chosen for the study as the population had been colour-banded so that individuals of known-age could be recognised. Also the Robin's territorial nature and fearlessness of man means they can be readily located and found through the bush.

All activities are timed using a stopwatch, with the results being written into a notebook as they occur. Robin activities include: Foraging (finding, killing and eating prey); caching food (some food is hidden in crevices to be retrieved later); comfort movements (bill-wiping, scratching, head-rubbing, preening, bathing, sunning and anting); vocalisations; resting; pair interactions; interactions with other Robins, especially neighbours; and interactions with other species.

During the breeding season several other activities (such as nest building and incubation) are included in the bird's behaviour patterns.

In order to have an accurate sample of Robin behaviour, observations are made at all times of day. The day is divided arbitrarily into six parts and an equal number of hours of records are made for each part during a month. This involves several dawn starts which, while very pleasant during the warm summer months, soon numb the fingers on frosty winter mornings.

The study has shown that Robin behaviour is determined by several factors such as time of day, month, daylength, sex and age. In general Robins spend about 60% of their time foraging during January and February, when breeding is complete and moult has begun. Peak feeding times are about mid-morning and mid-afternoon and about midday they often stop feeding for a while to rest, preen and sun themselves. However during June and July, when daylength is much shorter and temperatures colder, the Robins spend over 90% of their time foraging. During this period foraging takes up about 80% of their time during the first part of the day and this increases to 95% just prior to dusk. Immature birds (those less than a year old) spend slightly more time foraging compared with adult birds.

Being in close contact with a bird for long periods results in some fascinating observations. One case was when a Robin extracted a 'giant' earthworm (about 2.5 x 1 cm) from its burrow and proceeded to kill it. As the worm was too heavy to be carried in flight, it was dragged to a suitable log and bashed until broken up. It took the Robin 25 minutes to break it up, eat a portion and cache the remainder. Following this mammoth task the Robin retired to bathe.

Robins do not appear to worry about the weather conditions when they want a bath. One individual was seen bathing in a puddle surrounded by ice, the ice having been broken by a vehicle. Another bird spent over five minutes bathing in a pool during heavy rain, it became saturated and took several hours to dry thoroughly.

Recently when I visited a pair of Robins they were found giving alarm calls and they had their crown feathers raised. I realised they were alarmed at something hidden inside a hollow tree trunk. Thinking it might be an opossum I hit the trunk with a stick only to feel very sorry for disturbing a Morepork.

Although most of the bird studies carried out at Kowhai Bush have involved the Robin, several other species are in need of intensive study. A little-known species that resides in large numbers at Kowhai Bush is the Brown Creeper. Those of us working in the bush have 'stumbled' on several nests and intensive searching would yield a sample suitable for a breeding study. For other features which make Kowhai Bush a good study area see **OSNZ news 4**.

\* \* \* \*

#### **Raoul Island**

Sandy Edgar has passed on a request from E. F. (Ted) Lloyd, N.Z. Geological Survey, P.O. Box 499, Rotorua, who was a geologist on Raoul Island during the 1964 OSNZ expedition. Dr Lloyd writes 'A re-appraisal of the 1964 event in the light of recent studies, suggests that a ground-hugging surge also accompanied that eruption, small as it was. Since such events were first recognised only in 1965, and are still poorly understood, I wish to get as much out of the 1964 Raoul eruption as possible. I hope that the photographic record will be of great help here, and wish to enlist your help in locating the photographs which were taken. The movie record for instance should be perfect for my requirement. I can probably fit individual photographs into the correct sequence by comparing changes in the eruption column, but the movie sequence will provide the added advantage of accurate time control between frames, so that travel velocities can also be calculated. I suspect that the horizontal blast effects were initiated early in the sequence (and therefore may have been missed by photographers?) and since they hugged the ground they may have been hidden by nearby hills of the crater, but I can only keep my fingers crossed. In fact I interpret the initial sound effects heard by you as being created by hurricane force winds which immediately preceded any debris deposition and tore the forest apart within the affected area.

Can you put me in touch with the right people to view as much of the photographic record as possible?'

\* \* \* \*

#### **Antarctic ornithology**

Four OSNZ members, PAUL ENSOR, ELSPETH WAGHORN, LLOYD DAVIS and GRAHAM WILSON, comprised the 1977-78 University of Canterbury expedition to Cape Bird, Antarctica, although only Lloyd was working full time on ornithology. He is carrying out an M.Sc. thesis on the social behaviour, creching and mortality of Adelie Penguins. Paul made the annual Antarctic Skua count and identified 186 of the banded birds. Most had been banded at Cape Bird, some as long ago as 1965, but a few banded at Cape Crozier and Erebus Bay were also sighted. Unseasonable snow storms in November and December caused the loss of many skua eggs and delayed breeding of other birds by up to three weeks. Graham, with the help of other expedition members, carried out the annual count of Adelie Penguins. This season's count was about 5% lower than the three previous years, reducing the total to a mere 34 787 occupied nests.

Graham also recorded other species visiting Cape Bird. These included unusually high numbers of Emperor Penguins and Snow Petrels, perhaps correlated with the cooler

summer and later ice breakout. Wilson's Storm Petrels were seen on two occasions (7 December 1977 and 15 January 1978) and an Antarctic Fulmar was seen on 23 January 1978. This was the first recorded sighting of a fulmar at Cape Bird. Ectoparasites were collected from Adelie Penguins and an Emperor Penguin, Antarctic Skua and Snow Petrel for Professor R. L. C. Pilgrim.

Next summer Graham will return to Cape Bird to continue these projects. (GRAHAM WILSON)

\* \* \* \*

#### **Australian Bird Study Association**

The Bird Bander's Association of Australia has changed its name to the Australian Bird Study Association and that of its journal from **Australian Bird Bander** to the **Corella**. The scope of the Association and its journal has been expanded to cover all forms of field investigation of birds while continuing its emphasis on banding. Articles are not limited to Australian birds and contributions on New Zealand birds are invited. Membership is open to all persons interested in birds, with an annual subscription of \$6.50 for full members and \$4.00 for junior members (under 18 years of age). All members of the Association receive the quarterly journal **Corella** and back-numbers of the **Australian Bird Bander** are available from the Honorary Treasurer. For membership forms write to the Honorary Secretary, Australian Bird Study Association, P.O. Box A1313, Sydney South, N.S.W. 2000, Australia.

\* \* \* \*

#### **Seabirds and waders workshop**

A study workshop on **Seabirds and Waders** proved a popular venture of Auckland region when some 59 OSNZ members, including a few from South Auckland, Waikato and Northland, spent the weekend of 26-28 May in camp at Muriwai. Planned and conducted by Michael Taylor and Doug Booth, held in a pleasant setting, favoured by good weather, comfortable quarters and excellent meals provided by a team of lady members, the workshop was an outstanding success.

The study programme included talks by Peter Jenkins and John Craig (behaviour studies), Beth Brown and Dick Sibson (waders), Geoff Moon (water birds), Graham Turbott (seabirds in Hauraki Gulf), Neil Cheshire and Tim Lovegrove (petrels at sea), David Crockett (beach patrols) and Russell Thomas (seabird wrecks). Outdoor activities were well timed and relevant to the themes of instruction and involvement. The set talks were of good meat, easily digested, and stimulated useful and lively discussion. In and out of working hours, members took full advantage of the opportunity to browse among the study specimens, exchange items of knowledge and seek answers to ornithological problems. Perhaps the most notable result of a happy gathering was an increased awareness of how much is still to be done in field ornithology and a better understanding of how individual ornithologists can help to do it. (SANDY EDGAR).

#### **Cirl Buntings**

Kathleen Harrison and Phil Howell have supplied this note. On 23 May, during an examination of several groups of mixed finches, buntings and sparrows on the fairways of the Amberley golf course, we noticed several Cirl Buntings, feeding slightly apart from the other birds. We were able to spend some time observing these birds, which were not disturbed by our presence. Cirl Buntings were found in the same locality on two further occasions, 26 May and 1 June. On 30 June a flock of nine Cirl Buntings was observed flying about a weed-choked children's playground at Waikuku Beach and we were surprised to notice a distinct difference in the overall appearance of these birds compared with those at Amberley. The colour of the plumage on the backs of both sexes was a much lighter brown, with more distinctive striations; also, while the grey on the breast-bands of the Amberley birds was of bluish tone, the Waikuku birds had an olive-green cast, with a brighter yellow on the underbellies.

Witherby's British Birds describes one race, plus a sub-race on the island of Corsica. We could find no reference to differences in plumage, but in a field guide to the birds of North Africa the illustrations of Cirl Buntings were similar to the birds we had observed at Waikuku. As there is only 15 km distance between Amberley and Waikuku, it seems curious that these different characteristics have been noted.

\* \* \* \*

#### **Fantail raiding spiderwebs**

An interesting observation comes from KAREN MILLER of Dunedin who on a cold snowy morning (29 June) noticed a Pied Fantail flitting along close to the windows.

Every now and then it landed on the windowsill and hopped about. After watching these antics for some time Karen became curious as to the reason for the Fantail's frequent visits. She watched it closely and was most surprised to see it pluck a large, dead blowfly from the spiderweb and eat it quickly. The Fantail then moved off, presumably in search of other easily obtainable morsels, as the snowy conditions had probably grounded its usual prey.

#### **..... and a feast of flies**

A report of another avian flycatcher comes from ROB and GILLIAN GUEST. On 4 June, while notching up species for uncovered distribution squares on Banks Peninsula they were walking along the beach at Le Bons Bay. Ahead of them lay what they identified through binoculars as the carcass of a cattle beast, with a White-faced Heron standing still beside it. Periodically the heron would dart its head forward to pick flies off the carcass. The bird allowed close approach, before it flew to the water's edge, still only a few metres away, but as soon as they were past it returned to continue its meal.

When walking back along the beach about half an hour later the heron was still at its post, eyeing them warily from the far side of the carcass. The number of flies it caught must have constituted a fair meal rather than a light snack. Oliver mentions insects as being included in their diet, and this heron was obviously loath to abandon such a plentiful supply.

## Coromandel Peninsula

South Auckland would welcome members from other regions to this year's Labour Weekend survey of the Coromandel Peninsula, now an annual event. Past participants have become deeply interested in continuing the work to the extent that some, like David Lawrie and Peter Wilkinson, are tackling Mt Moehau for the third time despite having had wild weather there on both previous trips. Anyone who wants to join in should contact Beth Brown, 39 Red Hill Rd, Papakura, as soon as possible.

\* \* \* \*

## Nest Record Scheme

Many species of common birds will have begun breeding by now, some of them close to where you live. Little effort is required to fill in a Nest Record Card and much useful information may be obtained from a few visits to a nest. Many more completed cards are required from even the commonest garden species before a full analysis of breeding can be done, so why not help out?

Get cards from your RR or from David Crockett, 21 McMillan Avenue, Kamo, Whangarei.

\* \* \* \*

## Librarian's notes

The Society is grateful to the following for donations: Mrs B. A. Binning, Mr H. R. McKenzie, Mrs H. S. Newton and Mr P. E. Roberts.

Recent additions to the library include: The Birds of Burma, B. E. Smythies, 1953; The Birds of Borneo, B. E. Smythies, 1968. Both very comprehensive works with colour illustrations. Fairy Wrens, A. H. Chisholm, 1948; British birds and their haunts, Rev. C. A. Johns, 5th ed. revised by J. A. Owen, 1919 (64 colour plates); Locations and recoveries of Black Swans banded at Lake Whangape and Lake Ellesmere, reprint from Australian Wildlife Research 4, 1977; Food preferences of Takahe in Fiordland National Park, and the effect of competition from introduced Red Deer, J. A. Mills & A. F. Mark, Journal of Animal Ecology 46, 1977. (ANTHEA GOODWIN)

\* \* \* \*

## Revision of Seabirds Handbook

THE HANDBOOK OF AUSTRALIAN SEA-BIRDS by D. L. Serventy, V. N. Serventy & John Warham, published by Reeds, is now out of print and a new edition is in preparation. The authors would welcome suggestions for improvements, additions and corrections. Also needed are good photographs, preferably black and whites, of Little Black Shag, Lesser Crested Tern, Providence Petrel and Little Tern, taken in Australia. Please send any suggestions to Dr J. Warham, Zoology Department, University of Canterbury, Private Bag, Christchurch.

\* \* \* \*

## Grey-faced Petrels

Members D. Anderson, Paddy Latham, Bruce Goffin and son Geoff spent the evening of 17 August on Mount Maunganui looking for Grey-faced Petrels. The birds were found without difficulty. Seven were found on the ground near their burrows and an egg was found in a shallow burrow. Many more birds were heard flying overhead, indicating that the Grey-faced Petrel continues to nest on the Mount in good numbers.

MERVYN JUKES reports that recently, when feeding out hay to the stock, he noticed a blackbird pecking at the meat in one of his Harrier traps. About two hours later it had been joined by a Harrier but when doing his banding rounds some time later Mervyn found just a full Harrier and a scattering of black feathers.

Blackbirds visit the bait in the Harrier traps every day, and it is a common sight to see them sitting on top of the cages, eyeing the meat while waiting for the Harriers to be moved on.

\* \* \* \*

Results of the winter shorebirds census of the Firth of Thames of 25 June included 520 Godwit, 37 Knot, 2487 Pied Stilt, 37 Banded Dotterel, 7506 SIPO, 24 Turnstone, 3817 Wrybill, 2 Asiatic Whimbrel, 80 Caspian Tern, 27 White-fronted Tern, 1 Little Tern, 420 Black-billed Gulls and 211 White-faced Heron.

The Manukau Harbour census of 23 July included 1962 Godwit, 704 Knot, 2790 Pied Stilt, 783 Banded Dotterel, c. 15 N.Z. Dotterel, 19166 SIPO, 51 Turnstone, 1019 Wrybill, 6 Golden Plover, 3 Red-necked Stint, 178 Caspian Tern, 25 White-fronted Tern, 291 White-faced Heron and 2 Grey Teal. (From results supplied by Beth Brown).

\* \* \* \*

Fewer Godwits winter over at the two Canterbury estuaries checked regularly by KATHLEEN HARRISON and PHIL HOWELL. Regular counts during June and July revealed about 168 Godwits on the Heathcote-Avon estuary and between 15 and 34 Godwits on the Ashley estuary. On 26 June four Godwits in full breeding plumage and two partially coloured birds were seen. Are there many other records of wintering-over Godwits attaining full breeding plumage?

\* \* \* \*

A partial albino oystercatcher was seen near Otakau, Otago Peninsula, on 11 May by Graham Wilson. The top of the head, nape and wings were light fawn while the rest of the plumage was white. The legs, bill and eyes were the normal bright red colouration. This follows the report of an albino oystercatcher on Otago Peninsula in December 1977, by Mike Tarburton (*Notornis* 25: 108).

\* \* \* \*

## Mapping Scheme

Now that winter is over members should be getting out into the field more often and covering mapping scheme squares. To be sure that you record all species within a square don't forget to search as many different types of habitat as possible.

Cards are available from your RR or Peter Gaze, Ecology Division, DSIR, Nelson.

Return completed cards to your RR so efforts can be concentrated on filling gaps.

Across the Tasman, 3 000 000 square miles, 720 species and an Atlas to publish, is the task ahead of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union as they begin compiling the first Australian bird atlas. At the end of year 1 (December 1977) record sheets were coming in at the rate of 1 000 per month and 60% of the 1° grid blocks had been at least visited. With four more years ahead of them this augurs well for the success of the scheme.

When checking a reported sighting of a White Heron on a farm at Hokonui, Southland, on 9 June, Mervyn and Helen Jukes found that the 'white heron' was a Cattle Egret, which had been living happily with a flock of 90 white roosters for 9 days.

Four days later, the farmer killed the roosters and the egret hasn't been around since! However we are assured that it didn't go in the deep freeze by mistake.

\* \* \* \*

## Beach Patrols

Recent reports show that beach patrolling has been a rewarding activity in Northland, Auckland and Wellington lately.

From Northland DAVID CROCKETT reports the fifth and sixth New Zealand records of beach-washed Antarctic Petrels. JIM MORRISON found a freshly dead bird on his farm at Kaiwaka during a check on the number of White Herons in the area. Examination proved it to be an Antarctic Petrel. A second specimen was found by BILL CAMPBELL at Dargaville Beach on 29 August. A full scale assault on Northland beaches has since been planned and we hope to be able to report on this in the next newsletter.

These records add to an impressive list of rarities found by Northland beach patrollers this year. These include a Wedge-tailed Shearwater found by Bill Campbell at Dargaville; a White-bellied Storm Petrel found by Kath Brash and Robert Pinkney on 90 Mile Beach; a Fulmar Prion found by Alistair and Audrey Gordon at Dargaville and a Leach's Storm Petrel found by Bill Campbell at Dargaville. However these finds have not been all luck as about 2,000 km of beaches have been covered already this year. Can any other region beat that?

Recent storms have produced some interesting tallies for beach patrols in the Auckland region. DAVID LAWRIE reports that the monthly patrol on the Waiuku West Coast on 16 July produced 113 birds of 21 species. This was more than the usual yearly total and has stimulated interest in this activity in the region. Among the species collected were 1 Antarctic Fulmar, 1 Shy Mollymawk, 1 Blue Petrel, 2 Grey-headed Mollymawks and 2 Cape Pigeons.

Sightings of Antarctic Petrels along the Wellington West Coast by local members have been reported by MAX FALCONER. Jim Moore saw two close inshore and a further two well out to sea off the Foxton Beach, all were flying strongly. At Hokio Beach Max Falconer, Reg Cotter, Allan and Iris Gollop saw one fly over the beach and foredunes, first of all flying strongly south and then returning north. A little later Max and Reg were at Otaki Beach and saw one bird in an exhausted condition rise from the beach about 100 m ahead of them. Farther along the beach it dropped at the edge of the surf and was being rolled about by the waves when they approached. After recording all the plumage details they could from 2 metres away they attempted to catch their first Antarctic Petrel; however an exhausted Antarctic Petrel proved to be faster by about 30 cm than Reg Cotter in prime condition. The bird flew along the beach towards Otaki and they were unable to find it again.

Other unusual movements and numbers of seabirds in the area have been highlighted by beach patrols along South and West

Wellington beaches during August. These include Antarctic Fulmars (about 20), Fulmar Prions, White-headed Petrels, Blue Petrels, Westland Black Petrels and Shy Mollmawks.

With such a variety and number of seabirds being picked up by beach patrollers in these regions it would be useful for beaches in other areas to be checked as well. Much valuable information about the distribution of seabirds at sea can be obtained by a leisurely stroll along the beach, so why not try it.

\* \* \* \*

JIM and MAUREEN MOORE report a number of interesting seabird sightings off Foxton Beach during August. During the weekend of 26-27 August these included sightings of 8 Antarctic Fulmars, 6 Cape Pigeons, 40-50 Shy Mollmawks, 1 Wandering Albatross, over 30 Giant Petrels and more than 20 Bullers or Grey-headed Mollmawks, plus large numbers of shearwaters which were flying too low over the waves to identify specifically. These coast watching observations are a valuable addition to the beach patrol results from the same area.

\* \* \* \*

### Seabirds Identification Guide

'Southern Albatrosses and Petrels — an identification guide' by P. C. Harper and F. C. Kinsky is now available. Members can obtain copies of this excellent new and revised edition at the reduced rate of \$5 per copy from Peter C. Harper, Zoology Department, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington.

\* \* \* \*

From Auckland MICHAEL TAYLOR reports that Little Shags in the Hobson Bay colony had begun to build by 29 August, with 6 nests. Pied Shags had also started to nest, presumably an overflow from their large colony 1 km away on Orakei Creek.

\* \* \* \*

### All-red Redpolls

The following reply to the report of Helen and Mervyn Jukes of seeing all-red Redpolls in Central Otago (**OSNZ news** 7) has been received from DAVID STONEHOUSE, a senior lecturer in education at Massey University. David published a paper on the taxonomy of N.Z. Redpolls in **Notornis** 10: 61-67 (1962).

The suggested explanation of the all-red Redpolls is that not one but several of the European subspecies of the Redpoll are present and inter-breeding in the N.Z. populations. His 1962 taxonomic findings were based on measurements, colour of plumage, etc. of 268 birds live-trapped for banding and measurement and then released. A number of these were found to have wing-lengths above the maximum given for Lesser Redpolls by Witherby *et al.* 1943 'Handbook of British Birds'; also, various other individuals showed plumage colouring typical of other subspecies besides the Lesser Redpoll, notably that of the Mealy Redpoll. This latter subspecies is distinguished by being slightly larger than the Lesser Redpoll, its brown upper plumage is paler and greyer, its wing-bars are whitish rather than buff, and, most significantly, red colouring is distributed very much more widely over the head and body.

As it is unlikely that evolutionary change in an originally pure Lesser Redpoll population could have produced these changes in the century since 1862 when Redpolls were first introduced David has suggested that the original introductions contained a proportion of Mealy Redpolls (and possibly other subspecies as well, e.g. the Iceland Redpoll). In fact, the British 'Handbook' states that unusual numbers of Mealy Redpolls wintered in Britain in the winter of 1861-62 (the subspecies breeds in Scandinavia) and it is from these winter flocks that the bird-trappers were most likely to have obtained the birds which were sent to N.Z. and released in 1862.

Falla, Sibson and Turbott (1970), after mentioning David's findings, reported that Redpolls showing strongly 'mealy' characters had been noted in the Firth of Thames and on Great Mercury Island. This, taken along with the recent report from Otago and David's work in Canterbury and Otago, indicates that probably all the N.Z. populations are mixed, with several subspecies interbreeding. The fact that they clearly seem to be interbreeding in N.Z. supports their classification as subspecies rather than full species, but what is really interesting is what is happening to them now, and what will happen in the future. If we assume homogenous mixing throughout the N.Z. populations at the present time (and whether or not this is true could be established by appropriate research), will the northern and colder European Mealy Redpolls gradually sort themselves out in the southern and colder parts of N.Z.? Similar sorting could also occur in terms of altitude, with Mealy Redpolls being found in the high country and Lesser Redpolls in the warmer and lower regions.

Further sightings of Mealy Redpolls would help in gaining a better understanding of the distribution of this subspecies within N.Z. If it is found that a true N.Z. subspecies of the Redpoll does evolve, it looks as if we should call it the Mealy Redpoll.

\* \* \* \*

DAVID LAWRIE reports some seabirds being found alive in unusual places. Early in June a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross was found on the side of the main road at Waitakaruru at the head of the Firth of Thames. The bird was cared for by Peter Howard for several days while a boat was arranged to take it to sea for release. However it died before it could be freed.

On 14 July, following a severe storm, a strange bird was found on the back lawn of a house in the centre of Pukekohe. After a considerable amount of head scratching it was finally identified as a Kerguelen Petrel.

On 18 July a Pukekohe farmer found a small bird being attacked by magpies. After two days it died and several days later when Peter Wilkinson visited the area he identified it as a Lesser Broad-billed Prion.

\* \* \* \*

Spur-winged Plovers are continuing to spread through the North Island. Three birds were seen about 40 km west of Te Kuiti on 20 August (reported to Wildlife Service).

\* \* \* \*

A further addition to the long list of recoveries from Petone Beach by SHANE COTTER was a Soft-plumaged Petrel. This is only the third record of this species from New Zealand.

From the Banding Office, JEAN LLEWELYN reports that Mallards have been moving about the country. A bird banded at Pukepuke Lagoon in Manawatu was shot near Gore and birds banded in the Wairarapa were shot at Woodend and Kaiapoi, coastal Canterbury.

\* \* \* \*

Arrowtown acquaintances of Helen and Mervyn Jukes report watching a Falcon pursue a White-faced Heron in circles of decreasing height from about 30 to 0.5 m. The Falcon had almost made contact when the heron swerved under some willows by the Arrow River and escaped.

In mid-August, MARGARET DIVERS of Southland saw an encounter between a Harrier and a hare in a paddock close to the house. The Harrier appeared to be swooping on the hare, which stood on its hind legs and warded off the Harrier's attacks with its front legs. This lasted for about three minutes and ended with the hare racing off across the paddock for the cover of a nearby plantation.

\* \* \* \*

From Otago GEORGE GRANT reports that Spur-winged Plovers appear to be present in greater numbers than usual this August. On 16 August a flock of 50 birds was seen at Riverside, some 6 km west of Mosgiel. While looking for Cattle Egrets George noticed that Spurwings were abundant throughout the district. On a low lying paddock near Waihola a flock of about 100 birds was feeding and many smaller flocks of from 3 to 15 birds were in evidence nearby. It would be interesting to know if other districts are in a similar situation.

\* \* \* \*

### Recent sightings

A White-necked Heron has been reported by RUSS LACEY of Matamata. The bird was seen flying and despite a great car chase it finally eluded its pursuer and has not been seen since. The White-necked Heron is one of the commonest herons in Australia, yet this is only the second recorded sighting from N.Z. It may be a coincidence, but the first record of this species for Papua New Guinea was reported during May this year, perhaps indicating a wider than usual dispersal of the species.

A Masked Booby has been reported from the Hauraki Gulf.

Four Terek Sandpipers were seen at Miranda in April and one was seen at Karaka in March (Beth Brown).

A Grey Plover was seen at Karaka on 13 August by ROBIN CHILD.

During August 2 Hudsonian Whimbrel, 3 Black Stilts, 2 Mongolian Dotterel and 12 Knot were seen at the Ashley Rivermouth by KATHLEEN HARRISON, PHIL HOWELL and BILL ROGERS.

\* \* \* \*

### Summer school of ornithology

It is planned to hold a Summer School of Ornithology at Ward, Marlborough, about mid-January 1980. Emphasis will be given to a study of field techniques such as recording, counting, trapping and banding, photography, identification, etc.

This preliminary notice is being given to enable members to plan their holidays to suit.

A Baird's Sandpiper was seen at Miranda; it really is time the dream observatory became as much a reality as these dream birds.

The Tarawera mouth also continues to attract rarities. During June PADDY LATHAM saw and photographed an Arctic Tern, sitting among the Black-fronted Terns.

Sulphur Point has been an attraction to terns also, on 20 August BRUCE GOFFIN found an immature Little Tern associating with an adult Fairy Tern.

Meanwhile, back at Lake Horowhenua, the Whiskered Tern was still present when the past and present editors of OSNZ news took time off from a weekend of head scratching and type-writer tapping.

Another Whiskered Tern has been reported, this time from Hood's Landing, on the Waikato River between Aka Aka and Otatau. First seen on 27 August by TONY HABRAKEN and IAN SOUTHEY, the bird was still present on 30 August when Beth Brown and Dick Sibson checked the area.

\* \* \* \*

ARCHIE BLACKBURN writes: A change to mild weather in Gisborne on 1st August induced a pair of Fantails to commence building in a kanuka on the river frontage near the house. In the early stages, one bird had occasion to fly across the river and, on leaving cover, it was immediately pursued by a monarch butterfly and closely followed for some 30 m over the water, at a distance of inches. It is generally understood that a female scent is all important in the love life of butterflies, but apparently visual aids are equally so. On 31st August the Fantails were brooding 3 eggs when disaster came and one of the pair disappeared. The pair had an unusually large territory, extending some 150 m upstream, probably due to a scarcity of Fantails following last season's disastrous breeding, and into the territory of a marauding cat. Ten days later I was pleased to see that the survivor had acquired another mate, and nesting is again under way.

\* \* \* \*

#### Gisborne/Wairoa Notes:

On 28 September 1978 in the course of a beach check in the Pouawa area, north of Gisborne, JIM HENLEY and MAVIS WILLIAMS disturbed four Variable Oystercatchers (black phase). Of interest was an unusual occurrence of albinism in one of the birds, evidenced by pure white primaries. This bird was studied with binocular assistance both in a feeding situation and in flight, and the white feathers found to be evenly balanced in both wings. There was no unusual colour variation in bill, eyes, or legs from its three companions.

GEOFF FOREMAN reports a female Cirl Bunting from Wairoa, whilst BRUCE HENLEY reports a pair from approximately the same area. A single sighting of a pair, and a further sighting of a female come from Jim Henley in Gisborne. This species is very uncommon in the Gisborne/Wairoa area, in fact the Provisional Atlas lists only seven North Island square records. From Wairoa Bruce also has noted a N.Z. Falcon taking Welcome Swallows on the wing. This appears to be an original Falcon sighting for Wairoa.

\* \* \* \*

After an absence of reports for many years, N.I. Pied Fantails in the black phase are again appearing in Gisborne. TED JONES reports one from the centre of Gisborne, and individual birds have recently been seen by both Jim Henley and Mavis Williams about the city limits. There would now appear to be at least three birds in the area.

\* \* \* \*

#### Information wanted

If any member has or knows of information on the numbers and places involved in the shooting of waders in the years before protection, please write to B. D. Heather, 10 Jocelyn Crescent, Silverstream. The extent of former shooting of such species as godwit, knot, Banded and NZ Dotterel in such localities as Lake Ellesmere, Manukau Harbour, Ninety-mile Beach has apparently not been recorded. Early diary records, figures in earlier reports of acclimatisation societies, records of numbers and species shot or sold for Christchurch markets would be welcome. The only records found so far are rather vague references in Stead's Life histories of NZ birds.

\* \* \* \*

#### WANTED

Colour transparencies of ALL species and sub-species of birds found in New Zealand. More than sixty New Zealand ornithologists are currently preparing a new definitive book on New Zealand birds to be published by Readers Digest. As each species is to be illustrated in colour, we wish to know of as many people as possible who may have photographs which could be used. This is your opportunity to participate in an exciting new work.

At this stage only a list of photographs will be needed, not the slides themselves. Please send your name and address for further details to C. J. R. Robertson, Managing Editor N.Z. Birds, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington North.