

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## SHORT NOTES

WHITEHEAD BREEDING, AND PARASITISM BY  
LONG-TAILED CUCKOOS

During a visit to Little Barrier Island from 28 January to 1 February 1982, I recorded all flocks of Whitehead (*Mohoua albigilla*) seen during walks along the four main tracks leading away from the ranger's house (Thumb, Valley, Main Summit, and Shag Tracks) and down a track called Number 3, which leads from the Thumb summit to the western coast. To try not to record the same birds twice, I did not record flocks if I backtracked during the day or if I re-used a track along which I had recorded flocks on previous days.

I noted 35 Whitehead flocks, ranging from 2 to an estimated 40 birds. I have regarded two birds as a flock because they could have included young birds. Of these 35 flocks, 22 (63%) did not

contain dependent Whitehead fledglings, which can easily be recognised by their almost continuous twitter; 12 (35%) included fledglings (sometimes larger flocks seemed to include two separate groups of fledglings); and one (3%) small group of three birds was seen feeding two Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamys taitensis*) fledglings. The cuckoos were both well advanced in development.

The only data that I can find for comparison of Whitehead breeding success are eight nests observed by Wilkinson (1927) in one season, only one of which was successful. My observations were recorded late in the season, and most were made from tracks that tend to follow ridges. Therefore, any estimates of breeding success or of parasitism rate could be biased in several ways. However, two points should be made.

First, I saw all three Whiteheads feed one of the cuckoos. Rather than follow the adults constantly, as did young Whiteheads, the cuckoos tended to remain perched in one place, allowing easier monitoring of all birds. At one point during my 20 minutes of observation, all three Whiteheads fed one cuckoo one after the other. The Whiteheads appeared to be two males and a female, with one of the males being slightly duller than the other and possibly a younger bird. Guthrie-Smith (1925) reported more than two adult Whiteheads attending nests and, apparently speaking of fledglings, said that "there were innumerable cases of families which we believe also were fed by four old birds." This topic needs further investigation.

Second, two cuckoos were being fed together, and yet only one egg or chick has ever been reported in nests parasitised by Long-tailed Cuckoos (Stead 1936, Oliver 1955). Three explanations are possible:

1. A nest had been parasitised at about the same time by two cuckoos, and neither chick managed to eject the other;
2. One cuckoo layed twice in the one nest; and
3. Two groups of birds, each with a cuckoo fledgling, had come together in one flock, and one group had ended up with both fledglings.

Even if two cuckoos share the same nest, either because they were siblings or because neither managed to eject the other, the large size of cuckoo nestlings and the small size of Whitehead nests make the first two explanations seem unlikely. However, there are records of young being adopted by adults other than their parents in birds (e.g. in fantails — M. Powlesland, in prep.) and mammals (e.g. ground squirrels, Holmes & Sherman, in press; various primates, Wilson 1975, Hrdy 1980). My observation of Whitehead flocks apparently with two groups of fledglings suggests that adoption could occur in Whiteheads. The likelihood that two cuckoos should end up in the same flock seems improbably low, but until more is known, this seems to be the best explanation.

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## ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDLIFE OF NIUE

Recently my friend Don Morrison of Alexandra spent nearly 2 years (March 1979 to December 1980) on Niue. During that time he made regular observations of the birdlife, using Wodzicki's (1971) paper as reference. I had also given him some notes and sketches for other likely visitants, especially waders. Unfortunately Kinsky & Yaldwyn's (1981) comprehensive booklet was not then available. I have compiled the following summary from Don's written and oral notes.

One heron and two waders (listed below) are new records, and the presence of a Reef Heron (listed by Kinsky & Yaldwyn as "unconfirmed") was established. One of the waders was not positively identified, so that we could now say the Niue bird-list is 28 species, with three more unconfirmed; this last group consists of a duck, a calidrine wader and the Red-tailed Tropicbird.

These additional notes should be read in conjunction with Wodzicki's extensive paper and the Kinsky & Yaldwyn booklet. Place names are shown on Wodzicki's map. Status for individual species agrees with Kinsky & Yaldwyn, except where otherwise commented upon.

GREATER FRIGATE BIRD *Fregata minor*

25/9/79: Two adults soaring over Tapeu hill in the evening.  
 23/2/80: One adult soared out of sight.

BANDED RAIL *Rallus philippensis goodsoni*

Wodzicki mentioned a mid-winter breeding season in 1969. Kinsky & Yaldwyn suggest that breeding appears to extend throughout the year. DM recorded chicks from mid-March through to late September in 1980.