

On 15 April 1984, AR and Clive Copeman saw two Orange-fronted Parakeets near the junction of the east and west branches of the Hawdon River at 850 m a.s.l., about 2 km from the first sighting. The birds, identified by their orange foreheads, were seen 10 m away, feeding in the upper understorey/lower canopy zone in mountain beech forest. They were not with other parakeets or with Yellowheads.

This century, only eight confirmed sightings of Orange-fronted Parakeets have been made (Harrison 1970, Gray 1982), the most recent being in 1980 by officers of the NZ Wildlife Service in the Hope-Kiwi area of North Canterbury, about 50 km from the Hawdon Valley. Our sighting is only the second this century from outside the midwest Nelson-North Canterbury region, the other being at Manapouri in 1949 (Tiley 1949).

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### BIRDS ON AITUTAKI, ATIU AND MAUKE, SOUTHERN COOK ISLANDS

Although there have been a number of accounts of the birds of Rarotonga in the past few years, records for other islands are still sparse. Holyoak's (1980) guide summarises the distribution on most of the islands of the group, based mainly on a visit in 1973. Since then Child (1981) has recorded birds on Aitutaki and his map includes the place names mentioned here. All these records are confined to the months July-September.

In November-December 1983 my wife and I visited the Southern Cook Islands, including Aitutaki (26 November to 2 December), Atiu (2-5 December) and Mauke (5-8 December). Aitutaki is an "almost atoll" with a large lagoon, one large volcanic island and 15 smaller motus. Atiu and Mauke are "concentric islands" with a central volcanic core surrounded by a ring of raised coral limestone (the makatea) and a fringing reef. Neither has a lagoon, access from the sea being through small canoe passages in the fringing reef. On both these islands the volcanic regions are cultivated and the makatea, with its very rough limestone surface, is covered with forest. Where the volcanic core meets the makatea there is usually a swampy area, parts of which are cultivated with taro plantations.

#### SYSTEMATIC LIST

Regular surveying of the lagoon at Aitutaki and the sea areas round Atiu and Mauke yielded no petrels, storm petrels or shearwaters. Child saw none from Aitutaki, but Holyoak saw nine species on interisland trips.

TABLE 1 — Shore birds seen on transect from Arutanga to the airport, Aitutaki, on 26 November 1983. Section A was counted in the morning, sections B and C in the afternoon. The first figures are the numbers of birds seen on the outward trip from the Rapae Motel and the figures in brackets are the numbers seen on the return trip.

Section	A	B	C
	Rapae Motel - Arutanga	Rapae Motel rocks	Rapae Motel - airport
Distance (km)	2.5	0.4	1.8
Wandering Tattler	24 (22)	2 (4)	12 (8)
Lesser Golden Plover	16 (17)	2 (2)	8 (6)
Reef Heron — dark phase	7 (7)	5 (5)	5 (2)
white phase	0 (0)	2 (2)	5 (3)
mottled phase	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)

#### WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon lepturus*

Two pairs on Aitutaki, one on the rock face just below the summit of Maungapu and the other on a rock face some 2 km further south. These are the only suitable nesting sites on the island. Both pairs kept landing on specific ledges, but nests could not be seen.

#### BLUE-FACED BOOBY *Sula dactylatra*

One over the southern end of Aitutaki lagoon on 27/11. Readily recognised at close range by the black tips to the wings and tail on a large white bird. This is the second record for the Southern Cook Islands and the first for Aitutaki.

#### LESSER FRIGATE BIRD *Fregata ariel*

Two adult males and one adult female seen on 1/12 flying over the northern end of Aitutaki. One male was seen over the north-eastern end of Atiu on 4/12. (At Titikaveka, Rarotonga, one male, one female, and one immature were seen together on 25/11, and one male on 8/12.)

#### REEF HERON *Ardea (Egretta) sacra*

Very common on Aitutaki on the main island and motus, and fishing from coral heads in the lagoon. A beach transect from Arutanga north to the airport on 26/11 (Table 1) yielded 25 herons, of which 17 were dark phase and seven white phase, giving a dark/white ratio of 2:5. One bird was in a mottled phase. We saw no white birds south of the Rapae Motel during this transect and on three further walks along this beach area saw only one. This suggests that each bird tends to patrol a specific stretch of beach. This is borne out by the fact that the mottled bird was always seen on the same part of the beach.

Numbers on Atiu were much lower, only five dark phase birds being seen, possibly because it has no lagoon. On Mauke only two birds, both dark phase, were seen.

GREY DUCK *Anas superciliosa*

Reported by Holyoak from all three islands and Child flushed a flock of ten on Aitutaki. We saw none on Aitutaki or Mauke, although we were informed that they were present on Mauke. We saw a pair on open water in a swamp on Atiu.

DOMESTIC FOWL *Gallus gallus*

Birds heard well away from habitations on Aitutaki and Atiu were presumably all feral. Birds seen on cultivated land on Atiu were said by our guide to be "wild," i.e. not owned by anybody.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

Common on shores round Aitutaki (see Table 1) and on open grassy spaces, frequently under trees. Not often seen on the fringing reefs of Atiu and Mauke (five birds on Atiu, three on Mauke) probably because they prefer soft muddy shores to the coarse sand of the makatea coast. Much commoner inland on these two islands on open grassy places (e.g. eight on the old airstrip on Atiu on 3/12).

WANDERING TATTLER *Heteroscelus incanus*

Holyoak noted that this is the commonest shore bird in the Cook Islands, although it had not been formally recorded from Aitutaki at that time. Subsequently Child recorded it from Aitutaki. Holyoak's comment is borne out by Table 1. On Atiu and Mauke it was uncommon along the coast, like the Golden Plover, but frequent inland on grassy places (e.g. eight on the old airstrip on Atiu on 3/12).

SIBERIAN TATTLER *H. brevipes*

One bird on the shore just north of Arutanga, Aitutaki, was a "different" tattler with a lack of barring on the underparts, paler grey upperparts, and a more conspicuous eyestripe. We finally decided that it was of this species, which was confirmed by its voice on the third sighting. Previously recorded for Aitutaki by Child.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

One seen on Papuaetai, Aitutaki (southern end of the lagoon), on 27/11 is only the second single bird seen on Aitutaki.

BROWN (COMMON) NODDY *Anous stolidus*

Five cruising low over and among coconut palms on Tapuaetai Island, Aitutaki, on 27/11, but no nests were distinguishable. Single birds frequently seen over Aitutaki lagoon.

BLACK NODDY *A. tenuirostris*

Three over Aitutaki lagoon and five resting on a sandspit on Tekopua Island, Aitutaki, on 27/11. Readily distinguished from the Brown Noddies nearby at the same time by their smaller size, darker plumage, and forked tail. Two over the fringing reef at Atiu on 4/12. Not listed for the Southern Cooks by Holyoak, but recorded for Aitutaki by Child.

WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

Frequent on all three islands among trees, although we saw no signs of eggs or chicks.

ATIU FRUIT DOVE *Ptilinopus rarotongensis goodwini*

This endemic subspecies on Atiu was more often heard than seen. We saw seven in the makatea forest and heard about 20.

PACIFIC PIGEON *Ducula pacifica*

Heard throughout the makatea forest on Atiu, but only one bird seen. It did not seem to be as common as the Fruit Dove. From the number of calls heard on Mauke it seems less common there than on Atiu.

TAHITI LORIKEET *Vini peruviana*

Now confined to Aitutaki, where it was probably introduced as a cage bird. It is readily located by its call, being the only land bird other than the Myna on the island, with which its call cannot be confused. It seemed to be especially vocal in the evenings. We heard or saw 21 along 1 km of road through coconut plantations and scrub in Amuri village on 1/12.

In view of its disappearance from Atiu and Mauke over the past century with only unconfirmed reports in recent years (see Holyoak), we listened for it carefully on these islands without success.

ATIU SWIFTLET *Aerodramus sawtelli*

Endemic to Atiu. Nine nests in the Cave of the Kopeka were occupied on 4/12 with either eggs being incubated or unfeathered nestlings in the nests. Five nests were apparently unoccupied. The nests were mostly on inaccessible ledges near the roof of the cave. One accessible empty nest was examined. It had a cup 7 cm diameter with a 2.5 cm wall and was built of coconut fibre.

CHATTERING KINGFISHER *Halcyon tuta*

Endemic subspecies occur on Atiu (*Halcyon tuta atiu*) and on Mauke (*H. t. mauke*). On Atiu the birds were thinly scattered throughout the makatea, being more often seen than heard. The Mauke subspecies seemed to be more abundant and was especially common along the road round the island through the makatea forest, where we saw or heard up to seven birds at one spot.

INDIAN MYNA *Acridotheres tristis*

Abundant in the inhabited areas of all three islands, but scarce or absent in the makatea forest. We found no nests, but newly fledged young were being fed in Arutanga village, Aitutaki, and fresh egg shells were noted in Amuri village, Aitutaki.

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