

## SOME RAROTONGA BIRD NOTES

My wife and I studied the birdlife of Rarotonga on 23-29 August and 4-6 September 1980. The following observations should be read in conjunction with Turbott's (1977) summary about the status of Rarotongan birds.

PACIFIC PIGEON *Ducula pacifica*

RAROTONGA FRUIT DOVE *Ptilinopus rarotongensis*

RAROTONGA STARLING *Aplonis cinerascens*

RAROTONGA FLYCATCHER *Pomarea dimidiata*

In four sorties into the forest we saw or heard a few of the first three species on each occasion. None could be considered common. We could not, however, find any flycatchers although much of the habitat looked very suitable. It must now be very rare indeed. Mr G. Sawtell of Rarotonga (pers. comm.) stated that in 1973 Dr D. Holyoak of the University of Sussex estimated 50-100 birds remained, but our experience suggests that the number could be even lower than this.

KINGFISHER *Halcyon* sp.

The Rarotongan kingfisher is thought to be extinct. (Many locals blame the Myna for destruction of native birds.) However, a young man who spoke excellent English informed me he had seen a kingfisher about 24 August near the bridge over Takuvaine Stream in Avarua; he was surprised as it was the first he had seen since his schooldays (to the end of 1979) in New Zealand. We did not find it.

INDIAN MYNA *Acridotheres tristis*

This bird was introduced about 50 years ago to control insect pests in citrus orchards but has gradually developed into a nuisance. On 3 September the government introduced a bounty of 10 cents per beak to encourage its elimination, and had set aside \$5000 for that purpose.

SIBERIAN TATTLER *Tringa brevipes*

Tattlers are the commonest wader around beaches and reefs, but of 102 examined, many at very close range, only 3 were considered to be of this species. These were seen on 4 September on the outskirts of a high-tide roosting flock of 34 Wandering Tattlers (*T. incana*) on the islet of Motutapu. This is a new record for Rarotonga.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

The next most common wader. Evidently just arriving on southern migration: on 23 August we could find only three — these were on the airport runway and one was sitting down! By 5 September at least 22 were on the airport grass verges and several dozen were scattered around the beaches and reefs.

REEF HERON *Egretta sacra*

We could find no white-phase birds; of 43 herons observed all were grey-phase except two, which were mottled (possibly the same bird seen on two consecutive days).

TROPICBIRDS *Phaethon* spp.

Both White-tailed (*P. lepturus*) and Red-tailed (*P. rubricauda*) are present and, although both were calling, giving display flights, and hovering around cliff ledges and cavities at The Needle and Maungatea Bluff, there was no positive evidence of nesting during this time. Odd individuals or pairs of both species were also seen over the reef or forested valleys. We estimated that in all localities we saw a total of about 28 White-tailed and 11 Red-tailed.

The Red-tailed seems to be a new record for Rarotonga.

GREATER FRIGATE BIRD *Fregata minor*

23 August: 1 adult female near the golf course coming inland at dusk with a flock of noddies. 24 August: 1 adult female and an immature male overhead near Arorangi village. 4 September: 1 adult female overhead at Ngatangia Passage.

BROWN BOOBY *Sula leucogaster*

On 24 August a fully grown immature was flying overhead above the palms near the airport, with a string dangling from one leg. A local ship-captain told me that people sometimes bring pet boobies and frigates from islands in the northern group.

COMMON NODDY *Anous stolidus*

The only noddy recorded, but more common than suggested by Turbott. Single birds were seen over the reef every day, and in the evenings small flocks returned inland to forested valleys; the largest flock seen contained 43 birds.

HERALD PETREL *Pterodroma arminjoniana heraldica*

Following Turbott's lead, we visited the Muri/Ngatangia area several times in late afternoon and observed petrels which we attributed to this species (mostly light-phase), as described by King (1967) and Harper & Kinsky (1978). Some birds were clearly observed as low as 50 m (i.e. not much higher than the coconut crowns); in general, they showed dark brown upperparts, wedge-shaped tail, darkish breast with no sharp line of demarcation between it and the white belly, varying pale mottling on the sides of the head, and white subterminal underwing 'flashes,' with an irregular whitish median line. Observations were made on 26 August, 28 August, 4 September, and 5 September. On 28 August, after sighting some at sea, we recorded eight flying inland between 4.30 and 5.15 pm, all single birds at roughly 5-minute intervals. The general pattern was the same on the other days, except that on 5 September, three actually flew in the opposite direction. The general path of the incoming birds was towards the high forested ridges between the Avana and Turangi valleys.

## REFERENCES

- HARPER, P. C.; KINSKY, F. C. 1978. Southern albatrosses and petrels. 116 pp. Price Milburn.  
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 TURBOTT, E. G. 1977. Rarotongan birds, with notes on land bird status. *Notornis* 24: 149-157.

PETER CHILD, 10 Royal Terrace, Alexandra.