

KAIPARA HARBOUR — EASTER 1978

By C. R. VEITCH

ABSTRACT

Between 24 and 27 March 1978, 61 members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand counted birds on and near Kaipara Harbour. Results are listed and tabulated. The northward migration of Arctic waders is noted. Unusual birds recorded for this area were Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Large Sand Dotterel (*Charadrius leschenaulti*), Black Stilt (*Himantopus novaezealandiae*), Black-fronted Tern (*Chlidonias albostratus*), and Fairy Tern (*Sterna nereis*).

INTRODUCTION

Kaipara Harbour has a total area of 94 700 hectares and a shore line length of about 612 kilometres (Heath 1976). It has large areas of open water north-west and south-west of the harbour entrance and to the north-east many long meandering arms (Fig. 1). These arms are fed by streams of varying size and larger rivers enter the main harbour in the north-west and south-east.

The intertidal area is about 40 900 ha of mud and sand flats (Heath 1976). More than 12 500 ha of this is covered by mangroves (*Avicennia resinifera*). The introduced grasses *Spartina alterniflora* and *S. townsendii* now cover some 500 ha of mudflat and are still spreading.

During Easter weekend, 24 to 27 March 1978, the following 61 OSNZ members observed and counted birds on and near Kaipara Harbour:—

M. Barnes, G. Bates, K. Bond, K. Brash, J. A. & B. Brown, B. Burch, L. R. Burgess, W. J. Campbell, S. Chamberlin, H. Cook, P. Cozens, D. E. & R. Crockett, A. T. Edgar, G. Eller, M. S. Field, T. P. Fisher, A. & A. Gordon, A. Habraken, R. Haddon, T. R. & H. Harty, J. Hawken, R. & P. Hooper, D. Hussey, S. Jenkins, M. Jones, D. A. & L. L. Lawrie, A. McCutchan, J. Meder, C. Miskelly, J. D. Morrison, A. McPherson, J. Northway, A. Palliser, R. Pierce, A. & J. Piesse, A. Prickett, M. Quinn, S. M. Reed, R. A. & M. E. Ringer, N. Rothwell, C. Schischka, R. B. Sibson, J. Stanger, J. Staniland, M. J. Taylor, R. N. & T. R. Thomas, C. R. Veitch, M. Wallis, G. Watson, K. Wells, P. & J. Wilkinson.

Seven teams covered the Poutu Peninsula, Tinopai Peninsula, Bickerstaffe area, Ngamotu area, Tapora, Glorit to Oyster Point, and South Head Peninsula (Fig. 1). Each team was divided so that within each of the above areas up to five roosts or areas could be counted at one time. The weather changed from fine with moderate south-west

winds on the Saturday (25 March) to fine with strong east winds on the Sunday.

Observers were supplied with two forms to complete:

1. Wader and waterbird census. This was for the recording of all waders and gannets, shags, herons, swans, ducks, gulls and terns on the Kaipara Harbour. The list named 36 species, and space was left for additions. Team leaders sent observers to known roosts or observation points to count birds on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 March at predetermined times set for the whole harbour, as near as possible to high tide.

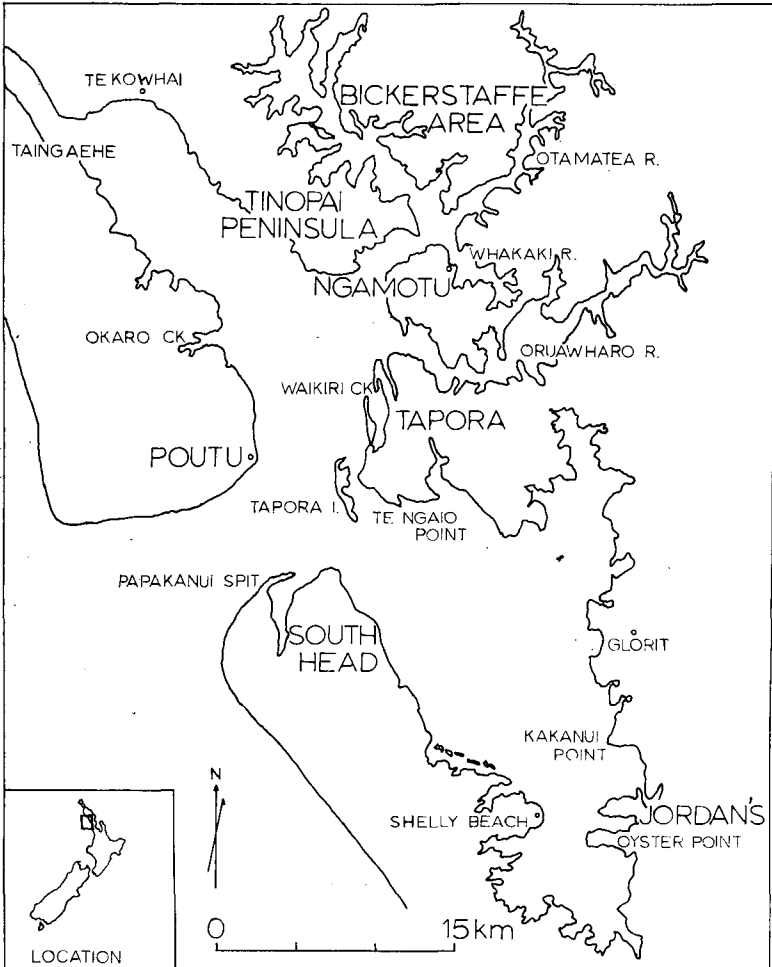


FIGURE 1 — Kaipara Harbour.

2. Casual bird list. This was to record all species at any place or time to be put later on Bird Distribution Mapping Scheme cards.

The Poutu team (nine observers) completed census forms for ten different places between Poutu and Taingaehe. Only one area was counted on both days. Okaro Creek had the most birds but many of the other bays and creeks along this coast had as many species, occasionally more.

On the Tinopai Peninsula most of the birds were found in the inlets on the north-east side. The same four areas were counted by nine observers on both days.

Around the Bickerstaffe area six places were counted by seven observers. Local knowledge and permission from landowners are needed to reach these roosts.

From Ngamotu three large areas were counted by ten observers along the Otamatea, Whakaki and Oruawharo Rivers. These areas were counted on both days with similar results. Local knowledge and permission from landowners are needed to reach these roosts.

Tapora has the largest suitable area within the harbour for roosting waders. Tapora Island is probably the least disturbed part of Kaipara Harbour although, in the Tapora area, more birds were roosting at Waikiri Creek. These localities and Te Ngaio Point were counted on both days by ten observers.

Jordan's had the greatest number of roosting birds. This roost and Oyster Point were counted by eleven observers on both days, while four different areas from a little south of Oyster Point north to Glorit were each counted on one day only. Access to most of the roosts between Oyster Point and Glorit is through private property.

At South Head the birds on Papakanui Spit were counted on both days. Three large areas, down to the southernmost part of the harbour, were counted, two on the Saturday and one on the Sunday. This area was covered by five observers. Access to most areas is over private land although Papakanui Spit, a Wildlife Refuge, can be reached by vehicle along the beach from Muriwai.

RESULTS

From the wader and waterbird census lists, the higher daily counts of the more abundant waders are given in Table 1 with comments as follows:

SOUTH ISLAND PIED OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus finschi*)

By far the most abundant species (c. 15 000, Table 1). As northward migration continues into April (Sibson 1970), it may be more abundant later in the year.

TABLE 1 — The higher daily counts of the more abundant waders on the Kaipara Harbour 25-26 March 1978.

	POUTU	TINOPAI	BICKERSTAFFE	NGAMOTU	WAIKIRI CREEK	TAPORA ISLAND	TE NGAIO POINT	GLORIT - KAKANUI	JORDAN'S	OYSTER POINT	SHELLY BCH - S-HEAD	PAPAKANUI SPIT	TOTALS
S. I. PIED OYSTERCATCHER	129	510	70	480	1800	1362	1300	2000	6500	350	-	430	14931
N. Z. DOTTEREL	-	-	-	-	11	57	-	-	2	25	-	39	134
BANDED DOTTEREL	-	-	-	80	38	72	12	-	3	300	-	-	505
WRYBILL	-	127	-	-	61	40	-	-	74	-	-	74	376
BAR-TAILED GODWIT	4	-	3	-	1000	900	9	185	2000	67	30	1405	5603
TURNSTONE	-	-	-	-	120	181	-	-	-	14	-	65	380
KNOT	3	-	3	-	1000	690	1	28	6000	2050	-	1010	10785
PIED STILT	137	960	255	1889	200	15	138	350	2000	54	147	-	6145

VARIABLE OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus unicolor*)

Alastair Gordon (pers. comm.) has seen more than a hundred in the northern reaches of the Kaipara during summer. The current census recorded 13 birds in the harbour and 30 at the more exposed Papakanui Spit where McKenzie (1965) recorded 13 in January 1965.

GREY PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

One recorded by R. Pierce and M. Barnes at the south end of Tabora Island on Saturday 25 March. This bird was first recognised by its trisyllabic call as it flew towards the observers who then had a good view of its black axillaries as it flew overhead. It did not appear to have any traces of breeding plumage. This is the second record for Kaipara Harbour.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica fulva*)

40 to 50 at the north end of Tabora Island and a further 31 at Oyster Point on the Saturday only.

NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL (*Charadrius obscurus*)

The Sunday total of 134 birds, found mainly at Waikiri Creek, the south end of Tabora Island, Oyster Point and Papakanui Spit, is a considerable increase on McKenzie's (1965) total of 79 in January 1965, although distribution is similar.

BANDED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius bicinctus*)

Some 500 birds, roosting mainly at Oyster Point (300), with fewer at other roosts (Table 1).

LARGE SAND DOTTEREL (*Charadrius leschenaulti*)

One, showing no signs of breeding plumage, was seen at Papakanui Spit on the Saturday with 3 NZ Dotterel by C. R. Veitch. This association of the two species clearly showed the leggier proportions (Sibson 1970) of the Large Sand Dotterel. Three were seen in this area during the 1965 census (McKenzie 1965).

WRYBILL (*Anarhynchus frontalis*)

Most (127) roosted on the northern shores of the Tinopai Peninsula at Raepere Creek with fewer at four other roosts (Table 1).

FAR-EASTERN CURLEW (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

One at Jordan's on both census days.

ASIATIC WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*)

Not recorded on the Saturday but 20 seen at Oyster Point by B. Brown and A. Habraken on the Sunday. These birds were carefully moved by the observers so that the diagnostic white rumps were seen.

ASIATIC BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa melanuroides*)

One seen by R. Pierce and M. Barnes at Te Ngaio Point on the Sunday.

EASTERN BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica baueri*)

A 14% reduction of numbers from 5603 counted on the Saturday to 4817 on the Sunday. 10 000 godwit had been at Jordan's on 3 March (B. Brown pers. comm.). McKenzie (1965) recorded

11 934 godwit on the Kaipara Harbour in January 1965. Since 1965, the population is likely to have increased, as have those of Manukau Harbour and the Firth of Thames (Veitch 1978). Numbers of waders are also likely to increase in northern harbours towards the end of summer and then drop rapidly (Bioreserches 1976). It therefore seems likely that the numbers counted on 26 March were nearly down to the winter population of 2000-3000.

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

A 32% reduction of numbers from 380 counted on the Saturday to 259 on the Sunday. Apparently also migrating northward but still more numerous than the 1965 summer count of 165 (McKenzie 1965).

KNOT (*Calidris canutus*)

A 48% reduction of numbers from 10 782 counted on the Saturday to 5640 on the Sunday. On 3 March 15 000 Knots had been seen at Jordan's (B. Brown, pers. comm.). This marked difference in numbers is surely due to northward migration.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*)

Not seen during this census. Apparently a very rare visitor. One seen in 1964 (McKenzie 1965) and one in March 1975 (S. M. Reed, pers. comm.).

RED-NECKED STINT (*Calidris ruficollis*)

Four seen at Papakanui Spit on the Sunday by R. A. Ringer and G. Watson. McKenzie (1965) recorded a total of 6 birds for the 1965 summer census, all at this site.

PIED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus leucocephalus*)

Some 6100 present, with relatively regular roosting habits despite the change of weather. Their more even distribution of roosts (Table 1) probably reflects their lack of dependence on the intertidal area for food.

BLACK STILT (*Himantopus novaezealandiae*)

One pure black and one "smudgy" bird (identified by C. R. Veitch and party) were with 180 Pied Stilts loafing on a salt marsh between stands of mangroves, about 6km north of Shelly Beach. Both birds were conspicuous because they were moving around and feeding while the Pied Stilts loafed. This is the same general area where 1 black and 5 smudgy stilts were seen in 1965 (McKenzie 1965). One smudgy stilt was seen at Moturemu Island (north of Glorit, Fig. 1) on 5 March 1977 (S. M. Reed, pers. comm.), and one smudgy stilt was seen by D. E. Crockett and party on the Otamatea River on 24 March 1978.

WATERBIRDS

The birds listed in the second half of the census form were not dependent on high tide roosts and are often very mobile. Where waders were abundant, observers concentrated on them as the first requirement of the census. Total numbers of waterbirds seen can therefore be taken only as an indication of numbers present and not as an accurate census.

TABLE 2 — The higher daily totals of shags, herons, ducks and gulls on and near the Kaipara Harbour 25-26 March 1978.

	POUTU	TINOPAI	BICKERSTAFFE	NGAMOTU	TAPORA	JORDAN'S GLORIT	OYSTER POINT	S. HEAD PENINSULA	TOTALS
BLACK SHAG	1	1	24	108	10	-	56	2	202
PIED SHAG	6	5	3	178	173	30	7	27	429
LITTLE BLACK SHAG	-	-	-	8	-	-	8	-	16
LITTLE SHAG	2	-	1	1	109	14	1	1	129
WHITE-FACED HERON	3	332	5	334	29	265	130	63	1161
WHITE HERON	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	8
REEF HERON	5	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
BLACK SWAN	-	-	-	8	445	3000	-	-	3453
PARADISE DUCK	-	-	4	21	-	-	-	14	39
MALLARD DUCK	-	-	122	150	-	-	-	13	285
GREY DUCK	-	-	-	30	6	-	-	25	61
GREY TEAL	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
SHOVELER DUCK	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	-	13
MIXED DUCK FLOCK	-	70	-	150	-	-	100	155	475
BLACK-BACKED GULL	13	51	30	30	30	14	1	114	283
RED-BILLED GULL	56	113	1	144	48	279	-	165	776

The higher of the two daily totals of shags, herons, ducks and gulls is listed in Table 2. Other species recorded were:

AUSTRALASIAN GANNET (*Sula bassana serrator*)

5 seen from the Tapura area on the Sunday.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*)

One was known to be in the Bickerstaffe area before the census but was not seen again until 29 April when it was with 5 White Herons and some White-faced Herons (M. Wallis, pers. comm.).

REEF HERON (*Egretta sacra*)

Titipu Island is a breeding place of long standing. 8 birds were seen there in January 1965 (B. Brown, pers. comm.). None were recorded during this census.

ARCTIC SKUA (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

Two seen from the northern end of Tapura Island on the Sunday.

BLACK-FRONTED TERN (*Chlidonias albostratus*)

On the Saturday two were seen at Waikiri Creek by S. Chamberlin and T. P. Fisher and later the same day one was seen near Te Kowhai by M. S. Field and C. Miskelly who, the next day, saw three in the same area.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

By far the most abundant tern with c. 300 being counted on both days. Most of these were at Papakanui Spit and Waikiri Creek

with smaller numbers being seen in most other areas. An average of 400 pairs nest at Papakanui Spit (B. D. Bell, pers. comm.).

FAIRY TERN (*Sterna nereis*)

One seen at Papakanui Spit on the Saturday (C. R. Veitch) and two at Waikiri Creek on the Sunday (S. M. Reed and party). A nest of this species was found on Tapora Island on 1 February 1976 (S. M. Reed, pers. comm.).

EASTERN LITTLE TERN (*Sterna albifrons sinensis*)

13 were seen on the Saturday and 44 on the Sunday. Of these, 35 were at Waikiri Creek (S. M. Reed and party).

WHITE-FRONTED TERN (*Sterna striata*)

19 were seen on the Sunday and 13 of these were at Whakaki River. In late December 1977, W. J. Campbell (pers. comm.) saw c. 850 White-fronted Terns at a nesting colony on the ocean beach west of Okaro Creek (Fig. 1). Some 650 birds were still in this area on 27 March 1978.

CASUAL BIRD LISTS

Some data from the casual birds lists have been included in Table 2. A. T. Edgar has completed 31 Bird Distribution Mapping Scheme cards from both casual and census lists.

DISCUSSION

The only previous survey of birdlife on the Kaipara Harbour took place in January 1965 (McKenzie 1965). Initially, the current survey was to be comparative but, because it was held some three months later, the data for most species can not be compared. Although more areas were covered than in 1965, there were still not enough observers to visit all wader roosts and observations points simultaneously.

It was apparent that Godwits, Knots and Turnstones were all moving northward in late March and that Godwits had nearly completed their departure.

I wish to thank B. Brown, S. M. Reed and D. E. Crockett, Regional Representatives of OSNZ, for assisting with the planning of this work. They and M. Wallis, A. & A. Gordon and L. Burgess organised teams in the field. D. Crouchley, Wildlife Service, drew the map (Fig 1).

Very special thanks to all who participated.

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