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SHORT NOTE

ARCTIC TERN IN MANUKAU HARBOUR

On the afternoon of 26 November 1980, Beth Brown, R. N. Thomas, A. Habraken and I met at Mangere beside No. 4 pond, Auckland Metropolitan Drainage Board, where three days before RNT had reported the sighting of a Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*). The day was very blustery and near full tide strong squalls were carrying spray over the Onehunga-Mangere bridge. In the lee of Puketutu Island 4 or 5 White-fronted Terns (*Sterna striata*) were fishing a channel which they commonly use in such westerly weather. Among them and sometimes harassed by them was a slightly smaller tern, showing greyish back and upper wing surface and a near-white rump and tail, deeply forked. It was a typical *Sterna*, not a tern of the *Chlidonias* persuasion. The stranger was taking a buffeting and tried to avoid the wind by settling among the scoria on the sea-wall road, where RNT was able to back the car within 10 m of it.

Some obvious features which we noticed at once were: bill black; crown and cap blackish brown at first glance, but moult starting and grey streaks beginning to appear; some breast feathers were dark with wet but lightened as they dried; for a while there seemed to be a white band almost round the lower neck contrasting with the grey of the nape and the mantle; legs coral red and very short; underparts and underwing white, not grey; wings long, slender and angular;

primaries, though frayed and worn, extended a little beyond the tail streamers of the resting bird.

Among the stones the bird rested uneasily, crouched as low as it could. The gale had clearly come at an inopportune time when the worn state of its primaries was diminishing its mobility and hampering the search for food, especially in competition with larger and fitter White-fronted Terns.

We concluded that it was an Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), probably an adult or subadult which had started the moult into winter plumage, since it had such an extensive dark cap. It could hardly have been a bird of the year which had just arrived from far-northern breeding grounds.

Records of Arctic Terns ashore in New Zealand during the southern spring are few. Presumably at this season some should be going south. Imber found one wrecked at Foxton Beach after westerly gales in mid-November 1963.

There are other Manukau records for autumn or winter, namely four at Huia on 22/3/61 and one dead at Ihumatao on 29/6/68. Similarly, two recent records from the Bay of Plenty belong to May and June. Nor should we overlook the possibility that subadult Arctic Terns may sometimes spend their first or even their second (southern) winter along the New Zealand coast, as many subadult northern waders do.

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REEF HERON ON NELSON HAVEN

At the top of Nelson Haven on 21 October in the late afternoon I noticed an unfamiliar bird flying fairly high to the north. Its neck was fully extended and looked very long. It was having difficulty making headway against the strong northerly and was finally forced to land on the tidal flats near Sewerside Drive.

I then had a close-up view and saw that it was a Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*). Two (resident?) White-faced Herons (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) immediately began swooping low over the Reef Heron which, after repeatedly ducking its head, flew several hundred metres down the Haven. The White-faced Herons followed and continued swooping but could not move the Reef Heron any further. They finally took up position a short distance away, and at dusk the three birds were still there.

This is only the second sighting of Reef Heron in Nelson Haven that I am aware of.

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