

In the New Zealand part of his journal, Best used as synonyms the terms *Pigeon*, *Wood Pigeon* and *Wood Quest* when referring to the New Zealand Pigeon (*Hemiphaga n. novaeseelandiae*).

I have therefore assumed that his references to pigeons and wood quests on Norfolk Island relate to the *Hemiphaga* pigeon rather than the dove (*Gallicolumba* (?) *norfolkensis*), both of which are now extinct.

NORFOLK ISLAND PARAKEET *Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae cookii*

Best recorded shooting five or six 'Lowries' in the bush at Ball's Bay on 21 September 1838, but on the following day he wrote "Got up at six to skin my birds, found them all too much shot about the body so cut off the wings and tail."

An editorial footnote to this entry, probably attributable to the late Sir Robert Falla, states "Any kind of parakeets would be loosely referred to as Lowries".

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Asiatic Dowitcher at the Heathcote-Avon Estuary, Christchurch

On 29 August 1985, Andrew Crossland visited the Heathcote-Avon estuary and found a wader that was unfamiliar to him.

The next day, Peter Langlands found the same bird on the western shore of the estuary and compared it with the Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) it was associating with. The bird was observed again by AC and PL for about one hour on 4 September. It was identified as a dowitcher (*Limnodromus* sp.) and other local observers were informed of the sighting.

On 6 September JF and JF found the bird in the same place feeding on the tidal mudflats with both Bar-tailed Godwit and five Asiatic Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa melanuroides*).

The dowitcher associated closely with the Bar-tailed Godwit, which it resembled in general colouring. However, the dowitcher could easily be distinguished by its smaller size, darker back, straight bill and different feeding technique.

The dowitcher was estimated to be about two-thirds the size of the Bar-tailed Godwit. Bar-tailed Godwits vary considerably in size, but the dowitcher was smaller than any of the godwit present.

Its back was grey-brown, and the lighter feather edgings made it look streaked. A dark brown patch at the bend of the wing was a feature noted by all of the observers. The nape was light brown and finely streaked. Its crown was grey-brown, and it had a light superciliary stripe and a darker eyestripe. No eye ring was distinguished.

The underparts were whitish with light brown barring on the flanks and under the tail. The tail looked brown, and the rump was pale with brown

barring visible on the upper tail-coverts. The wings were as long as the tail when folded.

When the bird was seen briefly in flight, its wing and rump pattern seemed similar to the Bar-tailed Godwit's.

The face tapered from the crown to the bill and looked noticeably different in shape from the high crown of the godwit. The bill was dark, straight, thickened at the tip and about twice the length of the head. The legs were dark and shorter than those of the godwit.

The bird fed actively, walking about with its bill pointing obliquely downwards, thrusting deeply into the mud to feed.

On the basis of size, straight bill, plumage characteristics and dark leg colour the bird was identified as an Asiatic Dowitcher (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*).

Identification features of the dowitcher species were summarised by Nisbet (1961).

The Asiatic Dowitcher is the largest dowitcher, being about the same size as a Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*). However, in plumage it most closely resembles a Bar-tailed Godwit. It has dark legs and the lower back and rump are closely barred white and dark brown, giving the tonal effect of being slightly paler than the rest of the back (Paige 1965).

The Long-billed Dowitcher (*L. scolopaceus*) and Short-billed Dowitcher (*L. griseus*) have greenish legs and a white back and rump.

The Asiatic Dowitcher is also distinguished from the Long-billed Dowitcher and generally from the Short-billed Dowitcher by a narrow white wingbar at the base of the primaries and secondaries in addition to the white tips to the secondaries common to both other species. Unfortunately our brief flight view did not let us see this character.

The Asiatic Dowitcher breeds in Siberia, Mongolia and northern China and migrates to south-eastern Asia. It winters on muddy estuaries, occasionally on inland lakes, mainly in Thailand, Indochina, the Malay Peninsula and India (de Schauensee 1984). It regularly reaches Australia, mainly on the northern coasts (Blakers *et al.* 1984).

This first New Zealand record has been accepted by the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee.

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