

## SUSPECTED UPLAND PLOVER (*BARTRAMIA LONGICAUDA*) IN MANUKAU HARBOUR

By H. R. McKENZIE

On a routine visit to the Karaka Shellbank on 28/2/67 a strange wader was found by a party of watchers, Miss M. C. R. McIntyre, Dr. Asa C. Thoresen, First Officer John A. F. Jenkins and H. R. McKenzie. As the cars pulled up on the slightly higher ground overlooking the semi-marine flat a large mixed flock of Knot, Turnstone, Pied Stilt, Red-breasted Dotterel, stirred uneasily then rested again. Banded Dotterels bobbed about over a large area. As soon as the cars stopped Miss McIntyre called, "What is that bird with a long neck running along at the back of the others?" The bird alternatively ran and paused, then stood, keeping clear of the attenuated patchy flock, giving ample time, an hour or more, for observing all the features visible. Notes were immediately taken, binoculars and 30 x telescope being used at 125 yards.

The bird kept moving to the right until it was hidden by a ditch bank with only its head showing so nothing more could be done for the time being. It was thought not to be a Grey Plover because of the general colour, size, shape and the very large eye, etc., but, there being no further detail to be obtained of it on the ground, to make absolutely sure it was decided to put it up and look for the axillaries. The party approached in an arc, pinning it against a ditch and fence. It rose sharply at about 125 yards, circled back overhead and went right away. There was no sign of the axillaries being different from the rest of the underwing so Grey Plover was ruled out. So intent was everyone on looking for the axillaries that the tail was not noticed to be long or short. However it was obvious that the underwing markings were of such diagnostic value that this was more important than the length of the tail. There was no opportunity of seeing the upper tail fully but it was seen to be generally dark, certainly with no white rump. Golden Plover appeared later but the bird was not with them. H.R.McK. returned the next day when Golden Plover were again present but it was not seen again. Miss McIntyre noted two other birds on the far side of the field which she was sure were of the same species. These she later saw fly when the first bird was put up.

### OBSERVATIONS TAKEN IN THE FIELD

The following points were noted by all members of the party, except where otherwise stated:

*Size:* A slim bird, similar to large Golden Plover but with longer neck.

*Bill:* Colour practically the same as Golden Plover. Heavy like Golden Plover but a little longer. J.A.F.J. noted a shallow depression on the upper bill, less pronounced than in Golden Plover. The others noted a slight downward curve of the fore part. In regard to shape, not size, this made the bill appear to be a mixture of that of a dotterel and a sandpiper.

*Head:* It had a small rounded head, much as Golden Plover. Crown brown. Side of face and a little about the bill and chin patterned whitish-yellowish with some fine dark marking on side of head, similar to but not the same as Stone Curlew, the light area round the eye being wider. The pattern was large for the size of the head.

*Eye:* The eye was so large in proportion to the head that this could well be accounted the most prominent feature for identification. The Grey Plover has a large eye but not nearly so large in proportion as in this bird.

*Neck:* The neck was longer and thinner than in Golden Plover and was held erect.

*Body Colour:* The neck all round, back and upper sides were a firm brown with no definite patterning noted. Miss McIntyre noted that the upper wing was dark, the primaries particularly so.

*Lower Breast and Belly:* The belly was all white, the white extending to the lower breast or fore-belly.

*Tail:* The unusually long tail of the bird was not noted because it kept its head high and tail down, the three inches or so of ground cover being too high to allow it to be seen.

*Legs:* The legs could not be accurately described because of the ground cover and were thought to resemble Golden Plover but (A.C.T.) more brown than grey.

*Underwing:* It was clearly seen, when the bird was flushed and overhead, that the underwing was wholly dusky with distinct and profuse darker barring. This was indeed striking. The axillaries did not show a contrast.

*Tail:* Missed, as already explained.

*Voice:* No call made.

H.R.McK. the same night studied several books and suspected that the bird might be an Upland Plover. There the matter rested until a U.S. visitor, returning home, sent back a new book, "Birds of North America, A Guide to Field Identification" (Robbins, Bruun, Zim and Singer). The three illustrations of this bird, p. 117, particularly the showing of the large eye and the barred underwing, satisfied him that the bird was indeed an Upland Plover so the matter was reopened with the other members of the party and their notes re-checked.

The following chart is made up from measurements of males as per Witherby. Averages are shown in brackets.

	Upland Plover	Ruff	Asiatic Golden Plover
Wing	155 - 176.5 (165)	186 - 198 (192)	165 - 174 (170)
Tail	72 - 84 (78)	61 - 68 (64)	59 - 64 (61)
Tarsus	44 - 52 (48)	45.5 - 52 (48)	39 - 46 (42)
Bill, from feathers	28 - 32.5 (31)	34 - 38 (36)	21 - 27 (24)

## DISCUSSION OF THE CHART

The Ruff and Golden Plover are chosen for comparison being near in size and shape, also because no other bird comes to mind as being similar to Upland Plover.

The Ruff is shown to have longer wings. It is of course a larger bird.

The 17 mm. difference in tail from the Golden Plover is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. The length of tail was not observed.

The tarsus was not closely observed.

Bill, from feathers: The comparison is important. The Ruff has a bill shaped like that of a Pectoral Sandpiper, the Golden Plover a dotterel-like bill, while that of the Upland Plover has less emphasised outlines so as to appear to be a mixture of the two.

## SOME REFERENCES TO LITERATURE

Dr. Asa C. Thoresen, Chairman Biology Department, Andrews University, Michigan, U.S.A., writes, "I have been through all of the good reference books and have compared yours and my notes with the information and pictures. I am convinced that we actually observed an Upland Plover (*Bartramia longicauda*)."

Witherby et. al. "The Handbook of British Birds," Vol. 4, pp. 181-184, give a fully detailed description. The bird was too far away for the patterning on the feathers to be noted and the underwing, seen only in shadow, was thought to be a little darker than the description. The drawing of the bill on p. 184, showing the shape, bears out exactly the field observations of the party.

Robbins, et. al "Birds of North America, A Guide to Field Identification." The notes taken are in line with the showing of the patterning of the head, the proportion of the very large eye to the small head, the underwing barring and the general body colour, p. 117.

Peterson, "A Field Guide to the Birds, Eastern Land and Water Birds," p. 103, shows more contrast between the upper and lower surfaces and agrees with Witherby in the yellow of the legs. It could be that the Karaka bird was not fully mature, being generally a little darker and with less leg colour. The eye is not shown to be abnormally large.

Stout, Matthiessen, Clem and Palmer, "The Shorebirds of North America," p. 111, emphasises the white more forward onto the breast as the Karaka bird and describes the legs as yellowish.

## DISCUSSION

There are rather wide differences in the literature referred to but none of the descriptions vitiates the notes taken in the field. The illustrations in Robbins, et. al. were shown to Miss McIntyre and J. A. F. Jenkins and they were both quite sure of the identification. J.A.F.J. put his finger across the neck and stated that the head and neck left to view provided sufficient evidence of the bird having been an Upland Plover or Bartram's Sandpiper.

This North American breeder migrates to Argentine and Chile. It has occurred widely as a straggler to Europe, more often to Britain. To the south Witherby has one record for Falkland Islands and there are two records for Australia, so it can well be expected to appear as a straggler in New Zealand.