

## SIGHTING OF GRASS WHISTLE-DUCKS

A note has been received of the sighting of a flock of 12 unusual ducks in January 1975, at Little Wanganui, about 16 km south of Karamea, Northwest Nelson. This was referred to the Rare Birds Committee, which has confirmed the sighting as a record of the Grass Whistle-Duck or Plumed Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna eytoni*).

Linda-Jane Stopforth of Karamea, reported that the ducks were present for about 10 days, feeding on grass seedheads and fossicking about on the ground; they roosted in two gum trees. She described them as having long necks and long pink legs with webbed feet. "Their feathers were grey with black tips, breast feathers seemed slightly striped. They had large side feathers cream in colour and very unusual, black bills and orange-pink eyes."

This is the fourth record of the species in New Zealand, but the first for nearly 80 years. Previous occurrences were Thames (1871), Kaitangata (14 birds, 1871), Ashburton (3 birds, 1894-6). (*Annotated Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*, OSNZ 1970: 36). Their arrival here is no surprise considering the distribution given by Slater (*Field Guide to Australian Birds — Non-Passerines*, 1971: 227): "Tropical Australia but isolated breeding colonies also occur inland as far south as the Murray River, and nomadic flocks can be seen at times almost anywhere in south-eastern Australia." It appears that one of these nomadic flocks crossed the Tasman in January; it may still be somewhere in New Zealand.

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## BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL IN THE MANAWATU

The 1974 Labour Day Weekend Field Study Course in the Manawatu was organised primarily to study the spread of the Black-fronted Dotterel in the Manawatu, and secondarily to survey local swamps for Spotless Crake and Marsh Crake.

The course extended from 8.00 p.m. Friday 25 October to noon on Monday 28 October, most meetings being held in the Teachers' College Science Department to organise field work and report back. On Saturday evening Sylvia Reed gave an illustrated talk on the Galapagos Islands, and on Sunday evening a buffet tea was enjoyed at the home of two of our local members.

The field work was highly successful. The Black-fronted Dotterel survey was conducted on the Manawatu, Oroua and Rangitikei Rivers (see table for details). Several Black-backed Gull colonies were found on the rivers. Using tape-recorded calls to lure the birds, Spotless Crakes were heard or seen at four localities and Marsh Crake