

A Ruff at Lake Wainono

On 1 November 1987, I found a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) at Lake Wainono, South Canterbury. When first seen the Ruff was feeding among Knots (*Calidris canutus*) and Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) at the northern end of the lake. It appeared similar in body size to the Knots but had longer legs. I made the following description using a x25 telescope from 20 m away.

Head, light buff with a short dark stripe behind the eye. Crown darker brown, continuing down the hind neck to back. Foreneck and breast streaked buff with a clear-cut pectoral line; rest of underparts white. Back brownish. Buff fringe to the dark wing-coverts gave a distinctive scaly appearance. Scapulars yellowish with black tips, forming a light patch above the coverts. Tail dark with lateral tail-coverts white. Underwing white with black tips to the primaries and a darkish leading edge near the carpal joint. A narrow white wing-bar showed in flight. Bill black, rather sturdy, straight and about head length. Eye dark and legs greenish.

Further observations were made at the south end of Lake Wainono two hours later, where I was able to photograph the Ruff with a 300 mm lens. Here the Ruff fed in shallow water (less than 5 cm), loosely associated with a small group of Wrybills (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (*Calidris acuminata*).

Compared with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, the Ruff was larger, with longer legs, a more elongate neck, and a disproportionately small head, and it had an upright stance. It fed with a rapid pecking motion similar to the sandpipers, and occasionally ran a few metres to a new area of the pond before feeding again. It flew erratically, with rapid wingbeats, and usually glided in to land. The Ruff was harassed twice by Pied Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) but chased Knots which appeared to approach too closely to it; otherwise it seemed indifferent to the waders around it.

Ruffs are sexually dimorphic in size, reeves (females) being distinctly smaller. The small size of the bird I saw indicated that it was a reeve. The buff (rather than white) sides to the head, scaly-looking coverts and greenish legs suggested that it was a juvenile (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

The Ruff was also seen by R.J. Pierce on 10 November.

There have been three previous records of Ruff in New Zealand. One was at Colac Bay, Southland, from December 1984 to March 1985 (Miskelly & Cooper 1985), two were at Lake Ellesmere, Canterbury, from December 1984 to January 1985 (Harrison *et al.* 1985), and one was in Hawke's Bay in November 1985 (M.J. Imber, *in litt.*).

I thank Ian McLean and Colin Miskelly for criticising this note.

LITERATURE CITED

- CRAMP, S.; SIMMONS, K. E. L. (eds) 1983. The Birds of the Western Palearctic. vol. 3. OUP.
HARRISON, K. C.; FENNELL, J.; FENNELL, J. 1985. Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) at Lake Ellesmere. *Notornis* 32: 332-333.
MISKELLY, C. M.; COOPER, W. J. 1985. A Ruff in Southland. *Notornis* 32: 329-330.
RICHARD MALONEY, *Zoology Dept, University of Canterbury, Christchurch*