

### Rare bird reports in 1991

In 1991, 33 records were considered by the Committee of which 19 were accepted. Most records not accepted were cases where the Committee was not convinced, on the evidence before it, that the identification to species level was fully established. This was particularly the case with a number of tern records from Alan Tennyson, where differentiation between Common and Arctic Tern proved difficult. As a result, seven records from the Waikanae River mouth are being held in the files as "Commic" terns. One other record is still under consideration by the Committee, as is a review of the 1984 Ringed Plover at Miranda. No records were rejected on the basis that a mistake had in fact been made. All records are held in the files of the Committee and thus are available for future review, which may subsequently revise the decision of the Committee.

The highlights of the year were the acceptance of two new species on to the New Zealand list – Chestnut Teal and American Golden Plover. With the latter species there had been a number of cases in recent years where the Committee instinctively felt that observers had seen this species but where the documented evidence was simply not sufficient for acceptance as the first New Zealand sighting. As the salient points for differentiating the Golden Plovers become more widely known, the number of acceptable reports is likely to increase.

### SYSTEMATIC LIST OF ACCEPTED RECORDS

This list follows the order and nomenclature of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand* (third edition 1990). Brief details of each sighting follow – full details are held in the files of the Committee and are available for further study.

#### ANTARCTIC FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialoides*

At sea 5 km N of Motiti Island, Bay of Plenty, 1 on 2/7/91 (J. Houston). Seen within 2 m of boat feeding on offal with Red-billed Gulls and Yellow-nosed Mollymawks, which intimidated it. Well north of the usual range for this species.

#### WHITE-BELLIED STORM PETREL *Fregatta grallaria*

Between Little and Great Barrier Islands, 1 on 8/1/91 (W. Pickwell). A solitary bird sighted along with numbers of White-faced Storm Petrels. The ninth record of this species off New Zealand.

#### BROWN BOOBY *Sula leucogaster*

Houhora Harbour, Northland. 1 present from October 1990 to April 1991 (R.J. Pierce & V. Hensley). This bird became well known to the locals, who referred to it as "the shearwater". It was caught at least twice on fishing lines from the Pukenui wharf!

#### LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata ariel*

Whangarei, Northland, 1 over city on 26/10/90 (R.J. Pierce & V. Hensley). Flew up the harbour and then circled above the city, gaining height before flying off. Most previous records have also been from the north.

**CHESTNUT TEAL** *Anas castanea*

Manawatu River estuary, 1 on 3 - 30/6/91 (J.L. & M. Moore & I. Saville). This male bird, which appeared to be in transition from 1st winter to adult plumage, associated with the flock of more than 150 Grey Teal which had gathered at the estuary during the shooting season. The behaviour of the bird and the status of known collections ruled against the likelihood of it having escaped from a collection.

**LARGE SAND DOTTEREL** *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Whangaparaoa River, Cape Runaway, BOP, 1 on 14/5/91 (M. Hutton). This wary bird was roosting with a small flock of Banded Dotterels, which gave a useful comparison.

**AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER** *Pluvialis dominica*

Karikari Peninsula, Northland, 1 on 27/1/91 (R.J. Pierce & G. Grant). The lone bird was associating with a flock of 57 *P. fulva*, which enabled detailed comparison under perfect viewing conditions. The first accepted New Zealand record of this species.

**SIBERIAN TATTLER** *Tringa brevipes*

Kaikoura, Marlborough, 1 on 20/11/90 (G.C. Saunders). A single bird associating with Turnstones.

**SOOTY TERN** *Sterna fuscata*

Kariotahi Beach, North Waikato, 1 dead on beach on 22/8/91 (J. Penney). The usual time of year and location for this species. The fresh plumage and the measurements facilitated identification. The bird is now held in the Auckland Museum.

**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Waimeha Stream mouth, Waikanae, Wellington, 1 dead on beach 22/11/82 (A.J.D. Tennyson). Could have been either a 1st summer bird moulting into 2nd winter plumage or an adult moulting into winter plumage. Remains deposited in the National Museum, Wellington.

**COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

Pukerua Bay, Wellington, 1 on 27/1/84; Waikanae river mouth, 1 on 28/1/84, 1 on 21-22/11/85; Waimeha Stream mouth, Waikanae, 1 on 21/11/85 (A.J.D. Tennyson). This series of sightings, together with those previously mentioned, which could not be determined to species level, suggest that this species may be a reasonably frequent visitor, as previously suspected. Correct identification requires very detailed descriptions and/or good photographs. With most birds turning up here an appreciation of the moult patterns of the species is necessary. The Pukerua Bay and Waikanae River sightings now constitute the first and second accepted records of this species in New Zealand. The third was in the Bay of Plenty on 8/4/84.

**FAN-TAILED CUCKOO** *Cacomantis flabelliformis*

Wanaka airport, Central Otago, 1 on 19 - 21/9/91 (M. Child & A. Anderson). This wary bird was trapped in the hangar, where it made short fast flights, fanning its tail only briefly on landing. This is the second record in New

Zealand. (The first was killed by a cat in 1960, and so this is the first bird to be seen alive.)

**SPINE-TAILED SWIFT** *Hirundapus caudacutus*

Cuvier Island, 1 on 2/12/91 (S. Rowe *et al.*). The bird was seen many times between 1000 and 1600 flying out to sea and circling back to gain height on the updrafts off the cliffs.

**FORK-TAILED SWIFT** *Apus pacificus*

South East Island, Chathams, 1 on 2/1/91 (M. & D. Bell). Observed for over an hour flying over the canopy with many banks and turns, presumably hawking insects. The first record from the Chathams.

**WHITE-BROWED WOODSWALLOW** *Artamus superciliosus*

Limeworks, Miranda, 1 on 21/9/91 (S. Chambers). The bird appeared after a series of fronts from Australia. It was found in the pasture and tidal swamp and was quite tame. It is probably the seventh bird recorded in New Zealand (the last sighting of the previous birds was in 1973). This is the first record from the North Island.

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**An inland record of the Pied Shag**

In New Zealand, the Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*) is not uncommon in coastal regions, although it is abundant only locally. It is restricted to the warmer parts of New Zealand and is "virtually absent from Hawkes Bay and the Wellington coast" (Falla *et al.* 1981, *The New Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*).

In February 1936, I saw a Pied Shag on a farm near Norsewood in southern Hawke's Bay. This locality is 400 m a.s.l. and, in a direct line, 45 km from the nearest seacoast, separated from it by coastal ranges running up to 750 m in height. By all the criteria the sighting of a Pied Shag there is suspect.

Unusual sightings, however, predicate unusual conditions, and on the day before the sighting a severe storm of tropical origin had swept down across the North Island. An indication of the severity of the conditions prevailing over the North Island on that day is that a Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*) was recorded from Lake Taupo (Oliver 1955, *New Zealand Birds*). Although Oliver's text does not relate the record to that storm, newspapers of the day included it as one of the notable events of the storm.

The farm dam where I saw the Pied Shag was kept under regular observation over a very long period. It was visited by the usual inland water birds, but I saw a Pied Shag only the once.