



OSNZ news

No. 24 September, 1982

NOTE: Deadline for the December issue will be 20th November.

Editor's Note

The editor thanks John Fennell for completing most of the copy of the June issue and getting it to the printers during the editor's absence overseas.

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Australasian wader studies

In August, 1980, the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union convened a meeting of people involved in wader studies from all Australian states, New Guinea and New Zealand. Richard Veitch represented New Zealand. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the state of wader counting and banding in Australasia. It was convened in response to both an increased interest in waders in Australasia and a request by the International Waterfowl Research Bureau for a study of waders in the Western Pacific region. Soon after this, the Australasian Wader Studies Group was formed and a full-time Secretary/Co-ordinator appointed. One subject raised at the outset was the necessity of New Zealand involvement if the results of research were to accurately document the waders of the Australasian region.

The aims of the Australasian Wader Studies Group are:

- (1) To obtain a comprehensive picture of the population and distribution in different seasons of resident and migrant waders in the Australasian region.
- (2) To determine the international migration routes used as well as those within the region, and to determine the migrational strategy of the many species which visit the area.
- (3) To monitor short and long term changes in population numbers, age structure and distribution of waders in Australasia.
- (4) To investigate the biology and requirements of waders as a basis for making recommendations on the manage-

ment and conservation of their populations and habitats.

(5) To co-ordinate wader banding activities throughout Australasia, and provide a forum for exchange of information on catching techniques and results.

Members of the A.W.S.G. receive the bi-annual journal "The Stilt" which contains articles from Australia and New Zealand, a round up of wader recoveries, a register of colour marking schemes and lists of recent publications on waders in Australasian journals and newsletters.

Already in Australia, three nation-wide counts have been organised, and the latest count (Feb. 1982) resulted in over 600,000 waders being counted. It is hoped that New Zealand can participate in these counts in future. There are already banding projects being undertaken in New Zealand, and it is hoped that the results of these activities can be better publicised through the A.W.S.G.

Anyone wishing to conduct counts or even become a regional organiser for wader counts in their area, should contact A.W.S.G. Co-ordinator, 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, 3039, Victoria, Australia. The membership fee is \$3.00 Australian (payable in Australian currency), sent to the same address.

BRETT LANE & RICHARD VEITCH

More flaxbirds

We were interested to read in the last *OSNZ news* of the observations of birds on flax flowers. In our garden at Te Kuiti the flax had a good flowering season too, and constant visitors to drink the nectar were the Silvereyes, Starlings and Mynas, with Tuis coming at quiet times of the day.

The flowers have produced an abundant seed crop, which we have often seen Chaffinches feeding on, but no other birds seem to take an interest. There is a notable lack of finches in this region, so we would be interested to know what species of birds others have observed feeding on flax flowers.

GILLIAN & ROB GUEST

Edited by PAUL SAGAR, 38A Yardley Street, Christchurch 4, for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

Please note that sightings recorded in this Newsletter are subject to confirmation.

Starving N.Z. Pigeons

Twice this winter I have received N.Z. Pigeons from the South Road area of Mamaku. On arrival both birds were emaciated, had poor balance, were able to fly only short distances, if at all, and were scouring badly. However, in both birds the plumage was in fine condition, indicating that starvation had not been prolonged.

Bird number 1. was passed to the Wildlife Service by a local farmer, who saw it fluttering on the ground while shifting stock that were grazing under Tawa. It was passed into my care and examined by a veterinary surgeon, who confirmed by opinion that the bird was starving. This bird died later.

Bird number 2. was seen to flutter to the ground and was collected by a bushman in a Tawa block that was being clearfelled. At the time of writing it is feeding and appears to be doing well.

This is the first time in 5 years of handling injured birds that I have received any birds that appeared to be dying of starvation.

BRENT CALDER

Territorial godwits?

On 24/4/81 I visited Karaka Shellbank and while there saw a high flying N.Z. Pigeon pass overhead at about 100 m. The pigeon was being harried by a Bar-tailed Godwit, which followed closely behind occasionally jinking from side to side.

On 2/1/82 in the same area I observed a similar incident, although in this case the bird being harried was a Far Eastern Curlew. Although many other birds were in the air at these times, the chasing was only carried out by one bird on each occasion. Perhaps surprisingly, none of the Harriers in the area was seen to be chased by godwits. Would this behaviour have something to do with territorial interests in same wintering waders?

K. J. FISHER

A major world wintering ground for migratory waders

Australian ornithologists have discovered from ground-and-air surveys several wader wintering sites of major importance.

The Australasian Wader Study Group surveyed the northern coast of Australia during August and September 1981 and located several areas with vast numbers of wading birds.

With the increased interest in offshore oil and gas exploration on Australia's north-west shelf such a discovery is very timely.

Over 2800 kilometers were surveyed from the air, from Kurumba (eastern Gulf of Carpentaria) to Port Hedland (Western Australia).

The south-eastern corner of the Gulf harboured 61 000 birds and the Broome to Port Hedland area had 145 000 birds of 25 species.

Of particular interest were the following species totals — Great Knot (40 000), Red-necked Stint (32 000), Curlew Sandpiper (25 000), Eastern Knot (20 000), Bar-tailed Godwit (18 000), Large Sand Dotterel (5000), Grey-tailed Tattler (1200), Eastern Curlew (1000) and Oriental Plover (1000).

More information about this survey appeared in RAOU Newsletter 50 (December 1981).

JOHN MARTINDALE & CLIVE MINTON

Whitehead and Long-tailed Cuckoos

Is a Whitehead???

- a geriatric
- a professional ceiling painter
- a North Island passerine
- a female Paradise Duck
- a person with a mortgage and five children.

If you did not answer (c) above, then please read Falla *et al.* page 193 before continuing. If you answered correctly — congratulations and commiserations because WE NEED YOUR HELP!!

At the AGM in May it was decided that the OSNZ would encourage a study of Whiteheads, and their parasite the Long-tailed Cuckoo, throughout the North Island during 1982-83.

We do not plan to conduct a definitive distribution survey, for the Atlas work of the 1970's has given a reasonable picture of this (although any records north of the Waikato or from the Ruahines would be welcome). The emphasis will be on habitat use and abund-

ance of the birds:— where they occur, the number located within a defined period, and any flocking behaviour observed.

It is hoped to elucidate the dependence of the Long-tailed Cuckoo on Whiteheads e.g. are those cuckoos seen in Northland merely on migration, or are they resident during the breeding season and using other species as hosts? Records of either species during the period October-January should help us to resolve this.

The aggregation of Whiteheads, both during the breeding season (polygamy?) and during the winter (relationships with other species?) are particularly worthy of attention, especially in those areas where Whiteheads are not uncommon. Any information on nesting should be entered into the Nest Record Scheme in the usual way, but we would appreciate hearing about any interesting observations.

It is hoped to expand our knowledge of habitat selection by Whiteheads, a species by no means confined to native forest in some areas of its range. Relative abundance in differing habitats should help to indicate the range and nature of the population in different parts of the North Island.

If you feel you can help in any way, cards are available to aid in the recording of relevant information from your Regional Representative and the survey organisers — John Innes, Forest Research Institute, Private Bag, Rotorua, and Rob Guest, N.Z. Forest Service, Te Kuiti.
JOHN INNES & ROB GUEST

Rare Birds Committee

Annual Report for the period June 1981 to April 1982.

Apart from the activities involved with making a fresh start, the Committee has dealt with the following reports of Unusual Birds.

1. A Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Ahuriri, Napier, 2 March 1968. Not Accepted.

We are agreed that this bird could hardly have been anything else, but as the description was incomplete and the identification was by elimination of other possibilities rather than a positive identification from a full description, we felt that this was not enough to establish a first N.Z. record. A fuller description and more details from further visits with supporting accounts from other observers would have helped here.

2. A Crested Tern, near Napier, 23 April 1981. Accepted.

This species has since been transferred to the 'local level' list and does not

need to be confirmed by the Committee.

3. A White-necked Heron, near Kerikeri, 3 October 1981. Accepted.

4. An Antarctic Tern, Waikanae River, 8 November 1981. Not Accepted.

A difficult bird to identify, partly due to our present incomplete knowledge. A number of unclear points and minor discrepancies made positive identification impossible. A pity that some of the many willing local birdwatchers were not called out to add their observations and possibly to settle the identification.

5. A Great Knot, Farewell Spit, 19-21 November 1981. Accepted.

And four reports of Common Terns:—

1. 1, Point Chevalier, Auckland, 21 November 1980.

2. 1 or 2, Lake Horowhenua, Levin, 29 November 1980.

3. 1, Hokianga Harbour, 30 November, 1980.

4. 5 to 8, Palliser Point, Wellington, 29 October 1981.

None of these is accepted at present.

These reports included full descriptions, photographs and reports from more than one observer of the same bird or birds. Non-acceptance is on the grounds of our ignorance rather than shortcomings on the observers' part. As we receive more details of the eastern race of this species, these reports will be reviewed and it is hoped that most will be eventually accepted.

We would like to receive accounts of birds that may be of this species, however doubtful, if reasonable observations have been noted.

Committee Members:— B. D. Bell, Dr B. D. Bell, B. D. Heather, P. M. Sagar and J. E. Squire.

J. E. SQUIRE, *Secretary*

Black-fronted Tern inquiry

In the absence of the South Island co-ordinator on higher things overseas, the North Island co-ordinator has struggled on without knowing what has been happening in some critical parts of the South Island. Therefore, he cannot give a complete report for the June-July period.

North Island

We think we now have a reasonable idea of numbers and the seasonal timetable because events are simpler and numbers much fewer than in the south. We know that more of the terns come north than most North Islanders realised but far fewer than many South Islanders thought, on analogy with waders. In the