

1990 report on rare birds in New Zealand

The working of the Rare Birds Committee

This report gives details of rare bird sightings submitted to the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee in 1990. The Committee consisted of eight members: Ben Bell, Brian Bell, Barrie Heather, Paddy Latham, Ray Pierce, Mike Imber, Paul Sagar and Dick Sibson, serviced by the Hon. Secretary, Rob Guest.

Species considered rare in New Zealand have been classified into national rarities and rarities of local importance. A listing of this classification was published in *OSNZ News* No. 38 (March 1986), a copy of which is held by each Regional Representative. The Committee is in the process of reviewing this system. Sightings of local rarities do not necessarily have to be forwarded to the Committee, although in practice many are – particularly the less regular or difficult to identify species. Descriptions are generally summarised on an "Unusual Bird Report" form and forwarded through the OSNZ Regional Representative for the region where the sighting occurred. The record is usually sent simultaneously to all members of the Committee, and then the observer is advised of the concensus view. Occasionally there is no concensus, and so the record is sent again to the Committee. If further expertise is required or if the sighting is of sufficient importance, the record may be referred overseas. Accepted records become valid for inclusion in the *OSNZ Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*.

Rare bird reports in 1990

In 1990, 32 records were sent to the Committee, of which 84% were accepted. For the vast majority of records not accepted, the Committee was not convinced, on the evidence before it, that the identification was fully established. In only a very few cases is it satisfied that a mistake has in fact been made. All such records are still held in the files of the Committee and thus are available for future review, which may revise the decision of the Committee.

A series of tern sightings from the previous year is still under consideration by the Committee, as is a review of an earlier decision from 1984.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF ACCEPTED RECORDS

This list follows the order and nomenclature of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*. Brief details are given of each sighting; full details are held in the files of the Committee and are available for further study.

CHATHAM ISLAND MOLLYMAWK *Diomedea cauta eremita*

Kaikoura, 1 at sea on 22/8/90 (P. Langlands and C. Gladwin). Bird observed from a fishing boat some 10 nautical miles SE of Kaikoura. Presence of Shy and Salvin's Mollymawks near the boat at the time allowed adequate comparison with the distinctive grey neck and head and yellowish bill of this bird.

CHRISTMAS ISLAND SHEARWATER *Puffinus nativitatis*

Curtis Island, Kermadecs, 1 on 10/11/1989 (A.J.D. Tennyson and G.A. Taylor). The bird was ashore at night with Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and was captured and measured. The bird could have been prospecting but a small breeding colony is also a possibility.

STEJNEGER'S PETREL *Pterodroma longirostris*

Pukerua Bay, Wellington, 1 dead on beach 30/12/89 (A.J.D. Tennyson). The 8th record of this species, which was found at the same time of year as previous records. Specimen held in National Museum.

PYCROFT'S PETREL *Pterodroma pycrofti*

Muriwai Beach, Auckland, 1 dead on beach 7/5/89 (A.J.D. Tennyson and team). Poorly ossified bones suggested that the bird had recently fledged.

NEW CALEDONIAN PETREL *Pterodroma leucoptera caledonica*

Muriwai Beach, Auckland, 1 dead on beach 7/5/89 (A.J.D. Tennyson and team). The usual locality and time for finding this uncommon petrel.

SOFT-PLUMAGED PETREL *Pterodroma mollis*

At sea 150 - 200 km NW of Great Barrier Island, 2 on 13/11/89 (A.J.D. Tennyson and G.A. Taylor). This species predictably frequents seas in that area at that time of year – supported by beach wrecks from Bay of Plenty and eastern Northland.

MAGELLANIC PENGUIN *Spheniscus magellanicus*

Otago Harbour, Otago, 1 from 18/3/90 (J. Darby). This bird, the second for NZ, had obviously been captive – taking food from the hand and greeting its handler, etc. When found, the bird was moulting, probably a juvenile, and could have been a Galapagos Penguin (*S. mendiculus*). Subsequent development, four weeks after capture, confirmed the bird as Magellanic.

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon rubricauda*

Muriwai Beach, Auckland, 1 dead on beach on 6/5/90 (A.J.D. Tennyson and G. Eller). A rare species only found about once a decade. This was a juvenile bird. Specimen now in the National Museum.

INTERMEDIATE EGRET *Egretta intermedia*

Lake Ryan and Blaketown Lagoon, Cobden, West Coast, 1 on 18/3/90 and 5/4/90 (U. Walthert, S. and P. Lauder). A White Heron also present allowed size comparison; kink in neck was visible.

YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL *Platalea flavipes*

Te Whiti, Wairarapa, 1 on 12/12/1980 (C. Scadden and T. Dennison). The second record of this species. Unlike the first record, this bird was seen only once, fortunately long enough to be photographed.

GRASS WHISTLING DUCK *Dendrocygna eytoni*

Haast Beach, Westland, 6 on 25/3/90 (B. Edwards and M. Thomas). This flock of most distinctive birds remained in grass paddocks for some three

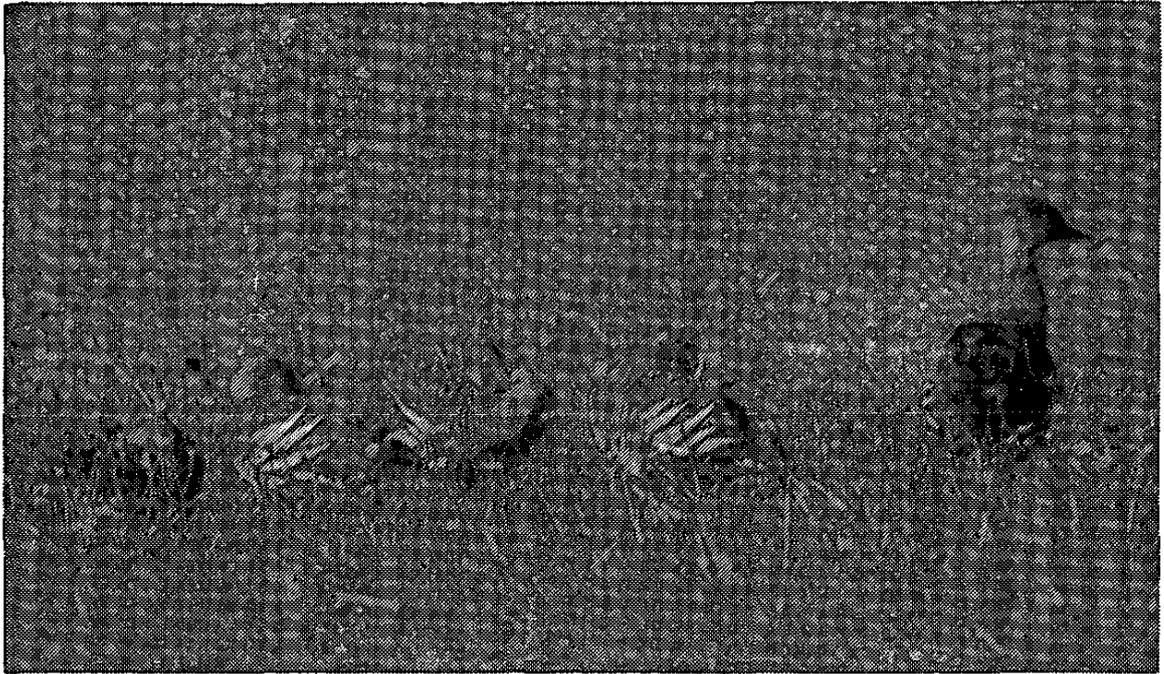


FIGURE 1 — Grass Whistling Ducks, Haast Beach

Photo: Bruce Edwards

weeks feeding on grass seed heads etc. and were quite approachable but prone to sudden flight. Excellent photographs obtained.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

Enderby Island, Auckland Is., 1 from 14 November 1989 to mid-January 1990 (P.J. McClelland and P.J. Moore). The first record from these islands. A lone bird associated with a roost of Auckland Island Shags. Subsequently seen by a number of observers.

PINK-EARED DUCK *Malacorhynchus membranaceus*

Mangere Sewage Pond, Auckland, June - July 1990 (G.J. Eller, K. Haslett, R.B. Sibson). This striking bird associated with the Mallards rather than Shoveler or Grey Teal and was well seen by many observers during its stay. All distinguishing features were well noted, including the ear. Good photographs.

NORTHERN SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*

Kaikorai Estuary, Otago, 1 on 19/8/90 (P. Garside). An unmistakable male bird among a flock of Mallard. The 8th record of this species since 1968.

NANKEEN KESTREL *Falco cenchroides*

Korere, Nelson, 1 from 9/5/90 to 1/6/90 (I. Arnold). Blenheim, Marlborough, 1 on 23/5/90 (P. Visser). Westport, West Coast, 1 on 14/5/90 (J. McCallum). Cambridge, Waikato, 1 on 14/5/90 (A. Bradbury). The four submitted records indicate the irruption of this species in May 1990, when 13-15 birds were recorded throughout the country. Records not noted here included a further 7 birds between Hokitika and Westport with extras at Cape Maria van Dieman, Northland; Rangiwahia, Manawatu; and Te Mata Peak, Hawke's Bay. The largest irruption to date.

MONGOLIAN DOTTEREL *Charadrius mongolus*

Aramoana mudflats, Otago, 1 on 3-4/6/90 (P. Schweigman, D. J. Onley, K. Gager). The bird was feeding with Banded Dotterel for a number of hours allowing detailed descriptions and some fine drawings by DJO. Some plumage features more typical of Large Sand Dotterel were observed (e.g. pale lores and rump) but size and flight characteristics pointed to *C. mongolus* — possibly a first-year bird.



FIGURE 2 — Common Tern, Northland

Photo: Alan Tennyson

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Pouto Lakes and Beach, Northland, 1 on 24-25/2/90 (A.J.D. Tennyson and G. Pulham). Good viewing conditions were supported by excellent photos, which clearly differentiated this increasingly common (!) tern from Arctic with the leg length and dark carpal bar most obvious.

COMMON NODDY *Anous stolidus*

Curtis Island, Kermadecs, c.25 pairs, 14/10 to 12/11 (A.J.D. Tennyson and G.A. Taylor). The first record this century and the first recorded breeding in the New Zealand region. The nests were fairly solitary bulky structures on cliff ledges and very steep slopes.

WHITE-CAPPED NODDY *Anous tenuirostris*

Rangaunu Harbour, Northland, 1 on 2/9/90 (S and J Rowe). The bird was patrolling the current convergence some 500 metres offshore and fishing the same stretch of water as Red-billed Gulls.

WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

Muriwai Beach, Auckland, 1 dead on beach on 6/5/90 (N. Rothwell and team). The black bill with the greyish blue at the base of the upper mandible was still clear on the specimen, which is held in the Auckland Museum.

PALLID CUCKOO *Cuculus pallidus*

Omarama, Otago, 1 on 12/1/90 (A. Anderson). Bird sitting on a power line by the roadside. As it flew, the white scallops down the outside edge of the tail feathers were clearly visible. Only the 5th record of this species.

SHINING CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx lucidus*

Ocean Island, Auckland Is, 1 on 30/11/89 (P.J. McClelland and P.J. Moore). The first record of this species from the Aucklands. The bird was seen feeding on the ground. The NZ subspecies *C.l. lucidus* is the most likely subspecies.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

New Plymouth, Taranaki, 1 found dead in streamside bush within city, 17/8/90 (R. Lambert). This find followed 10 days of 30-50 knot winds of unusual consistency (NZ Met. Service). The specimen, which is held in the Taranaki Museum, is the 6th record of the species in New Zealand.

BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE *Coracina novaehollandiae*

Tarras, Central Otago, 1 on 4/3/90 (A. Anderson). An adult noted after a prolonged period of strong westerly winds. The 13th record of the species and the 10th this century.

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Further comments on J.R. Forster's observations of helicoidal intestines in the Procellariidae

Storrs Olson (1990) drew attention to J.R. Forster's observations of helicoidal intestines noted by him in specimens of Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*, White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessonii* and Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea* collected some two centuries ago in the course of Cook's second voyage. Because this morphological condition supposedly occurs only in most *Pterodroma* species (Imber 1985:199), Olson considered that perhaps faulty recollection or editorial reordering of the sequence of the relevant Forster species would account for the apparent discrepancies.

The four volume manuscript of Reinhold Forster's *Descriptiones Animalium*, edited by Lichtenstein and published in 1844, is in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin under Ms.lat.qu.133-136. The descriptions of the five Forster procellariid species referred to by Olson, namely *Procellaria antarctica* (= *Thalassoica antarctica*), *Procellaria inexpectata* (= *Pterodroma inexpectata*), *Procellaria tristis* (= *Puffinus griseus*), *Procellaria leucocephala* (= *Pterodroma lessonii*), and *Procellaria haesitata* (= *Procellaria cinerea*), appear in Volume 2 (Ms.lat.qu.134) at folios 129, 130, 131, 132 and 133 respectively. The observations on the intestines, quoted and translated in Olson, are at folio 134.