

SHORT NOTE

A 1952 record of snipe on Campbell Island

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The Campbell Island snipe (*Coenocorypha* undescribed sp.) was discovered in 1997, and no earlier acceptable records are known (Miskelly 2000; Barker *et al.* 2005). Following the eradication of rats on 11,268 ha Campbell I in 2001, snipe began to recolonise the main island from their only known refuge on 19 ha Jacquemart I off the south coast. A survey of the recolonising birds was undertaken in Jan 2006 (Miskelly 2006; Miskelly & Fraser 2006). The issue of *New Zealand geographic* following Miskelly (2006) contained a letter by Shirley Hayes claiming that her late husband Ralph Hayes had seen snipe on Campbell I in the early 1950s. Hayes had seen snipe in England, and his description of the Campbell I birds "flying straight up when disturbed" is consistent with the behaviour of *Coenocorypha* snipe, and unlikely to apply to any other vagrant wader that may have strayed to Campbell I (with the possible exception of Japanese snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*).

Ralph Hayes was a meteorological observer on Campbell I from Jul 1952 to Dec 1954. Unfortunately he did not keep a personal diary (Shirley Hayes, pers. comm.), but the Officers-In-Charge of the Meteorological Station, C.P.B. (Pat) Sewell and Laurie McManus, entered daily summaries of work and activities in the official monthly diaries. The Campbell Island Station Diaries are held in National Archives, Wellington (AAPR, Acc W3350, Box 5); they contain no mention of snipe during the time that Hayes was present. However, they do record the very few occasions when personnel travelled far from the base, and it appears that there was only a single date when Hayes visited the part of Campbell I where snipe were most likely to be seen. On 16 Nov 1952, Hayes, Pat Sewell, and fellow meteorological observer Trevor Talbot walked to Eboulé Peninsula (the nearest part of Campbell I to Jacquemart I) via the western side of Six Foot Lake, the site where snipe have recolonised the main island since 2001.

Shirley Hayes did not know where Sewell and Talbot had settled after their return to mainland New Zealand. Tracking them down required "cold-calling", people with the right surname in the New

Zealand White Pages. Fortunately, New Zealand is a small country! Both men ended up in Auckland, but sadly Pat Sewell died in 1996. Trevor Talbot still lives in Howick, but has no strong recollection of seeing or hearing about snipe while on Campbell I.

The rate at which snipe have recolonised Campbell I since rat eradication indicates that snipe frequently cross the 1 km water gap from Jacquemart I, and must have done so for the 175 or so years that rats were present on Campbell I. It was assumed that birds attempting to colonise before 2001 were killed by Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) or feral cats (*Felix catus*) before they were noticed (Barker *et al.* 2005). Ralph Hayes's intriguing report suggests that some birds were seen before 2001, but that their significance was not recognised at the time. There is a slight chance that Hayes reported the sighting to Dr Robert A. Falla, and that it may yet come to light among Falla's papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library. Unless that happens, the Hayes sighting will have to remain an unconfirmed early record of *Coenocorypha* snipe on Campbell I.

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