

## SHORT NOTES

### New and rare bird records for Raoul Island

During a visit from 22 to 28 October 1995, two new species of birds for Raoul Island (29°16'S, 177°55'W) in the Kermadec Group were recorded. Three further species which have rarely been recorded there were also seen.

#### Giant Petrel (*Macronectes sp.*).

The beach-cast carcass of a giant petrel which had been long ashore was found on 25 October 1995 on Denham Bay beach on the south-west coast of Raoul Island, at approximately 29°16'S, 177°56'W. The disintegrating remains were substantially buried in sand at the very highest high water mark, where the bare sand met the first vegetation. The plumage was wholly dark indicating that this was a juvenile of either Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) or Northern Giant Petrel (*M. balli*). The only previous records of giant petrels at the Kermadec Islands (Merton 1970) were one seen off the coast of Macauley Island in August 1966, and one seen off the coast of Meyer Island in December 1966. Both species of giant petrel have a circumpolar range in sub-Antarctic and Antarctic waters and breed in those latitudes. Immatures of *M. balli* have been recovered as far north as 23° - 25°S off South West Africa, 25°S off Western Australia, and 20°S off South America. Immatures of *M. giganteus* disperse further north than *M. balli*, and there have been recoveries from Mauritius, New Guinea, Fiji, Tahiti and Easter Island (Marchant & Higgins 1990). On this visit to Raoul Island, there were four sightings during the three day voyage from Auckland, the furthest north being at 31°33'S, 179°51'E, but none on the return voyage.

#### Blue Petrel (*Halobaena caerulea*).

The fairly fresh beach-cast carcass of a blue petrel was found on 23 October 1995 on Onerahi Beach on the northern coast of Raoul Island, at approximately 29°15'S, 177°56'W. The body had been partly eaten (presumably by a mammal), but head, legs and feet, wings and tail were all present, so identification was possible.

This is the first record of this species in the Kermadec Islands. The blue petrel is a circumpolar breeder, on sub-Antarctic islands. Adults may disperse only to adjacent waters (Marchant & Higgins 1990), but non-breeders move north from pack-ice in winter to about 30°S and up to 20°S off Peru. This species is found in low numbers as beach wrecks on the main islands of New Zealand, particularly on the west coast of the North Island, mostly during August to October (Taylor 1996).

#### Paradise Shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*).

A male paradise shelduck was observed on 26 October 1995 at Blue Lake on Raoul Island. From a vantage point on the edge of the cliffs on the northern side of the lake, we observed it with binoculars and telescope. It took off and flew across

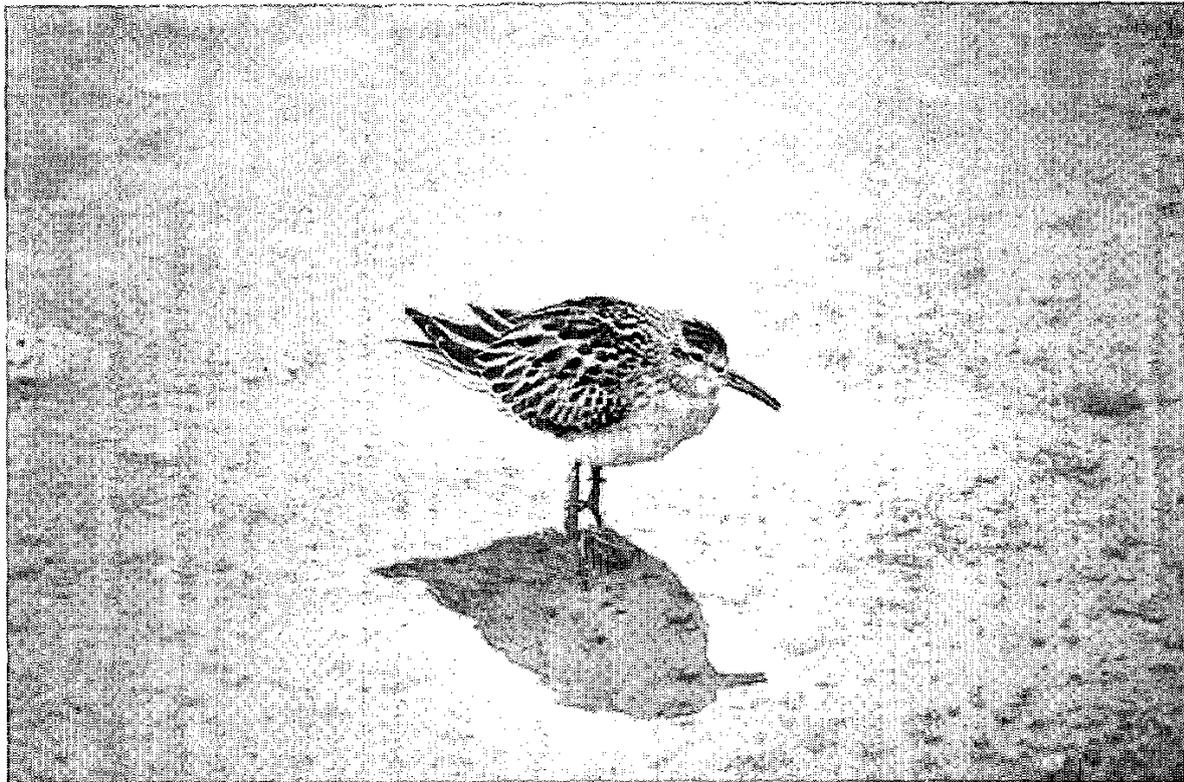


FIGURE 1 – Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Green Lake, Raoul Island.

Photo: H. Clifford.

the lake to land in the swampy margin directly below us, and commenced feeding. We had expected it to be a male Chestnut-breasted Shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*), as that species had been previously reported on Raoul (C.R. Veitch pers. comm.). However, the bird had no neck ring and no chestnut on neck or breast, and appeared in every respect to be a male paradise shelduck.

This is the first record of this species at Raoul Island. No other shelducks were seen. The paradise shelduck is an endemic New Zealand species which has extended its range since the mid-19 century as native forests were progressively cleared and replaced by pasture (Marchant & Higgins 1990). It has been recorded as a vagrant to Chatham Islands (about 700km east of the main islands of New Zealand), and Lord Howe Island (about 1,300 km from the North Island of New Zealand), (Marchant & Higgins 1990), while Raoul Island is about 1,000 km from the North Island.

#### **Lesser Knot (*Calidris canutus*).**

A Lesser Knot was observed and photographed in the Denham Bay swamp on 25 October 1995. This is the fourth record of this species at Raoul Island. The first record was of a bird collected by Oliver at Denham Bay on 17 October 1910 (Oliver 1912). The second was of dried remains of a dead bird found on Blue Lake mudflats on 20 December 1966 (Merton 1970). The third record was from Oneraki Beach on 1 November 1993 (C.R. Veitch, pers. comm.).

The bird was first spotted, from a distance, by John Ombler. We investigated by walking through the swamp which, though rather yielding underfoot in places, had virtually no surface water. The bird was found feeding in an area of wet mud with a rapid "sewing machine" action. It was observed for approximately an hour and photographed until it flew away. The bird was not confidently identified until our photographs were developed on our return to New Zealand. Identification was confirmed by Pavel Tomkovich, the curator of Ornithology at Moscow University Museum, during a visit to New Zealand in March 1996, and members of the New Zealand Wader Study Group.

### **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*).**

On 26 October 1995 John Ombler and other Department of Conservation staff saw and photographed a small unidentified wader at Green Lake, on Raoul Island, and remarked how unconcerned it was at their proximity. The next day we observed and photographed what was presumably the same bird, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (see photo). The characteristics of a juvenile included a broad pale supercilium bordering a very distinct bright rufous cap, and the foreneck and upper breast being orange-buff, with a narrow gorget of fine streaks across the upper neck. The bird was, therefore, on its first journey south from the breeding grounds in north eastern Siberia. It was feeding along the margin of the lake which is in a thermally active area. Although this would appear an unattractive feeding ground, other species were using it as well.

This is the third record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Raoul Island. The first record is of a bird shot by W.R.B. Oliver in October 1908 (Oliver 1955), and the second record is of a bird shot by R. Bell on 29 October 1910 (Sorensen 1964).

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