

## Captain Hutton on Migratory Birds of New Zealand.

CAPTAIN F. W. HUTTON, F.R.S., Christchurch, New Zealand, President of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, amongst other attainments has long been an ornithologist of repute. Hence anything he may have to say about birds is worth notice, and his paper on "Our Migratory Birds," contained in the "Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute" for last year, will be read with general interest. The wide problems connected with bird migration and geographical distribution are ably reviewed by the light of the latest knowledge, and a valuable series of notes on those birds which in their yearly flight or otherwise visit New Zealand are also embodied in the paper. Though these notes are, of course, local to those islands, they have a bearing on the work of bird students in Australia, since some of the species named touch our shores in their passage, and others have passed hence.

In dealing with his subject the author has drawn the line between "stragglers," which may have been blown to sea and forced to fly on; those wanderers who pass from one country to another for what is often an inexplicable reason; and those regular migrants who have fixed seasons for arrival and departure. The list of the first-named class includes several cases of birds which have managed to cross the Tasman Sea (by way of Australia) and to reach New Zealand. Amongst these are cited the Red-capped Dottrel (*Ægialitis ruficapilla*), Curlew (*Numenius cyanopus*), Little Whimbrel (*Mesoscolopax minutus*), Grey-rumped Sandpiper (*Heteractitis brevipes*), Greenshank (*Glottis nebularis*), Snipe (*Gallinago australis*), Grey Phalarope (*Crymophilus fulicarius*), Plumed Whistling Duck (*Dendrocycna eytoni*), Darter (*Plotus novæ-hollandiæ*), Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*), Red-wattle Bird (*Acanthochæra carunculata*), Tree Martin (*Petrochelidon nigricans*), Roller (*Eurystomus pacificus*), and White-rumped Swift (*Micropus pacificus*). The captain adds—"Possibly there may be a few others, but their cases are not fully proved." However, the Whimbrel (*Numenius variegatus*) and the Black-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) might have been included with safety. None of the foregoing birds has been known to breed in New Zealand, and they are often only single examples. The distance across the Tasman Sea is about 1,000 miles, which Captain Hutton reckons could be accomplished by a bird in from 24 to 36 hours.

The mysterious migration of the White-eye (*Zosterops cærulescens*) from Australia is ever fresh to students. The author states:—

"The date of its first occurrence in Otago is doubtful, but in 1856 it appeared on both sides of Cook Strait in considerable numbers. Before then it was unknown both to the Europeans and the Maoris, the latter calling it 'Tauhau,' which means 'a stranger.' In 1860-61 it had spread

over the South Island and the southern parts of the North Island, but it did not reach Auckland until 1865. It has also spread to the Chatham Islands, Snares, Auckland Islands, and Campbell Island. Evidently it is a new arrival, for the restless habits of the bird forbid us from thinking that it had remained for many years in Otago without spreading northward. I should call the White-eye a wanderer, and not a straggler, for, unlike the others, it crossed the ocean in sufficiently large numbers to establish itself both in New Zealand and afterwards in the outlying islands. Several other of our birds—especially some of the Herons, Rails, and Ducks—are also found in Australia, and these we assume were at one time wanderers like the White-eye. They also, at different times crossed over the sea, and became naturalised, but long before the settlement of the country by Europeans."

The more regular migrants—those that breed in Siberia and Kamtchatka, and travel to the South to winter—are next considered. Of the feathered stream which passes every year through the Malay Archipelago to Australia, a small branch—three or four species—leaves New Guinea for New Zealand. Of these the Barred-rumped Godwit (*Limosa novæ-zeelandiæ*) is the best known. Leaving their breeding grounds in Eastern Siberia the end of June or in July, and passing China, some winter in the Island of Formosa. Others arrive in August or September in Australia,\* Fiji, &c., departing again northward early in autumn. In New Zealand many Godwits arrive during October, November, and December, spreading as far south as Stewart Island,† and leaving about the end of March or beginning of April. Some also visit the Chatham Islands.

The Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), the Knot (*Tringa canutus*), the Brown-eared Sandpiper, or Sharp-tailed Stint (*Heteropygia acuminata*), and the Spotted (Lesser Golden) Plover (*Charadrius dominicus*), are mentioned, with equally interesting records and details. With regard to a pair of Golden Plover having bred at Portland Island, as reported by Mr. C. H. Robson, most students will agree with Captain Hutton that the occurrence, if a fact—with the birds, too, being in winter or non-breeding dress—is certainly very remarkable. As has been pointed out, such introduced birds as European Linnets, Starlings, Goldfinches, &c., change both dress and breeding season together on coming to the Southern Hemisphere.

The two Cuckoos—the Bronze (*Chalcococcyx lucidus*) and the Long-tailed (*Urodynamis taitensis*)—furnish material for some exceedingly interesting paragraphs. The Bronze Cuckoo appears regularly in the northern parts of New Zealand during the latter half of September, and early in October it is found in Wellington and in the South Island. After breeding, the old birds commence to return in January. Some of the young leave considerably later than their parents. In the adjacent Chatham

\* In spring—September or October—numbers of these birds are often offered for sale in the Melbourne market.—EDS.

† Three Godwits were shot by Mr. Borchgrevink on Campbell Island, during the cruise of the whaler *Antarctic*, 1894.—EDS.

Islands the birds arrive and depart about the same dates as in New Zealand. On the Chathams, on one occasion, a bird was noticed to arrive so tired after its flight that it suffered itself to be picked up and handled.\*

The author is of opinion that the New Zealand Bronze Cuckoos have their winter home in New Guinea, and, excepting touching at Cape York, Northern Queensland, their course is direct to New Zealand, save those that land and breed on Norfolk Island. May some of the birds not travel down Eastern Australia, seeing there is a specimen in the Australian Museum which was taken in Tasmania?

Touching the very interesting Double-banded Dottrel (*Ochthodromus bicinctus*) the author states it has been "suspected" of migrating from New Zealand to Australia, but thinks "it may be safely affirmed that it does not pass regularly" between these localities. Judging by the numbers (a flock of 50 birds being recorded in one instance)† of these Dottrels which appear regularly in autumn and disappear before spring, notably in Victoria, as well as Tasmania, and by the fact that eggs have never been found in any part of Australia, the assumption is that these birds must return regularly to New Zealand, their only breeding quarters.

It is doubtful whether the Pectoral Rail (*Hypotaenidia philippinensis*) is a migrant in the true sense in its more Australian quarters, as stated by Captain Hutton. The fact that these birds do not migrate in New Zealand, tends to prove that that trait may be similar in the same species on this side of the Tasman Sea.

Understanding that Captain Hutton is *au fait* at sea birds, we should have expected him to touch on the Mutton Bird (*Puffinus tenuirostris*), which happens to be attracting so much attention at present, and which is as truly a migrant as any of the birds he has enumerated and so pleasantly and instructively dilated upon. It has rookeries on the New Zealand coast and neighbouring islands. Possibly it has been regarded as a pelagic bird which only visits land to breed, and its visitations have not been looked upon as pertaining to migration from one part of the world to another.

### Prosecutions under the Victorian "Game Act."

THE authorities are to be thanked for their vigilance in the matter of prosecuting transgressors of the game laws. Notwithstanding the law needs amending in some of its important details, as it stands it affords a very good protection to native

\* A Bronze Cuckoo in a similarly exhausted state was noted much further south, on Macquarie Island.—"Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds" (Campbell), p. 580.—EDS.

† "Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds," p. 791.—EDS.