

SOME UNUSUAL WADER RECORDS

by ALAN LENDON

It is well known that numbers of certain species of migratory waders habitually winter at the I.C.I. Saltfields, north of Adelaide; those most usually seen there at that season being Red-necked Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Greenshanks and, until recent years, Eastern Curlews. Of these species, the Curlew Sandpiper has a spectacular breeding plumage which is often observed in late autumn and early spring but never amongst those birds which remain for the winter months.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that some species virtually never remain in this area during the winter months, notable examples being Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Marsh Sandpipers. Small numbers of some of the other less-commonly occurring species, such as Godwits and Plovers, are occasionally seen in small numbers during the winter months but never previously, in the writer's experience, exhibiting any nuptial plumage.

The year 1970 proved to be one of many surprises in several regards. As Eckert (S.A.O.A. Newsletter No. 54) has already reported, a Broad-billed Sandpiper was seen (and collected) in the adjacent Buckland Park area, and two Ruffs were seen on the Saltfields on 28th March; this is probably the only occasion on which two of this species have been seen together in Australia.

On May 9, the writer took Mr. John Izzard, an Englishman now living at Tocumwal, N.S.W., for a visit to the Saltfields, and we were surprised to see some numbers of Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Knots

and Great Knots present, numbers of each species being in breeding plumage. Mr. Izzard was more familiar with both Knots than the writer and quickly identified both species, some of the Knots being very rufous on the underparts, and some of the Great Knots very black on the abdomen. It was considered that these birds must have been on the point of leaving for their Northern Hemisphere grounds.

On July 4 the author paid another visit to the area, this time in the company of Dr. D. W. Brummitt. To our great surprise, some numbers of both species of Knots (many showing colour, especially the Great), and both species of Godwits were still present. Of the latter only the Black-tailed certainly exhibited any sign of nuptial plumage. In addition, a single Grey Plover was seen.

The next visit to the area was made on July 19 in the company of Mr. and Mrs. G. Laybourne-Smith. Once again, both Knots and both Godwits were present. Of the Knots, some of each species showed colour, whilst of the Godwits, only five Black-tailed were seen, two being highly coloured; of a number of Bar-tailed Godwits observed, none were coloured. In addition, at least a dozen Grey Plovers and two, possibly three, Golden Plovers were seen.

Just on a month later, on 23rd August, in the company of Dr. G. van Tets and Messrs. B. Glover and C. E. Rix, a flock of fifteen Black-tailed Godwits was located, of which only one showed signs of nuptial plumage.

We had abandoned the search for the other species, and had left the area where they were usually to be found, when a large flock of waders of varying sizes was seen flying inland, presumably driven in by the rising tide. We retraced our steps, and then found large numbers of Grey Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits, and both Knots in the usual area. Magnificent views were obtained of the Knots, some of both species being still highly coloured. In addition, a puzzling wader was seen, which none of the party could identify but which, on reflection, seems likely to have been a Dunlin.

Finally, on August 30, Dr. J. M. Bonnin, who had made several unsuccessful searches for the birds under adverse tide conditions, accompanied the writer, and we were able to locate numerous Grey Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits (well over fifty of each) and a flock of Knots, some still in colour. On this visit,

neither Black-tailed Godwits nor Great Knots were seen.

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of the Black-tailed Godwits, the birds were almost always found in the same place, viz. in the vicinity of the south-eastern corner of the second most northerly and north-western corner of the third salt pan, in the region of an old galvanised iron shed, and that they were only there at times of high tide.

In summary, a number of unusual waders, Godwits, Knots and Plovers, remained in South Australia during the winter of 1970 and many of them notably Great Knots, Knots and Black-tailed Godwits, assumed full nuptial plumage. It is perhaps worthy of comment that an adequate colour figure of the Great Knot in breeding plumage has not been located.