

SHORT NOTES

OCCURRENCE OF STRAY LAND BIRDS IN DRAKE PASSAGE AND THE SOUTH ORKNEY ISLANDS

By M. W. HOLDGATE

THERE are numerous records of temperate-zone land birds arriving as stragglers at sub-Antarctic oceanic islands. This note places on record one certain and one probable occurrence of such species at unusually high southern latitudes.

During the first southern voyage of R.R.S. *Shackleton* in the 1963-64 season, on 29 November 1963, a juvenile American barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*) came aboard and was captured at lat. 60°10'S., long. 61°15'W. The skin and skeleton have been preserved and are deposited in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.). This species breeds throughout North America, and migrates in the northern autumn through Mexico, Central America and the West Indies to winter in Panama and in South America as far south as central Chile, northern Argentina and Brazil. Specimens, presumably birds which have overshot the wintering area, have been obtained farther south in South America and in the Falkland Islands, while one specimen was collected in the Southern Ocean by R.R.S. *Discovery II* on 12 May 1934 at lat. 55°20'S., long. 44°50'E. The present record is the southernmost so far obtained and was evidently of a bird on its first southward migration.

On 6 and 30 December 1962, and on 26 January 1963, birds of an unidentified species were observed about Elephant Flats and Three Lakes Valley, Signy Island, South Orkney Islands (lat. 60°43'S., long. 45°38'W.). Two individuals were seen on the first occasion, and one only on each of the other two. The birds were described as having a wing span comparable with that of a Wilson's petrel, and legs and bill that were long in relation to the body. The plumage was pale brown on the back, and paler and somewhat greyish on the under parts; the legs were greyish green. On the ground, the birds were seen to hop, and their footprints suggested that the feet were not webbed. When disturbed the birds flew away uttering a double "chirrup"; the flight was irregular ("jerky"), and in flight light-coloured bars or flashes were displayed on the wings. The flight did not appear strong, and the birds themselves were wary and hard to approach; collection of a specimen proved impossible. From this account, and from the association of the birds with an area of muddy shores and lakes flanked by wet moss, it is thought that some kind of sandpiper is the most plausible identification, and this is confirmed by eye-witnesses who consider the bird closely to have resembled a sandpiper (possibly *Bartramia longicauda*) seen in the Falkland Islands. Dr. B. B. Roberts has kindly drawn my attention to a record of this species for Deception Island (lat. 62°57'S., long. 60°38'W.) (Dabbene, R. Captura de un batitu (*Bartramia longicauda*) en las Islas Shetland del Sud. *Hornero*, 3, 1923, p. 197).

MS. received 2 October 1964

A VAGRANT AMERICAN EGRET AT SOUTH GEORGIA

By C. J. S. JEFFERIES

In the mid-afternoon of 29 March 1964, while camped near Royal Bay, South Georgia (lat. 54°30'S., long. 37°00'W.), Harry B. Clagg of United States Antarctic Research Program and the author observed a large white heronlike bird which circled the bay for a short time before landing in the middle of a gentoo penguin rookery. The penguins ignored it completely. The bird was in a very weak condition and because of this, and because there was heavy

snow falling at the time, it was easily approached. Despite the bad weather conditions, a number of reasonable colour photographs were obtained.

One of these photographs has been examined by Mr. D. Goodwin, of the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), and the bird compared both for colour and size (the latter by reference to gentoo penguins shown on the same photograph) with skins in the Museum. The very dark legs, yellow bill, overall size, length of neck and the proportions of body to bill length make it possible to identify the bird almost certainly as an American egret (*Casmerodius albus egretta* (Gmelin)). This species ranges from the temperate United States and Mexico through the Antillean arc and throughout South America as far as Golfo de Peñas (lat. 48°S.) in Chile and western Santa Cruz in Argentina. It has been recorded as an accidental visitor to the Falkland Islands. This individual, which is the first recorded at South Georgia, had presumably come from South America, being driven eastwards by the high winds which had been blowing over a wide area for some considerable time.

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