

RESEARCH ON PATAGONIAN OYSTERCATCHERS

A.J. Baker and E.H. Miller

As part of a continuing research program on systematics and zoogeography of the world's oystercatchers, one of us (AJB) arranged a trip to southern Argentina in late 1977. The purposes of the trip were: (i) to collect specimens of Haematopus ater, H. leucopodus, and H. palliatus durnfordi, for osteological research; (ii) to film and tape displays of H. ater and (especially) H. leucopodus; and (iii) to add to existing knowledge of the natural history of the species.

We spent late October through November in southern Argentina, and obtained good specimens of all three species. These are currently being prepared as skeletons in the Royal Ontario Museum.

Our visit spanned parts of the nesting seasons of all three species. We located 10 nests of H. leucopodus, 36 of H. ater, and 12 of H. p. durnfordi. The first of these species is known to have a clutch size of two, and our observations confirmed this. All but one of the nests of H. ater contained two eggs also (the other held only one), yet all nests of H. p. durnfordi in the same area held three.

Tape recordings of various vocal displays were made, and movie film was exposed on piping and distraction displays.

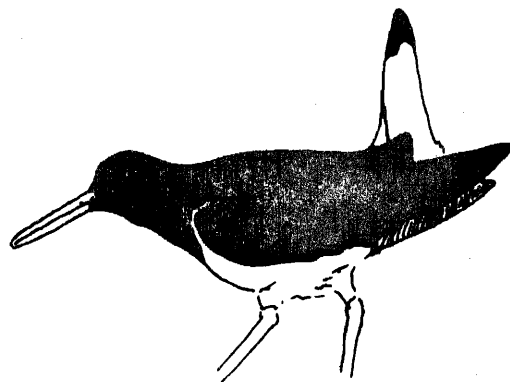
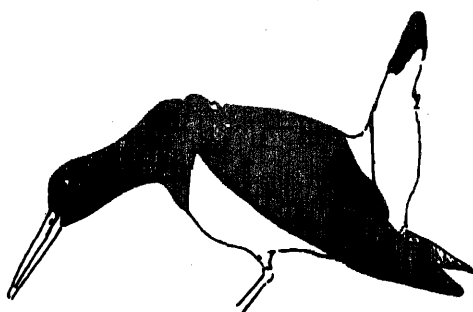


Figure 1

(a) Single H. leucopodus in piping display involving its mate, and a neighbouring nesting pair.

(b) Nesting H. leucopodus walking slowly away from an observer near its nest, and raising the tail to expose the under-tail coverts.

The major features of piping in H. ater and H. p. durnfordi were like those in European and North American populations. H. leucopodus differed greatly. During piping the interactants assume a posture like that in other species, but lift the tail up past the vertical; this displays the striking white chevron on the rump and the under-tail coverts, which are

fluffed. A similar display of the tail and associated feathers occurs when members of this species are disturbed near the nest. They walk slowly away, turn repeatedly with the under-tail coverts toward the intruder, and occasionally false-brood (see MacLean, G.L. 1972. Zoologica Africana, vol. 7, pp. 57-74) (See Figure 1).

Our observations, tapes, films, and specimens are under study, and we will report the results in due course.

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NORTH AMERICAN MEMBERSHIP

Some confusion appears to have arisen in the case of some members in North America in that they have paid subscriptions to both the N. American Treasurer and to the central Treasurer. Only one subscription per year is necessary as N. American Section members are members of the Wader Study Group. We shall arrange to set subscriptions paid twice against subscriptions due in future years, and shall notify these members accordingly later.

REVIEW - EXPEDITION TO NAMIB COAST; SOUTHERN AFRICA

The latest report by the Western Cape Wader Group has recently been published. it is:-

'An ornithological expedition to the Namib Coast summer
1976/77'
by L.G. Underhill and D.A. Whitelaw.

The report maintains the high standards that have been achieved in the past. The expedition took place between 29 December 1976 and 14 January 1977. A total of 236 km of shoreline, including major estuaries were censused. Details of counts of all wetland birds are included although with the emphasis on waders, a total of 75,000 of which were recorded. This included 24,000 Sanderling and 20,000 Curlew Sandpipers. A total of 1,100 birds were trapped and in the species accounts there are useful summaries of weight and moult status. The study also identified the important sites along the coast and showed that Sandwich Harbour, as well as Walvis Bay, was an internationally significant area for waders.

Copies of the report are obtainable from:-
M. Waltner, 5 Montague Way, Pinelands, South Africa.
Price - R.3-00 (in South Africa); R.4-00 (elsewhere - surface mail) or
R.6-00 (elsewhere - airmail).

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