Nearly 2,000 pulli Oystercatchers have been ringed to date in Orkney, and an analysis is underway of both their recoveries and those of birds ringed elsewhere but recovered in Orkney. This has shown that the Orkney breeding population starts to depart in August, moving southwards to the inner Moray Firth and then on to winter on the west and south-west coast of Britain, with a few birds going to France. A return to Orkney begins in February. These findings tie in well with results from the monthly counts and more casual observations. As yet we know nothing about the breeding areas of the smaller numbers of Oystercatchers which overwinter in Orkney.

For work carried out so far, we are grateful for financial support from Sir Herbert Bonar, the BTO, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Shell U.K. As to the future, we would like to continue our present studies and also try to find out something about the origins of the many Curlew which winter in Orkney. In this context, 1990 has seen the start of a separate three-year study into the breeding biology of the Curlew in Orkney by Murray Grant from the University of Durham.

Detailed results of the Orkney Wader Survey are available in a 78-page booklet entitled *The Shorebirds of the Orkney Islands* published by the Tay and Orkney Ringing Groups, and obtainable for £2-50 from: Colin Corse, Garrisdale, Lynn Park, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1SL.

Dunlin feeding on bait-digging spoil

Simon Aspinall

At 0800 on 11 December 1991 during a colds spell of weather, I was watching Dunlin Calidris alpina feeding on an area of stony mudflat at Lepe, near Beaulieu, Hampshire. Overnight temperatures were below freezing (-3o C)although the mudflat was not frozen or glazed and the tide was rising. Local bait-diggers were complaining of the shortage of worms (Nereis spp.) from this otherwise profitable site, and also about the depths they were having to dig to find them. Dunlin were feeding apparently unconcernedly, within 15 m of those people actively digging. Their tolerance here contrasted markedly with that at many other parts of the Solent.

Dunlin purposely fed around the dug over areas and mounted the upturned molehill-like sods probing and picking actively, although I was unable to detect what prey, if any, they were locating. Foraging continued on the upturned mounds, which remained as islets, as the tide rose over the surrounding mudflats.

As backfilling seldom, if ever, takes place in this or any other Solent site it may be that in cold weather especially, Dunlin find this association with bait-diggers a useful one, somewhat akin to that of Robins and gardeners (although no Dunlin was seen to perch on a fork handle at any time). The low temperatures presumably caused the worms to retreat deeper into the substrate. They may also be reproducing at this time of year which might possibility further reduce their availability.