

feature which is so unique can only be observed at very close quarters, and the Wrybill is inconspicuous and unobtrusive. Dove-grey above and white below, a single black band across the chest, and only about 6 in. long, there is nothing about the Wrybill to attract the attention as it runs actively across the sand, pausing periodically to pick up a sand-hopper or other morsel. A closer and considered inspection is not difficult, for the Wrybill is the tameest of shore birds, and then can be seen the long and quite solid bill, with a distinct twist to the right about a third the distance from the tip. Many have been the conjectures as to the uses to which this peculiar feature is put. When feeding, it seems that the bird scoops up its food morsels with a sideways sweep of the bill, in which its distinctive shape may be of some use.

Wrybills breed only in the South Island, on the shingle beds of several of the larger rivers that drain the eastern flank of the Southern Alps. The Rakaia, the Waimakariri, the Hurunui, the Waiau, the Rangitata, and probably other such rivers provide nesting-places on their broad shingle flats, where the two finely speckled grey eggs, themselves wonderfully like pebbles, are laid in a mere hollow among the boulders of high spits. Eggs are laid in September and October, and the young, with their parents, leave the river-beds in mid-summer, when the old birds have lost their black chest bands and resemble their offspring. The Wrybills make for the beaches and lagoons of the east coast of the South Island and immediately make slowly northwards.

The migration route apparently runs up the east coast of the South Island, across Cook Strait, and up the west coast of the North Island to the Firth of Thames, Manukau and Kaipara Harbours, where the vast majority of Wrybills spend the winter, feeding on the mudflats at low tide, and resting on sand or shell-spits at high tide.

A very few birds have been seen on the east coast of the North Island, and some passing further north than Kaipara reach Parengarenga Harbour. Their winter habit is to associate in flocks of from a dozen to several hundred birds, loosely

scattered over the mudflats, sometimes in company with Banded Dotterels and other similar birds, feeding on marine life such as hoppers and worms. As the tide rises, the birds are pushed up the flats and usually make their way to a favoured spit of shell or shingle where they roost and rest, often standing on one leg and nestling their heads under one wing. At such times one can approach within a few yards. Before the spring a further moult restores the black band which characterises the breeding plumage, which most birds have regained before they make southward.

The southward migration to the breeding-grounds in Canterbury begins in late July, and must be fairly rapid, as the first eggs are laid in the middle of September. Very small numbers of Wrybills mainly young of the previous year, spend the summer in the North Island.

