

A large diverse group of birds of estuaries, coasts, riverbeds and farmland. Most are long-legged and feed in or near shallow water. Bill shape is varied; short and stubby in those (e.g. dotterels) that peck from the surface, but longer in those that feed in shallow water (e.g. stilts), or probe deeply (e.g. godwits). Flight strong and direct. Often form flocks while roosting or flying, but disperse to feed. Many species seen in NZ breed in the Arctic and arrive in September, with remnants of breeding plumage, and depart in March, often in breeding plumage. Most subadults and a few adults spend the southern winter here.

**PAINTED SNIPE** *Rostratula benghalensis*

Rare Australian vagrant

25 cm, 120 g. Distinctive large-bodied chestnut, olive and white wader with short greenish legs and long (5 cm) slightly decurved bill. Buff stripe over centre of head from bill to nape; white band sweeps up in front of wings from breast to back; broad olive or buff and black patterned wings. Adult male has brown head with pale buff eye patch; nape, throat and breast streaked greyish brown; wings, back and uppertail spangled buff and grey; belly white. Adult female has maroon-brown head with white eye patch; reddish-brown nape, throat and breast; dark olive-grey wings, back and uppertail; white belly. When flushed, flies with slow wingbeats, legs dangle like in Pukeko, and gives repeated 'kuk' call. **Habitat:** Breeds Africa and Australasia. One NZ record, at Lake Ellesmere, August 1986. Usually in long grass near freshwater wetlands. [Sp 167]



**PAINTED SNIPE**

**Rostratulidae**

2 species; 1 is a rare vagrant to New Zealand.

In the field, their long bill, squat body and large eyes makes these birds look like the true snipes of the Scolopacidae. In fact, they are more closely allied with rails (Rallidae)

and jacanas (Jacanidae). Sex roles are reversed, females being brighter and bigger, and they visit males purely for courtship and mating. The rest of nesting duties are the responsibility of the male. They are polyandrous, i.e. a female mates with more than one male.

**167. PAINTED SNIPE** *Rostratula benghalensis*

**Plate 43**

**Size:** 25 cm, 120 g

**Geographical variation:** Two subspecies: *benghalensis* breeds in central and southern Africa, southern Asia, southern Japan, China, the Philippines and western Indonesia; and *australis* breeds in Australia.

**Distribution:** Eastern Australia from Queensland to Victoria. They are nomadic and head to inland swamps and lakes to breed following heavy rains. When the interior dries out, they return to coastal lakes and swamps. A

single vagrant has reached New Zealand: a male at Lake Ellesmere (August 1986).

**Behaviour:** Little is known about Painted Snipe, as they feed mainly in thick vegetation at dusk and at night, and they freeze rather than fly when disturbed. When they do fly, they fly low, directly and only briefly, unlike the steep, towering flight of true snipe. Like rails, they jerk the rear of their body up and down.