

### THIRD RECORD OF McCORMICK'S SKUA ON N.Z. COAST

By R. E. Sibson, Auckland.

Falla (Emu, XL, p. 119) has shown that there are only two acceptable records of McCormick's skua (*Catharacta maccormicki*) for New Zealand both being casualties on the long west coast of the North Island. The discovery of a third specimen also from the west coast is therefore a matter of considerable interest and worthy of recording in some detail.

The finder was Peter Williams, one of a group of boys whose interest in pelagic birds was aroused in 1946 when large numbers of gale-exhausted petrels provided plenty of material for study. On leaving school, his interest was maintained and from his home at Rawene trips were sometimes made to Mitimiti Beach, just north of Hokianga. From him I recently received a collection of carefully-prepared remains of birds, most of which had been found on the Miti-miti Beach. The commonest shearwaters and petrels were well represented, but two skulls immediately caught the eye as being out of the ordinary. One was of a white-chinned petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) a species seldom found storm-wrecked; the other, with a culmen of approximately 50 m.m. clearly belonged to one of the larger skuas. This skull was then shown to Mr. E. G. Turbott, and when it was compared with the useful series of skua skins in the Auckland War Memorial Museum, there seemed to be no species to which it could be assigned except *Catharacta maccormicki*. It was next sent to Dr. R. A. Falla who confirmed the identification. The fragmentary condition of the specimen when found made precise dating impossible. It may have succumbed to the winter gales of 1946, when southern great skuas (*Catharacta skua lonnbergi*) were known to be present on the west coast—one was actually caught in a hawk trap at Awhitu—or it may have come ashore early in 1947.

According to Murphy (Oceanic Birds of South America), "little is known about the normal pelagic range of the South Polar skua, but it is highly probable that the season of its complete and definite winter migration away from the breeding grounds is spent almost altogether in the pack-ice." The same author also has a note that it "apparently wanders at times into the North Pacific"; and Alexander (Birds of the Ocean) mentions that it has accidentally reached Ceylon. This skull provides concrete evidence that McCormick's skua, which to quote Murphy again, "undoubtedly holds the distinction of being the southernmost bird on the globe," has ranged nearly to lat. 35 S in New Zealand seas.

The value of ornithological beachcombing on the New Zealand coast is being more and more realised not only because information is being gained on the seasonal migrations of many oceanic birds which breed on the islands of the subantarctic, but also because little by little something is being learnt about the occurrence in the New Zealand region of elements of the truly antarctic fauna. Recent examples which may be cited are a southern fulmar (*Fulmarus glacioides*) and a Weddell's seal, both from Muriwai.

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NESTING OF BLUE SHAG.—In Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island, this week I found the blue shag (*Stictocarbo punctatus steadi*) nesting on West's Point. There were nine nests, three eggs in three nests, and two and one in the other six nests. The birds were sitting (November 10, 1949). I thought that this shag nested much earlier. The nests were on rocky ledges facing the sun. When in the dinghy next day, I saw nine of these shags feeding together in a group not far from the nesting site.—Mrs. Olga Sansom, Invercargill.