

SHORT NOTES

CHATHAM ISLAND MOLLYMAWK ON OHAU BEACH

The Chatham Island Mollymawk (*Diomedea cauta eremita*) is rarely recorded away from its nesting ground on Pyramid Rock, Chatham Islands. Five specimens have been collected on the coast of New Zealand: one on the east coast of the South Island and four on the west coast of the North Island (Fleming, 1939; Oliver, 1955). There have also been two sight records from off the east coasts of the North Island (Oliver, 1955) and of the South Island (*Notornis* 12, 85, 1965).

The finding of a fifth individual of this subspecies on the North Island coast is here recorded. On 27/12/61 the dried remains of a mollymawk, which had apparently died in November or early December, were found on Ohau beach, near Levin. The remains were skeletally incomplete, but the head was intact and was collected and sent to Dr. R. A. Falla, who replied: "The Mollymawk is a typical specimen, although somewhat faded in bill colour, of *Diomedea cauta eremita*" (*in litt.* 24/1/62).

The bill, with all plates intact, was uniformly pale yellowish-cream without any trace of darker areas. Measurement of culmen: 117 mm. The head was grey, paler on the forehead, with a blackish band from eye to top of bill. The bill colour indicates that the bird was an adult.

This specimen was included in the 1961 Beach Patrol Scheme records, but in the Report (*Notornis* 10, 265-277, 1963) the subspecies of *Diomedea cauta* have not been distinguished.

The previous four North Island specimens comprise two adults and two juvenals, of which the latter are of particular interest because the juvenal Chatham Island Mollymawk has apparently not been described from Pyramid Rock. These young birds were collected at Karekare Beach, Auckland west coast on 26/4/1936 and at Nukumarū, Wanganui on 3/5/1951. The former is described by Fleming (1939) and appears identical with the latter, briefly described by Oliver (1955), and which I have examined in the Wanganui Museum, where it is preserved as a study skin. Culmen measurements are 121 and 124 mm. respectively. The Wanganui specimen is a male. Both these birds were probably very recently fledged when they were wrecked. The stage of development of the chicks which Fleming observed when he visited Pyramid Rock on 16th December, 1937, indicates that the young Mollymawks would leave the nesting ground during March or April.

Thus slight doubt is implied in the identification of both these birds. Referring to the Karekare specimen, Fleming states: "A bird believed to be the juvenal of this race . . ."; whilst the Nukumarū specimen was identified by Dr. Falla as (from label): "*D. cauta* subsp., probably *eremita*." When a fully-fledged young *eremita*, ready for its first flight (i.e. juvenal), is collected and/or described from the breeding ground, these identifications can be confirmed, or revised.

REFERENCES

- FLEMING, C. A., 1939: *The Emu* 38, 393.
OLIVER, W. R. B., 1955: *New Zealand Birds*, 2nd edition. Reed, Wellington.

— M. J. IMBER