

## A FLOCK OF SOUTHERN SKUAS REPORTED

The Otago coastline is outside the breeding area of the Southern Skua (*C. skua lonnbergi*), and generally only lone birds are seen on this coast.

However, on 27/2/65, while taking part in a wader count, Mr. E. Sheat and four companions walked the coast from Anderson's Lagoon to the mouth of the Shag River. Here they found a flock of 24 dark, gull-like birds which they could not identify. They were positive that the birds were not juvenile Black-backed Gulls (*L. dominicanus*) and the whole party agreed that the birds were all of the same species. Two similar birds had been seen earlier.

The flock took off and flew out to sea, flying strongly with wings flapping, at which point Mr. Sheat was going to record them as unknown. But as he watched a bird dropped out of the group, swooped down and caught a White-fronted Tern (*S. striata*) in flight. "... it veered towards us and attacked the tern and landed, still at a fair distance . . . I could see through binoculars that it was not black but dark brown," writes Mr. Sheat. A second bird dropped out of the group and as it landed beside the first bird, the white under the wings was visible. As the observers moved up the birds took off again, carrying the tern with them.

Dr. R. A. Falla's comment on this report was:—

"The various details seem convincing enough, especially the incident of the killing of the tern which could hardly have been done by anything but a skua. . . . You are well within the range of wandering of the Brown Skua and the only surprising thing about the observation is the extraordinary number seen together."

A recent Australian report of Southern Skuas forming small flocks away from the breeding grounds was published by G. M. Storr in *Emu* 63:4 (Zonation and Seasonal Occurrence of Marine Birds) in which he states that "... in Fremantle Harbour it is thus characteristic of a winter day to find a dozen or more of these skuas sitting on the water patiently waiting for scraps and unperturbed by all the activity around them." Also under the notes on Pomarine Skuas he remarks that most of the birds of this species were seen by him on this survey "sitting on the sea in fairly compact groups. This last trait is shared with the Great Skua."

— G. HAMEL



## SKUA ON THE SUMNER CLIFFS

The following are details of the sighting of a large skua at White-wash Head. On the morning of 21/7/66 I visited this wildlife refuge at Scarborough, Sumner, to see if the Spotted Shags (*S. punctatus*) had begun nesting. There were no shags in the refuge on this morning, but as soon as I breasted the hill, I sighted a large brown bird. It flew south out to sea, keeping low, but I held it in my glasses for some time and I am sure it was a Southern Skua (*C. skua lonnbergi*).

This is the first time I have seen this species actually on the Sumner coast, but I have recorded them out at sea from fishing vessels. I do not know why one should be ashore at this place, but the refuge is used extensively by Rock Pigeons (*C. livia*) which seem to breed right