

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

through the year in holes on the cliff face and it is quite possible that the 'Sea-hawk' has found young pigeon an attractive addition to its normal diet.

Although I have kept a watch on the area since, I have been unable to record any return of this interesting visitor.

— BADEN NORRIS



PRESENTATION TO H.M.N.Z.S. LACHLAN

On 9th September, 1966, two members of the 1964 Kermadecs Expedition, D. V. Merton and M. J. Hogg, and the Editor, visited H.M.N.Z.S. Lachlan, which was looking very smart after her refit, to make a presentation on behalf of the Society and to express the Society's gratitude for help and kindness received from the Royal New Zealand Navy in the course of that unlucky and short-lived expedition.

Subsequently the following letter, which we have pleasure in publishing, was received from Commander I. S. Monro:—

Dear Sir,

This is to record our deep appreciation of the magnificent gifts your Society has presented to this ship. We are a little overwhelmed by the splendour of both the silver cigarette box and the photograph, and would state that rarely, if ever, in its lifetime does a ship receive such gifts. For these we are most grateful.

To carry people, such as members of your Society, is our pleasure, for in such a small community new faces in the Mess are most welcome, and the diversion from the purely surveying routine can be a welcome break.

It has been our pleasure to be associated with your Society, and we trust that this contact will remain firm and that we will see more of your Society in the future.

Yours sincerely,

I. S. MONRO,

Commander, R.N.Z.N.,
Commanding Officer.



LETTER

Sir,

The article on Pukeko (*Notornis* 13, 133) makes no mention of eggs in their diet. To my knowledge they eat vast quantities of duck eggs as well as those of domestic geese and poultry who lay under farm-garden hedges. Eggs may be undetectable in the stomach contents.

In the article on the breeding of Song Thrushes and Blackbirds (pp. 142-149) the writer fails to mention the use of mud with which Song Thrushes plaster the inside of their nests. Blackbirds don't do this; but they use quite a lot of partly decayed leaves from cabbage trees, where available.

— MAURICE E. FITZGERALD

81 Beach Road, Tauranga