

## FIRST RECORD OF THE EMPEROR PENGUIN IN NEW ZEALAND

By L. E. HENDERSON

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Additions to New Zealand's avifauna from the north, while not commonplace, have occurred in recent times to an extent which encourages us to look towards the Tasman or the Pacific with some anticipation. Now we have an arrival from Antarctica and the bird is flightless!

A large penguin, at first thought to be a King (*A. patagonicus*), was reported on Oreti Beach near Invercargill on 5/4/67, by Mr. F. W. Mayne. It was examined in the evening and photographed with provisional identification as an Emperor (*Aptenodytes forsteri*). To avoid the risks of vandalism, dogs or blowing sand, the bird was removed to a place of safety the next morning and there was ample opportunity to study it.

It was certainly in perfect condition with immaculate plumage. The contrast between the mat black head and very pale lemon front with the arresting deep golden auricular patches formed a fitting complement to the clean symmetrical lines of this very handsome bird. The mandibular plates were of a dull rufous red with a little violet towards the tip. The height with the bill horizontal and the neck unextended was 2ft. 9ins. Other points of identification confirmed were flipper markings, feather length and relationship of bill to total skull dimensions.

The bird was not as friendly as some have been described — approach to 5 or 6 feet caused some agitation and sometimes the "interrupted Klaxon" call, while a closer approach still qualified for flippers raised and some very sharp raps. Rivolier (Emperor Penguins, 1956), claims that a full blow from a flipper of a fully grown adult can break an arm. Ross's reference to the excessive stupidity of the birds when captured (A Voyage of Discovery and Research in Southern and Antarctic Regions during the years 1839-43, Captain Sir James Clark Ross), seemed hardly to apply to our bird.

Although it was distressed on the journey to Bluff, probably by the confinement and movement, it was still alert enough to find that it could see through the windows of the van and seemed to get some reassurance from this.

Liberation was made half an hour out from Bluff near Dog Island through the kind offices of Mr. R. T. Ballantyne, a Bluff fisherman. When the bird surfaced from his dive off the launch we saw what a really happy Emperor penguin looks like. It splashed, preened, drank and dived with the greatest concentration, leaving one in no doubt as to his favourite element. There we left him. The possibility of a bird having been brought up by a Deep Freeze craft was explored, but no evidence for such an occurrence could be found.

We were grateful to Dr. Bernard Stonehouse, whose work on the species is well known, for confirmation of our identification from a photograph, and for the information that since sub-adults range very widely and as the weight of this bird was 49 lbs. against a range of up to 100 lbs. for the species it was probably a young bird.

From Cook's sightings on the floes approaching the ice barrier in 1773 and Ross's securing specimens in January 1841 on to the present day, the Emperor penguin has captured and held the imagination and interest of naturalists. Skelton's locating the rookery during Scott's "Discovery" Expedition, Edward Wilson's epic winter journey with Bowers and Cherry-Garrard to find the brooding birds and Wilson's reverent and meticulous work on the species match the Emperor's own distinction. With characteristics and associations alike, one meets superlatives on every hand.

Modern work has thrown much light on the biology of the Emperor Penguin; on the mechanism for instance which enables them to brood for over two months without food in temperatures as low as 70 degrees below zero. One wonders why our bird could appear so much at home in Foveaux Strait.



## SHORT NOTE

### SPINE-TAILED SWIFTS NEAR KAITAIA

In the late afternoon of 28/11/67 I had a ring from Mr. Malcolm Matthews, a farmer of Awanui Road, some four miles from Kaitaia. He had noticed two strange birds flying about hunting insects in the vicinity of a clump of pine trees. He is quite familiar with the Welcome Swallow (*H. neoxena*) which since it started breeding here just ten years ago is now very common. He described these unknown visitors as being much larger and much faster in flight than Welcome Swallows. I immediately got in my car and he directed me to the spot where he had been watching them. Right enough they were still there.

Such was their speed that it was very difficult to observe their colour accurately. I had my binoculars, but they were useless, although the birds often passed within thirty or forty feet of me. Their speed was like a bullet's and the only times I could catch a glimpse of their colour was when they were flying directly away from me. Their general tone was black; but the base of the tail and possibly a portion of their underparts was white or maybe light buff. This was quite conspicuous. The tail was short and appeared to be square, not forked. The shape of their wings and their flight generally was quite different from that of a Welcome Swallow. They would make long runs, gliding, ascending high without an apparent wing-beat, bank, then swoop; repeating the procedure over and over again. Their wings were swept back like those of a jet-fighter; but were not so pointed as the wings of a Swallow. There was no ducking and diving in short manoeuvres.

By their appearance and behaviour they were Spine-tailed Swifts (*C. caudacuta*). They appeared during a strong E. to N.E. wind which had been blowing for about three days and which continued till the night of the 29th. Mr. Matthews was working nearby and reported that the two swifts were still present. During the night there was heavy rain. They had gone next morning.

— ROSS MICHIE