

## NEW AND RARE BIRDS AT SNARES ISLAND DURING 1968 - 69

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The University of Canterbury's field station on the main island of the Snares Group was occupied from 14 November, 1968, to 25 February, 1969, when long term studies of the ecology of littoral and forest invertebrates and of sea birds were continued. The following notes give details of ten species of birds hitherto unrecorded on the islands and of other birds reported in the past but not seen in recent years.

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As in previous years, a number of crested penguins, mostly immatures, came ashore to moult. Since one member of the party devoted his whole time to observing penguins and ranged widely round the island, the sightings of these were more numerous than hitherto. They included about 20 Fiordland Crested Penguins (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus pachyrhynchus*), about 15 Erect-crested Penguins (*E. p. sclateri*) and about 12 Rockhoppers (*E. crestatus*). Not all the latter were light-throated juveniles. The greatest number of these visitors was seen at the important landing slope on the east side of the North Promontory which serves the numerous penguin colonies in that area.

A feature of the 1968/69 bird sightings was an increase in the variety of European passerines and of wading birds, an increase not accounted for by the longer period of observation than that maintained during previous visits. The weather preceding our arrival had been bad and according to data from Invercargill weather station, during October and November, 1968, there was an unusually high frequency of gale force westerlies in Foveaux Strait. That such gales also extended south to the Snares is suggested by the unusual number of recently thrown *Olearia* trees found in many parts of the main island during 1968/69.

Such winds seem unlikely to have helped birds from southern New Zealand to the Snares as the latter lie too far to the south west but would be in the right direction to assist dispersal from Tasmania and south eastern Australia. In view of the arrival, apparently under calm conditions, of Australian Tree Martins on Snares (see below) and of such species as Blackbirds, Silvereyes and Goldfinches as far afield as Macquarie Island in the past, an Australian origin for the finches on the Snares cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, P. M. Johns has drawn our attention to the appearance in New Zealand

of an unusual number of Australian lepidoptera from September to December, 1968. This trans-Tasman crossing has been documented by Fox, Gibbs and Dugdale in separate communications (1969, N.Z. Ent. 4). It concerns a butterfly, *Vanessa kershawi*, and eight noctuid and one arctuid species of moths. The records, mainly from the western coastlines, range from southern Stewart Island to North Auckland and are attributed to wind-assisted migration from south-eastern Australia following prolonged westerlies. This migration supports the hypothesis that the origin of the Snares Island finches was Australia. On the other hand for dispersal with following winds from Southland and/or Stewart Island the period from 21 to 24 August seems to have been most propitious being the only period during the three and a half months preceding our arrival with strong north to north easterly winds. For birds coming from Stewart Island wind assistance may, of course, not be necessary bearing in mind that from the top of that island the Snares are just visible to the human eye under really clear conditions.

The waders, of three species, were unexpected visitors to a coastline as rock-bound as that of the Snares and none remained for very long.

Not included in the following list is a Mallard-Grey Duck hybrid first noticed on 18 November and assumed to be the male partner of a normal plumaged Grey Duck seen with four ducklings on 27 December.

#### Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*)

A single bird, fat in anticipation of moult, was seen on 9 February. From the depth of its blue colouration it was judged to belong to the southern race.

#### Macaroni Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*)

Although a watch was kept for Royal Penguins (*E. c. schlegeli*) which were expected visitors, the appearance of a Macaroni Penguin on 10 January was a surprise, for the nearest breeding place of this bird at Heard Island is about 3,000 miles more distant than Macquarie Island where *schlegeli* nests. When the present bird (Plate XXXII) turned up near the biological station it weighed 3825 grams and its bill and flipper lengths were 65.5 and 196 mm. respectively. The bird appeared to be a male. It was not in pre-moult fat condition and on release returned to sea and was not sighted again.

This comprises a new record for New Zealand although the Royal Penguin, which is often only regarded as sub-specifically distinct and which includes a very small proportion of black-faced birds, has been recorded as a straggler on several occasions.

#### White-throated Shag (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

There were 10 sightings of black and white shags during the period, two being seen on one occasion, but not until 3 December was any close enough for positive identification. The birds were of the extreme white-throated form and they were only noted along the east coast where the only inlets suitable for these birds to feed are to be found. It was here in 1967 that an unoccupied nest, thought to be of this species, was seen (Warham, Notornis 14: 134).

#### Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Erolia acuminata*)

A single example of this bird was present between 15 and 28 November. It was tame and spent much of its time feeding among



[D. B. Cameron

Plate XXXII — Macaroni Penguin, Snares Island, 10 January, 1969.

pools and along the muddy margins of certain inland colonies of the Snares Crested Penguin. A familiar bird to the senior author, its diagnostic characters (*vide* Serventy & Whittell, Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia, ed. 3, page 201) were noted — the white outer tail feathers, straight but almost imperceptibly downturned bill and olive green legs and streaked rufous, buff and black upper parts.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

A single example was present at least from 20 November to 13 December. The long bill, long greenish legs, white tail and familiar 4-note call were noted. The bird's feeding grounds were along the tidelines of the Boatharbour and of the inlets to the north and south of there.

*Tattler (Tringa brevipes/incana)*

A lone tattler was feeding with the Greenshank on 9 December. It was less timid than that bird and about two-thirds of its size. This wader gave good views and the uniformly grey upperparts (except for a slightly darker head), white underparts not sharply delineated from the upper parts as in *T. nebularia*, dark eyestripe; long tapered bill, darker distally were readily seen. It gave a two-note cry when flushed and was not seen subsequently. The nasal groove was not seen clearly enough to separate the bird specifically but it was most likely *T. brevipes*, as this is the commoner species recorded from New Zealand and in south-eastern Australia and has a double call note.

*Black-billed Gull (Larus bulleri)*

One bird was present with the party of Red-billed Gulls at the Boatharbour on 18 November and remained with them until at least 10 December after which there were no further sightings, although two were seen flying on 20 November.

*Southern Black-backed Gull (Larus dominicanus)*

Although seen in 1947 (Fleming, 1948, N.Z. Bird Notes 2: 182) and 1948 (Richdale, n.d. Wild Life on an Island Outpost, 115) and evidently rare then, this bird was not encountered by the University of Canterbury teams in 1961 or 1967. One adult appeared on 24/1/69, when it was found scavenging among Giant Petrels. Three days later two of these gulls were noted in the vicinity of Ho Ho Bay where they continued to be sighted until 6 February. The last record was of a singleton two days later.

*Hedge Sparrow (Prunella modularis)*

Stead (1948, N.Z. Bird Notes 3: 79) is the only previous visitor to record this species. Its presence in 1968 was soon noted because of its song and a single bird was seen or heard between 19 November and 21 December.

*Australian Tree Martin (Hylochelidon nigricans)*

Two used the radio aerial as their perch between feeding forays from 18 to 20 February. The dull white rump, slightly forked tail, brownish undertail coverts contrasting with the whiteness of the remaining underparts were well seen and prevented confusion with *Hirundo neoxena*.

*Greenfinch (Chloris chloris)*

A pair on 15 November was feeding on seeds of *Poa annua*. The species appears to have been scarce during the period reviewed, the only other sighting being of a single bird in flight on 5 February.

*Goldfinch (Carduelis carduelis)*

Seen by the 1947 and 1948 expeditions but not previously by those from this University. Sightings of single birds and of groups of up to 5 were common during November and through to 12 January, the same individuals probably being involved on most occasions.

*Yellow hammer (Emberiza citrinella)*

A male found under a rock ledge near the Station on 14 February had been dead for some time but was still readily identifiable.

These additions bring the bird list of the group to 45 of which 23 species are believed to breed.