

SIGHTINGS OF WHITE-BELLIED STORM-PETRELS
IN COASTAL WATERS

(a)

On 4/11/69 in position 40° 35' South, 171° 42' East, which is 47 miles to the west of Cape Farewell, two unfamiliar storm petrels were seen. These birds followed closely in the wake for 20 mins. and good views were obtained at distances of 40 to 50 feet in excellent light. They did not appear to be feeding, their flight being very erratic as they flipped continuously over from one side to the other. I did not see the feet used for walking on the surface of the water. However, on a number of occasions the two birds seemed to launch off the surface as though they had hit it with their breasts. The flight and movement were so swift that this could not be verified and it could well have been that the feet were put down momentarily without being seen.

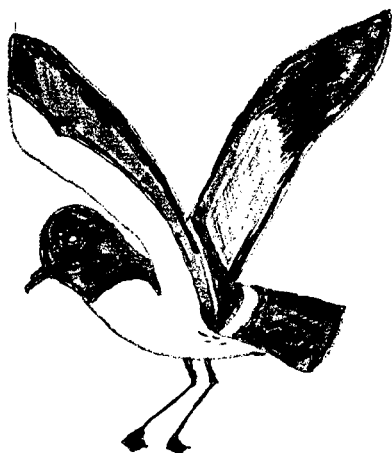
The time of observation was 1200-1220 and the weather — Wind SW 24 knots. Sea rough. Swell SW moderate. 4/8 Cloudy. Air temperature 56°. Sea temperature 56°. The vessel crossed the 100 fathoms line shortly after 1200 hours.

The following notes were taken at the time of observation. 8 x 50 binoculars were used. The head and neck were very black, being much darker than the rest of the black on the bird. The head reminded me of a Tom-tit, there being the same sharp contrast between the black head and white lower breast.

The lower breast and belly were white, there being no sign of black marking on the belly either in the form of a line or flank patches.

The under tail was white with a black tip, the tail being either square or slightly concave, as though the two outer feathers were slightly longer than the rest.

The underwing was mainly white about the coverts with black primaries. There was a black line right around the underwing, and



this seemed to be narrower at the fore end than at the after end, where it was quite wide.

The upper tail was black with a greyish-white rump. The white rump though being definite did not appear to stand out so much as in the darker storm petrels. The upper wing showed black primaries with a black line along the fore end which contrasted slightly with dark greyish-brown secondaries.

The bill and legs were black.

After discussing the above field notes with R. B. Sibson and F. C. Kinsky, who showed me a skin of the bird, it would appear that the birds were White-bellied Storm Petrels *Fregetta grallaria*.

— JOHN JENKINS

(b)

On the crossing from Tutukaka to the Poor Knights Islands on 6/12/69 two storm petrels, predominantly black above and white below, were seen. Both birds, seen within 200 yards of each other, behaved in an identical manner. They "skipped" over the surface of the water, with both feet together, touching water on the downswing. The wings were fluttered continuously and on about every third upswing were raised completely. The flight was relatively direct, with little zigzagging. Only one bird, however, came close enough (10-15 yards) for a certain identification to be made.

The accompanying illustration is based on field notes and sketches made at the time. The bird was observed through 8 x 30 binoculars for three to four minutes.

Description: Bill and feet black. Head, throat and upper breast and back a grey-black colour. The tail was square and appeared slightly browner, with a prominent white band across the upper tail coverts. The underwing was strikingly bicoloured — outer coverts grey-black, inner ones white. On the upperwing the proximal part was distinctly paler (grey-brown) than the primaries and wing margins (grey-black). The lower breast, abdomen, flanks and under tail coverts were white, with a few dark marks on the flanks. There was no sign of any dark markings on the abdomen.

The absence of a dark line through the abdomen distinguishes White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta grallaria* from the normal (dark) phase of Black-bellied Storm Petrel *F. tropica*. The rarer pale phase of *F. tropica* lacks a dark line through the abdomen. In both phases of this latter species, however, the upperparts are sooty (not grey-black) and the median and greater wing coverts are sooty-black (not grey-brown). It should be noted that even this latter distinction can only be appreciated at fairly close range and under favourable conditions.

As all relevant plumage details could be distinguished on one of the two individuals seen, I had no hesitation in identifying it as White-bellied Storm Petrel *F. grallaria*.

On the same crossing the following day the only storm petrels seen were White-faced Stormed Petrels *Pelagodroma marina* and, most surprisingly, a single Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis*. It is probable that the latter was a non-breeding bird, as the breeding season at the subantarctic islands is from October to March.

Zoology Dept.,
Univ. of Auckland

— J. P. CROXALL