SHORT NOTES

BLACK-CAPPED AND OTHER PETRELS NEAR THE KERMADECS

At 1830 hours on 4/1/70, M.V. Tarawera passed a small group of birds which were feeding, and consequently did not scatter until we were amongst them. The position at this time was 29° 20′ South, 174° 14′ East. Wind E 14 knots. Air temp. 73°. Sea temp. 74°. The group consisted of 5 Black-winged Petrels *Pterodroma nigripennis,* 4 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus pacificus* and two birds with which I was not familiar. The following is a description of these birds taken at the time; the light was good, and 8 x 50 binoculars were used.

The wings were long and fairly narrow. The flight in the moderate wind involved plenty of wing flapping and gadflying, and very little gliding. There was a prominent black cap which came down below the eye towards the back of the face, though the eye or black patch around the eye was clear of the cap. The forehead was white and the bill black. There was a very prominent white collar passing right around the back of the neck. The back was grey near the collar and seemed to get progressively darker grey towards the tail. The feathers of the back seemed to have some form of marking on them, as though the edges of the feathers were a different colour grey or even brown. The upper surface of the tail was dark grey or black. On the upper wing the primaries were dark grey/black, and the secondaries were a lighter grey, though not nearly so light a grey as the back. The under surface of the body was white with a prominent narrow dark band which seemed to start at the forward edge of the wing and pass well down each side of the breast, but was not complete. The undertail was white.

From references to literature and after discussions and examination of skins at the Dominion Museum, Wellington, it seems clear that these birds were Sunday Island Petrels *Pterodroma cervicalis.*

On 5/1/70, two more of these birds were seen, one at 1000 hours and the other at 1130 hours, the position at 1130 being 26° 16′ South, 175° 37′ East; the wind E S 15 knots; air temp. 74°; sea temp 75°. With the bird seen at 1130 hours were one *nigripennis,* 4 *pacificus,* and one Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta.*

Whilst bound from Nuku'alofa to Wellington on 18/1/70 the vessel passed within sight of the Kermadec Islands. At 0700 hours in position 26° 30′ S, 177° 32′ W; wind ESE 13 knots; air temp. 74°; sea temp. 75°, there was one *cervicalis* present with the other birds about the ship. At 1330 hours when 30 miles south of Raoul Island and almost the same distance from Macauley Island, ten *cervicalis* were seen together. At 1800 hours when 15 miles S.E. of Curtis Island four *cervicalis* were seen together and at 1830 hours three more. From the above observations it would appear that *cervicalis* is still present in the Kermadec Islands; if not on Raoul itself, then on some of the southern islands.

In Notornis XV, 214, I reported seeing large black-capped petrels in this area which I suggested could have been Greater Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis.* At that time it was pointed out by a number of ornithologists that the description given would fit *cervicalis.* Having now become reasonably familiar with *cervicalis* I can state that the birds seen in 1967 and 1968 were certainly not it.

The earlier birds were much larger, with a vastly different flight pattern and with a much larger black cap coming right down in line with the bill. After comparing the field notes on both types, I feel that my original tentative identification of *gravis* must stand.

The most numerous species seen on this passage through the Kermadecs was *nigripennis;* up to a hundred of these birds could be seen about the ship throughout the day. That large numbers stayed with the ship all night cannot be doubted as their distinctive calls could be heard from the bridge throughout the hours of darkness. At 0700 hours on 19/1/70 in position 33° 37′ S, 179° 29′ W; wind N 13 knots; air 73°; sea 73°, there were still about 40 *nigripennis* accompanying the vessel. This number gradually declined through the day until at 1830 hours in position 35° 40′ S, 179° 37′ E; wind S 13 knots, air 71°, sea 71°, there were seven of them still following. On 20/1/70 at first light the vessel was on the New Zealand coast south of East Cape and no more *nigripennis* were seen.

It was most interesting to notice the different behaviour of these Kermadec birds from that of *nigripennis* about the north of New Zealand. The New Zealand birds can be relied upon to give a good display of their high flying chases, as described in the Field Guide. The Kermadec birds not only did this but flew close up to the ship, above the bridge and masts more in the fashion of gulls than petrels. The chasing of one bird by two or three others occurred continuously, the birds calling throughout the chase.

— JOHN JENKINS

★

LITTLE BLACK SHAGS AT GISBORNE

There have been no recorded occurrences of the Little Black Shag *Phalocrocorax sulcirostris* from the Gisborne-East Coast area; but in 1967 and 1968 I suspected that flocks of shags numbering up to 28, flying high overhead to and from the upper reaches of the Waimata River, might be of this species. Confirmation came in March and April 1969, when a feeding flock travelled daily up the river, the maximum count being 41 birds. Usually they progressed rapidly on the deeper far side, feeding on shoals of sprats (yellow-eyed mullet); but sometimes they used the near side with its gently sloping bank, and fed on small flounder, about two inches long. On these occasions, excitement in the flock was even more intense than when a shoal of sprats was encountered, many birds stranding themselves on the bank during dives; and none appeared to fail in catching a flounder at every dive. It is interesting to note that the feeding habits of *P. sulcirostris* are precisely the same as those of the Guanay *P. capensis bougainvillei* of the Peruvian Guano Islands. Nelson (1968) in "Galapagos: Islands of Birds," describes how this species travels in an irregular mass, diving almost in unison, with the rearmost birds continually leap-frogging and landing ahead of the main flock. He expresses the opinion that communal hunting is unlikely to be a specially important mechanism, and goes on to say "It would be fascinating to know more about the precise schooling behaviour of *anchovetas* and what effect hunting Guanays have on