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SHORT NOTE

AN IMPRESSIVE ASSEMBLAGE OF ALBATROSSES

At 0845 on 28/2/71 M.V. Karepo passed about one and a half miles off a large foreign fishing vessel of the factory type working in the Canterbury Bight. The position at this time was 44.55 South, 172.00 East, with wind NE 15 knots; fine clear weather; air temperature 14.5 C and sea temperature 15.5 C. About four miles from the fishing vessel the numbers of albatross about the ship increased rapidly. The increase continued until we were at our closest point of approach when we estimated that there were at the very least five thousand albatross in the area; possibly more, as many groups of birds could be seen at extreme range.

Birds close enough to be identified included adult and immature Black-browed Mollymawks, Buller's Mollymawks, White-capped Mollymawks and tentatively Salvins Mollymawks and Grey-headed Mollymawks. Royals and Wandering Albatrosses were noticeable only by their small numbers. Four birds that could have been either old Wanderers or Royals were seen. It is doubtful if there were fifty of these larger birds in the area. There were very few other species about, not more than forty Giant Petrels; fewer than ten Cape Pigeons; and possibly fifty other dark petrels, of which those seen clearly were Sooty Shearwaters.

The fishing vessel was engaged in trawling at the time; and whilst the birds were thickest close to her, the rest seemed to be loafing about the area, possibly waiting for the trawl to be lifted. Rafts of up to one hundred mollymawks were not unusual and one raft was estimated to contain one hundred and fifty mollymawks and two Wanderers. Whilst these factory ships seen about the New Zealand coast invariably have large followings of mollymawks, this is by far the greatest number I have so far encountered.

— JOHN JENKINS