

RECENT OCCURRENCES OF RARE PETRELS IN NEW ZALAND

By F. C. KINSKY
Dominion Museum

1. SOFT-PLUMAGED PETREL *Pterodroma mollis*

On 16/5/71 a Soft-plumaged Petrel was found in a weak condition, but still alive, in the Hutt Valley. It was brought to the Wellington Zoological Gardens, where it died the following day, and was handed in to the Dominion Museum.

The bird, on dissection, proved to be a juvenile male, which could not have been off its nest for more than a few weeks, and possibly even less. Its plumage was fresh and in excellent condition. Although very thin, when found, the bird must have been trying to feed by scavenging at sea, as a complete tail of a young Short-tailed Shearwater *P. tenuirostris* was found in its stomach.

The description of the bird is as follows:

Crown, hindneck, sides of neck, back and short scapulars uniformly ash-grey; upper tail coverts and tail similar but slightly paler. Feathers of forehead and sides of face white-tipped, giving a mottled appearance. A black patch in front and behind the eye. Long scapulars and entire wing blackish, except for both rows of greater secondary upper wing coverts, which are ashy grey with white edgings. Inner webs of all primaries narrowly edged with white. Underwing coverts mainly sooty-grey, but greater underwing coverts more or less white-tipped and white-based. Longest axillaries white on outer web, remainder grey and white-tipped. Chin and throat white, grey collar extending in an ashy-grey band across the foreneck. Remainder of under surface white, except for faint freckling on flanks. Undertail coverts pure white. Outer tail feathers white on inner web with heavy grey mottling on outer web; some grey mottling on next two pairs of rectrices; remainder of tailfeathers grey. Bill black; iris dark brown; tarsus flesh coloured, and this colour extending one third down the toes and webs, remainder of toes and webs black.

Measurements:

Bill:	35.8mm	Wing:	258.0mm
Tarsus:	36.7mm	Tail:	111.0mm
Toe:	45.9mm	Weight:	176.0gr.

This specimen represents an extremely light colour phase, particularly in the uniform colouring of its dorsal surface. Its general plumage pattern and its measurements fall within the published records for the Southern (Indian and Atlantic) Ocean races of the species, and it can therefore be considered to belong to the nominate race, *Pterodroma mollis mollis* (Gould).

The above specimen constitutes the first reported occurrence of a Soft-plumaged Petrel on the mainland of New Zealand.

2. BLACK-CAPPED PETREL *Pterodroma externa cervicalis*

Following the unusually heavy tropical storm which hit New Zealand on 10/4/68, a Black-capped Petrel was found exhausted, but still alive, on farmland on the Mamaku Plateau (Rotorua). The bird died shortly after it was picked up and was placed in a freezer, where it was consequently forgotten. However, it eventually reached the Dominion Museum late during 1970. The bird was very thin and somewhat dehydrated, but its plumage, in spite of the long delay, was still in very good condition.

The specimen, an immature male, was prepared as a study skin (DM-15736) and its measurements are given below:

Bill:	25.8mm	Wing:	309.0mm
Tarsus:	46.0mm	Tail:	140.0mm
Toe:	50.3mm	Weight:	295.0gr.

Up to a very short time ago Black-capped Petrels were known to breed only on Raoul Island (Kermadec Islands), where their numbers were rapidly decreasing. Within the last few years their numbers on Raoul Island declined to a stage at which the race was considered to be on the verge of extinction. Quite recently, however, a hitherto unknown and thriving breeding colony was discovered on Macauley Island, one of the more southerly islands of the Kermadec Group. Although Black-capped Petrels may be observed fairly regularly at sea in the vicinity of the Kermadec Islands, no specimen of this race has ever been found storm-wrecked in New Zealand before.

3. SUBANTARCTIC LITTLE SHEARWATER *Puffinus assimilis elegans*

On 7/6/70, a Subantarctic Little Shearwater was found killed on Campbell Islands, after hitting a building during the preceding night. Late during the same year the specimen was forwarded to the Dominion Museum, where it was prepared into a study skin (DM-15797).

The measurements of the specimen, an adult male (by dissection) are the following:

Bill:	24.6mm	Wing:	188.5mm
Tarsus:	42.4mm	Tail:	70.0mm
Toe:	48.0mm	Weight:	224.0gr.

The Subantarctic Little Shearwater, the largest of the three races of the species, breeding in the New Zealand region, is known to breed on the Chathams, Antipodes and Auckland Islands. Some specimens are known to have straggled to the South Island of New Zealand, but none has, as yet, been recorded from Campbell Island.