

LETTERS

The Editor,
Sir,

BLACK-FACED PENGUINS ON THE SNARES

You may have room for a few additional comments on the identity of the black-faced *Eudyptes* penguins from the Snares Islands discussed in recent issues of *Notornis*.

It is clear that the controversy boils down to an assessment of probabilities. Falla, Fleming and Kinsky argue that the 1969 bird was more likely to have been a Royal Penguin due to a combination of characters, all of which are known to overlap with those of the typical race, whereas I believe that the probability is in favour of its belonging to the typical sub-species due to the rarity of black-throated birds noted at Macquarie Island during 1959-61 and by Peter Shaughnessy during his 15 months there.

Falla *et al.* evidently believe that we are wrong in our estimates of this rarity. I'm sure, however, that if they had lived in close proximity to Royal Penguins or searched unsuccessfully for black-faced birds among the hundreds of thousands of penguins comprising the vast Hurd Point colony, as I did, they would agree on the scarcity of such animals.

I remain unconvinced as to the alleged blacker throats of dark-faced Royals: some skins of undoubted Macaronis e.g. some from Deception I. and Kerguelen in the British Museum (Natural History) could hardly be darker.

The additional data given by Falla *et al.* which we all agree must be comparable as regards sex, age and so on, hardly permit such comparisons. For instance, only one of the birds (16 Macaronis and 8 Royals) in the British Museum and none in the American Museum of Natural History (15 Macaronis and 14 Royals) is labelled as a breeder. Some probably were breeders, but many are unsexed and many clearly sub-adult. The best labelled that I have seen are the ANARE Royal Penguin skins in the National Museum, Melbourne, but these hardly comprise a good statistical sample. Jouanin and Prevost, in the paper referred to by Falla *et al.*, do not give the dimensions of the British Museum birds.

Nevertheless, as I have indicated previously, it seems that there are significant size differences between these two sub-species of *E. chrysolophus* and Downes and Gwynne's bird with a bill length of 66 mm may be atypical. But to evaluate the degrees of overlap in the various characters like bill size — perhaps measured in 3 dimensions (see Warham 1972, "Breeding seasons and sexual dimorphism in Rock-hopper Penguins," *Auk* 89: 86-105), flipper length, under-flipper pattern etc., requires better data, preferably taken from good samples of live birds. It should then be possible to be more confident of

differentiating between pale-faced Macaronis and normal Royals and between black-faced Royals and normal Macaronis, if the problems of age variation can be overcome. Of course this assumes that abnormal birds like the black-faced examples from Macquarie, are not really all stray Macaronis, as I thought when the 1963 photograph to which Falla *et al.* refer was published.

Incidentally the under-flipper pattern of the 1969 bird was carefully drawn from life. It was darker anteriorly than Rand's Figure 2 of a typical Macaroni (reference in Falla *et al.*) so that if this feature has any diagnostic value it does not help their case. Unfortunately no such sketch was made of the 1970 bird.

Finally it seems doubtful that the latter was yet another black-faced Royal. According to G. R. Wilson it had a flipper 194 mm long, a bill length of 58.2 mm, an extensive exposure of bare skin at the gape, and a lemon-yellow crest: the latter suggests that it was not fully adult and the dimensions fit either sub-species.

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The Editor,
Sir,

LEG AND FOOT COLOUR OF THE MARSH CRAKE

I read with much interest Dr K. E. Westerskov's article (Notornis 17: 324-330, 1970) on the leg and foot colour of the Marsh Crake (*Porzana pusilla*). According to the author the Marsh Crake has olive green legs and feet, irrespective of the subspecies, sex, age and season. This opinion is in contrast to much of the European ornithological literature.

The Marsh Crake is an occasional breeding bird in the Netherlands. From 11 June till 5 August 1971 at least 8 males of *Porzana pusilla intermedia* were holding territories in an inundated polder in the neighbourhood of Amsterdam. Four nests containing one or more eggs were found (Veling, Mededelingenblad KNNV VWG Amsterdam, 9e jaargang, nr. 3: 20, 1971). On 14 July I had the opportunity to study both male and female for about a quarter of an hour. I was in company of three experienced birdwatchers. After a careful examination of the leg colour we all concluded that both male and female had brownish-flesh-coloured legs (1). Three other males were observed in electric torch-light at very close quarters (about 1 metre).