

SHORT NOTES

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE MERCURY ISLANDS

Until the early 1960s, little was known, and even less had been published, about the birds of the Mercury Islands Group. However, a number of accounts have now appeared (Edgar 1962; Skegg 1963; Thoresen 1967). The present note records some of the observations of a King's College Bird Club party, which visited the Group in mid-December 1965. The party was led by Mr R. B. Sibson, and comprised Mr J. A. F. Jenkins, Mr D. V. Merton, seven members of the King's College Bird Club, and the writer.

The party spent seven days on Red Mercury Island. Pycroft's Petrels (*Pterodroma pycrofti*) were found to be occupying burrows in all parts of the island. Evening banding efforts were concentrated on the slope behind Rolypoly Bay. On three successive nights, six members of the party banded 22, 26 and 35 Pycroft's Petrels, along with other birds, in less than two hours. This is very many more than could have been caught around Dragon's Mouth Cove, Hen Island, or even South Cove, Big Chicken Island, in the same time. Two new birds were added to the "island list." A Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*) was seen around the island on two successive days, and a Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) was found, dead, in the valley behind South Landing.

Four members of the party spent the night of 20-21 December on Kawhitihu (Stanley I.). After nightfall, it was not possible to move far from the campsite, which was located near the middle of the western side of the island, some way down from the central ridge. Pycroft's Petrels and Sooty Shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus*) were discovered breeding. The Pycroft's Petrels did not appear to be in as great a numbers as on the slope behind Rolypoly Bay, on Red Mercury Island. Nevertheless, there was little difficulty in catching six of them for banding. The Sooty Shearwaters were the first recorded breeding in the Group. Four were caught for banding, and it was estimated that there were a couple of dozen pairs breeding on the slope below our campsite. Two other additions to the "island list" were Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) and Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*).

On 15 December the boat taking the party to Red Mercury Island passed close to Flat Island. 60+ pairs of Black-backed Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) appeared to be nesting, along with c. 200 pairs of Red-billed Gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*). Red-billed Gulls were also seen flying towards Whale Rock, where they may have been breeding.

LITERATURE CITED

- EDGAR, A. T. 1962. A visit to the Mercury Islands. *Notornis* 10 (1): 1-15, 2 maps.
- SKEGG, P. D. G. 1963. Birds of the Mercury Islands group. *Notornis* 10 (4): 153-168, 1 map.
- THORESEN, A. C. 1967. Ecological observations on Stanley and Green Islands, Mercury Group. *Notornis* 14 (4): 182-200, pls XXVIII-XXIX.

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DIVING BEHAVIOUR OF GANNETS AND SHEARWATERS

Late on the evening of 4 May 1972, in a flat calm, a wide stretch of water off the southern shore of the Bay of Islands was patrolled by scattered single Gannets (*Sula bassana*) fishing mainly for anchovies and pilchards; they flew 3-5 feet above the water, shallow-diving at intervals. Several flocks of Fluttering Shearwaters (*Puffinus gavia*) were feeding normally or resting on the water, but some of the gannets were attended by a single shearwater, some by two and one by four shearwaters. These shearwaters flew below and behind, or sometimes underneath the gannet; each time the gannet dived so did the attendant shearwaters. Sometimes gannet and shearwater entered the water together, at other times the shearwaters dived a fraction ahead of the gannet, which went in on top of them; occasionally when the gannet made as if to dive but checked before actually doing so, the shearwater's momentum carried it into a brief dive followed by a quick recovery and hurried flight to catch up with the gannet.

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A PALE SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER

An unusually pale Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) was picked up on Muriwai Beach, Auckland west coast, on 12 December 1971. The following features should be noted in particular (see Figs 1 and 2): Pronounced white chin, underwing coverts off-white and underparts of body, and especially upper breast, very pale grey.

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