

SHORT NOTES

A SOFT-PLUMAGED PETREL FROM THE BAY OF PLENTY

On 18 November 1971, following three days of strong northerly wind NRH patrolled 3 miles of beach west from Rangitaiki rivermouth in the Bay of Plenty. In addition to 36 shearwaters and a White-headed Petrel (*Pterodroma lessoni*), he found a smaller petrel of whose identity he was uncertain. He sent this to MJI who thought it was a Soft-plumaged Petrel (*Pterodroma mollis*). The specimen then went to the Dominion Museum where FCK confirmed the identification as the typical subspecies, *P. m. mollis*. Unfortunately the condition of the specimen had deteriorated when it was collected so it was unsuitable for skinning but the skeleton and one complete wing were preserved. Upon dissection FCK found it to be an adult female with an ovum (yolk) in its oviduct. This yolk was 24 mm in diameter.

This is only the second Soft-plumaged Petrel recorded from the mainland of New Zealand, and it is the first found on a beach. The first specimen was a juvenile male found in the Hutt Valley, near Wellington, on 16 May 1971 (Kinsky 1971). There is little doubt that both these birds belong to the same breeding population, that this population is within the New Zealand zoogeographical region, and that it breeds in summer. The reproductive condition of the female indicates that she would have laid her egg in late November or early December which is the typical laying period for many summer-breeding petrels in the New Zealand region. The incubation period would be about 53 days, and the fledgling period probably similar to that of *Pterodroma inexpectata* which Richdale (1964) gives as "somewhat shorter than — 97 days." Thus, from an egg laid on 1 December the chick would probably have left the colony by 1 May. Such a departure date agrees well with the finding of the Hutt Valley juvenile on 16 May.

The first recorded occurrence of the Soft-plumaged Petrel in the New Zealand region was on Anipodes Island in February 1969 (Warham 1969). It is well established from beach patrols that several procellariiform birds breeding on the subantarctic islands of New Zealand, especially Bounty and Antipodes Islands, occur regularly in or near the Bay of Plenty: for example, Salvin's Mollymawk (*Diomedea cauta salvini*), White-headed Petrel and Grey Petrel (*Procellaria cinerea*). Hence, the occurrence of *P. mollis* there suggests that it is as likely to have come from Antipodes Island as anywhere else.

Furthermore, this specimen seems to demonstrate again the amazing distance to which breeding petrels forage from the nesting colony. The offshore waters of the Bay of Plenty are about 2,000 kilometers (1,300 miles) from Antipodes Island.

REFERENCES

- KINSKY, F. C. 1971. Recent occurrences of rare petrels in New Zealand. *Notornis* 18 (3): 215-216.
- RICHDALE, L. E. 1964. Notes on the Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* and other petrels. *Ibis* 106 (1): 110-114, tables 1-2.
- WARHAM, J. 1969. University of Canterbury Antipodes Island Expedition 1969. *Antarctic* 5 (6): 282.

N. R. HELLYER

65 Alexander Avenue,
Whakatane

F. C. KINSKY

National Museum,
Wellington

M. J. IMBER

Wildlife Service,
Department of Internal Affairs,
Wellington



UNUSUAL SEA-BIRD SIGHTINGS IN OTAGO

On Sunday, 15 March 1970, at approximately 5 p.m., as I was leaving the Royal Albatross colony at Taiaroa Head, Otago Peninsula, I observed a large sea-bird fly over the lighthouse, and then circle over the colony. The bird was "glasses" with 10 x 50 binoculars, and recognised as a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*). The bird made a pass over one of the Royal Albatross chicks, lowering its feet, as if to land, then carried on towards Harington Point rising higher and higher until it was lost from sight over Reids Beach.

On Sunday, 5 September 1971, a message was received from Mr G. R. MacKenzie of Waiwera South (14 miles south of Balclutha) to say he had a live albatross on his property, in a healthy condition except for a few ticks around the eyes. When collected it was found to be a juvenile Bounty Island Mollymawk (*Diomedea salvini*), 2 years old, and possibly older (F. C. Kinsky pers. comm.). The bird was held overnight, measurements taken, banded (M-24021), and then released at Taiaroa Head at 10 a.m. 6 September 1971. Gale force winds had been experienced on the previous days with southerly winds up to 50 knots. At the time of recovery this bird was 30 miles from the sea.

A. WRIGHT

Wildlife Service,
P.O. Box 30,
Portobello, Otago