I was unsure of the identification of the bird so I sent it to Mr F. C. Kinsky at the National Museum, Wellington. He identified it as a juvenile White-tailed Tropic Bird *(Phaethon lepturus)*. This is the first positive identification of this species in the New Zealand region.

Because of the malformed bill it is possible that the bird had difficulty feeding and died through starvation. The malformity of the bill had probably occurred at birth, or at a very early stage in the bird's life.

This species occurs in the centre of the tropical oceans, mainly on the Ascension and Galapagos Is, where it breeds amongst the larger Red-billed Tropic Birds *(P. aethereus)*. It also appears around the Tongan Is, where it is more common than the Red-tailed Tropic Bird *(P. rubricauda)*.

S. R. BROWN

5 Brabant Street,
Whakatane.

★

ANTARCTIC SKUAS AT VANDA STATION, ANTARCTICA

Vanda Station is a small permanent New Zealand field station sited at the East end of Lake Vanda in the Wright Valley at 77°31'S, 161°40'E. Its main function since its establishment in 1967 has been as a meteorological station and as a service centre for field parties studying geology, glaciology, hydrology, etc., in the Dry Valleys. The coast lies some 30 miles to the east where, at Marble Point, the nearest colony of Antarctic Skuas *(Stercorarius skua maccormicki)* breeds. Each summer since the opening of Vanda Station skuas have visited the Station (unpublished Vanda Leader's Reports to the Ross Dependency Research Committee). The largest number seen together is recorded as three, and the earliest arrival at the Station on 9 November, in 1971.

During the summer season 1972-73 I was appointed Leader, Vanda Station, by the Antarctic Division of the DSIR, and noted on 6 November the arrival of the first skua, which carried a plain, un-numbered band. Presentation of high quality food scraps attracted the individual for several days until it was joined by another and, a little later, a third. Although, at this stage, no more than three birds were seen together, it was clear from plumage variations and recognisable individual behaviour that more birds were involved. In an attempt to assess the size of the visiting population I commenced a trapping programme in which four birds were trapped and banded. Subsequently three un-banded birds were seen feeding together, bringing the total number of confirmed visitors to seven. On 15 January seven birds were seen together in flight and it is probable that the actual total number of visitors during the season exceeded ten — far more than has hitherto been suspected. Two birds (one of which was the first visitor of the season) were present when the Station was closed for the winter on February 8.

On several occasions during the season elementary courtship display, territorial defence behaviour and exciting aerial chases were observed, but because the visiting skuas are entirely dependant on food scraps proffered by the Station's personnel it is considered most unlikely that breeding could take place in the vicinity of the Station.

J. A. FOWLER

Department of Education,
Private Bag,
Wellington.

★

PREENING OF SILVEREYES

For many years I have, over the three winter months, fed Silvereyes *(Zosterops lateralis)* at a feeder suspended in a tree. Although I have frequently observed what I call " reciprocal preening," it is only recently I have had the opportunity of watching this at close quarters, from inside a window at a distance of three metres.

The procedure is for two birds, after feeding, to perch close together. Each preens itself wherever it can reach. The birds then in turn preen each other all round the head and neck in a very detailed manner. Occasionally the birds will preen each other's head at the same time. The operation takes from less than a minute to a maximum of five minutes. The greatest number of pairs preening at one time has been four.

L. W. McCASKILL

8a Kauri Street,
Christchurch, 4.

[See also under ' Silvereye ' in this issue of Classified Summarised Notes — Ed.]

★

HYBRID OYSTERCATCHER REPORTED IN ARGENTINA

In an article on winter bird populations in Argentina, Jehl, Rumboll & Winter (1973) published a photograph of a pair of American (pied) Oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus,* sometimes treated as a subspecies of *H. ostralegus*) with a supposed hybrid between that form and the Blackish Oystercatcher *(H. ater)*. *H. palliatus* averages 8 to 10 pairs a mile along the sand beaches of their study area of Golfo San Jose, most of them maintaining territories throughout the year, a habit more reminescent of the New Zealand *H. reischeki* phase of *H. unicolor* than of *H. ostralegus finschi.* Where rocky platforms outcrop, supporting mussel beds, they provide habitats for the Blackish Oystercatcher which " occasionally hybridises with *H. palliatus* in this area." Thus *H. ater,* like *H. unicolor* in New Zealand, tends to replace the pied on rocky shores. A third form, *H. leucopodus,* the Magellanic or Fuegian Oystercatcher, winters in this area.

The photograph shows that these Argentinian *" palliatus "* (perhaps properly the subspecies *durnfordi*) differ from the true