

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 reminiscent 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

*palliatu*s of the North and Central America (in R. C. Murphy's words) by their "mottled line of demarcation between the black and white plumage on the breast," another *unicolor-reischeki* character. While the relationship between *finschi* and Palearctic *H. ostralegus*, pointed out by Falla, has not been questioned, the affinities of the dimorphic *H. unicolor/reischeki* seem still undetermined and these South American forms, together with the Australian coastal species, must be considered candidates for relationship.

I apologise for adding more to the considerable amount of space already devoted to oystercatchers in Vol. 20 of *Notornis*, but it seems justified to alert readers to a forthcoming paper by Jehl (cited as "in prep." without further detail) that will presumably amplify evidence for hybridisation.

REFERENCE

JEHL, J. R.; RUMBOLL, M. A. E.; WINTER, J. P. 1973. Winter bird populations of Golfo San Jose, Argentina. Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club 93 (2): 56-63, figs 1-3, table I.

C. A. FLEMING

"Balivean,"
42 Wadestown Road,
Wellington, 1.

[See also reference to this paper in A. J. Baker, *Genetics of plumage variability in the Variable Oystercatcher (Haematopus unicolor)*, *Notornis* this issue — Ed.]