as Editor of *Notornis* have qualified him admirably to suggest what "the criteria for acceptance of material for publication in *Notornis* should be." I am bound to suggest, however, in a way that he, at least, will understand — "*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*" — Ed.]

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The Editor,
Sir,

## SOME SEABIRD RECORDS IN NOTORNIS

In the course of scanning the world's seabird literature I have just taken a three-volume dose of *Notornis*. It seemed wholesome, indeed impressive, if a bit solid (a little more sugar on the pill would do no harm), were it not for one or two small points that made it stick a little. Since I observe that a third of the way through it acquired a new Editor who wrote ([Dawson] 1972) "I would welcome, indeed encourage, controversy and discussion in the pages of *Notornis*. Too often a paper is printed and becomes accepted fact even if its readers hold contrary views, reticent though they may be in expressing them. Too many myths have already appeared in New Zealand ornithology about matters that are said to be 'well known' or are spoken of but never published. Letters to the Editor and critical reviews will always be welcome . . . ." I also notice a provocative review of volume 22 of *Sea Swallow* last year (E.W.D. 1973) which appears attributable to the same source. As Confucius remarked, those who are afraid of lightning should not fly kites, so let us also take up a few points in *Notornis!*

If we start with a bird I have actually seen, long ago at a great distance in a bad light (normally I try to avoid this, because as Oscar Wilde remarked in another context, it does prejudice a man so), your reviewer remarked on "a profound need for better guides and critical studies, such as we have had in *Notornis* on . . . the Soft Plumaged Petrel, by people who really know their seabirds, which might stress in particular, the pitfalls awaiting the beginner or those, experienced elsewhere, who move into a new geographical area . . ." If we refer back to this generally admirable study (Harper 1973) I observe on p. 200 the statement "another belief to be disposed of is that *Pterodroma mollis* has a dark phase. Authentic specimens to support this are so few and of doubtful origins that it would appear at most to be a rare aberration."

I do not disagree with this, but I wonder whether this study and the previous one by Harper, Watson & Angle (1972) of the Kerguelen Petrel *(Pterodroma brevirostris)* could not be considered more thorough if they had noticed that I once took the trouble to investigate this dark morph (Bourne 1957)? About a tenth of the available specimens of Soft-plumaged Petrel (which may well have been selected) have the back suffused with sepia pigment which extends anteriorly as a breast band and ventrally as streaking of the belly. Two extreme examples, one from Gough Island and one taken at 36°S. 88°55'E. by John Gould, are almost uniformly dark and very like a Kerguelen Petrel, from which they may be distinguished by their broader bills, wider primaries with dark centres and shafts where these are pale in the Kerguelen Petrel, pale bases to the feathers of the

underparts and pale fringes to those of the chin. I subsequently concluded that some other dark birds with broad bills might be hybrids between the two species (Bourne 1966). I had no skulls of the Kerguelen Petrel available, and Mr Harper's account of their distinctive character might now be thought to indicate that the two preceding species and the Mottled Petrel *(Pterodroma inexpectata)* which I interpreted as their migratory Pacific representative, are not so closely related, but on the other hand some other undoubtedly closely related seabirds such as the Murres or Guillemots of the genus *Uria* also show adaptive structural differences (Spring 1971) so this may not be so significant.

It may also be noted that some other gadfly petrels, and especially the members of the *Pterodroma neglecta- arminjoniana- alba* complex, also appear to hybridise freely where they breed at the same site despite equally marked differences in structure, voice and appearance. The numerous intermediate individuals in the American Museum of Natural History incidentally include the type of *Aestralata oliveri* from Sunday Island in the Kermadecs on 7 March 1913 (Mathews & Iredale 1914) which appears to me intermediate though with a strong strain of Phoenix Petrel *(Pterodroma alba)*. Another bird of this type in the National Museum, Wellington, was taken on Raoul Island on 20 August 1944. It should also perhaps be pointed out that records of the Providence Petrel *(Pterodroma solandri)* from the Tuamotu and Austral groups result from misidentifications of Murphy's Petrel *(Pterodroma ultima)* before it was identified as a distinct species.

It is perhaps also worth pointing out that the northern forms of the Manx Shearwater *(Puffinus puffinus)* complex also vary greatly in appearance, the extreme individuals being entirely dark (Loomis 1918, Davis & Packer 1972). While I *agree* that the dimensions *and appearance* of the New Zealand specimen recently reported by Kinsky & Fowler (1973) do agree with the nominate race from the Atlantic, the difference from the Hawaiian race *P. p. newelli* is really very small, the only certain character being the length of the tail (Murphy 1952, King & Gould 1967). The possibility that such birds come from the North Pacific should always be considered before it is assumed that they come from the Atlantic, where, incidentally, they no longer breed on Bermuda and have never been proved to do so on the Salvages though they are now known to winter off south-west Africa (Lambert 1971). Since Vooren (1973) also quotes past speculations that breeding birds have a vast feeding range, it should perhaps also be pointed out that more recent workers doubt if it greatly exceeds 200 miles (Harris 1966).

It is not particularly surprising, as your Reviewer remarks, that people should occasionally get into trouble with birds with which they are not normally acquainted. It is only because some people are prepared to risk making asses of themselves in this way that the rest of us become enlightened. The fact which is somewhat surprising to an external observer is that people in New Zealand sometimes show so little awareness of events elsewhere. This not only involves rare petrels and shearwaters, but also such conspicuous examples of native avifauna as Giant Petrels (*Macronectes* sp.). I note with mild interest that eight years after we suggested that there are two species (Bourne & Warham 1966), and six after this was confirmed by the French on

the Crozets (Voisin 1968) I have only come across one note of this observation in *Notornis*, which gets it wrong (Hicks 1973)*. One would at least expect someone to make haste to point out that our (perhaps here I should say " my ") conclusions about the distribution of the white morph and the migratory tendencies of the Northern Giant Petrel *(Macronectes halli)* were wrong, but no, nobody has even noticed ! This really suggests an extraordinary atrophy of the critical faculties. Johnstone (1971) has listed the characters by which the two forms, which since they have a widely overlapping breeding distribution should surely be regarded as distinct species, may be distinguished; current evidence suggests that all the young birds migrate, though all the older ones may be more sedentary.

This wayward tendency is most conspicuous to external observers in local classification and nomenclature. The object of this otherwise tedious study is to enable people to arrive at agreement over what entities they are dealing with and what they should be called. Unfortunately, it appears to have evolved in an entirely different direction in New Zealand to the rest of the world, where people apparently still indulge in racial discrimination in the field a quarter of a century after they began to abandon it elsewhere (see Tucker 1949). The rest of us are now confronted by a set of systematic Moas, talking a language we cannot understand. I share your Reviewer's friend's doubts about everybody's observations, with the reservation that I particularly doubt my own because I know more about them, but if the world at large is to make further progress not only with qualitative but also quantitative ornithology we need to agree not only on an international nomenclature but also recording techniques as well, as already pointed out by Mr Heinekamp (1973). I quite agree that at present we are not really ready for computors (our Consultant ended up drawing interesting symmetrical outlines with his); much as I admire the luxuriant variety of treatment adopted in the numerous excellent seabird papers you have published recently, the mind boggles at what would happen if anyone tried to process the data uniformly in a computor !

Actually, I think *Notornis* is a splendid journal, combining a monumental original contribution in an area where it is much needed with a fine ripe local flavour too rare in the modern world. Congratulations on your coming of age (if that is what Volume 21 means).

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* (but see JOHNSTONE, G. W. 1974. Letter to the Editor. Plumage phases of Giant Petrels. *Notornis* 21 (1): 91 — Ed.)

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*29 May 1974*
*(amended 28 October)*

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The Editor,
Sir,

## OYSTERCATCHER ETYMOLOGY — A REPLY

Mr R. B. Sibson's note (1973) to two apparent 'errors' in my etymological paper on Oystercatchers (Heppleston 1973) has prompted me to defend myself in public — and I am grateful to the Editor for this opportunity of doing so. Sibson disagreed with my interpretation of the words *malacophaga* and *Haematopus.*

*malacophaga:* its derivation is indeed Greek, not Latin — a slip which I humbly admit. One of the standard Greek-English lexicons (Liddell & Scott 1890), to which I will refer again later, gives two meanings for *malakia:*

malakia (1) — softness
malakia (2) — mollusca — i.e. water animals of soft substance without external shells e.g. cuttlefish (Aristotle); hard-shelled molluscs Aristotle termed 'Ostracoderma.'

Neither of these meanings refers to bivalve molluscs. Confusion arises from the use of the word *Malacology* to describe the study of molluscs, and *Malacostraca* as the name of one of the crustacean taxa; in the latter word it is the root *ostrakon* which means 'shell' — not *malaco-.*

The *malacophaga* subspecies (if one accepts that it is a separate subspecies) is found in Faeroe and Iceland. In Faeroe very few Oystercatchers winter; those that do would have difficulty feeding on the shore, since there is a narrow intertidal zone on a coastline which