

variant for himantopus (thong foot/leg), the Greek name for the Stilt. Many centuries later, Linnaeus retained himantopus for the Stilt, but used haematopus to designate the Oystercatcher.

Let us grant that the basic meaning of malacos is soft or dainty. Are Faroese oystercatchers really more partial to a soft diet than others? Most, if not all, oystercatchers eat only the fleshy insides of the larger molluscs on which they prey. They do not consume the hard shells. Thus, the polder-frequenting oystercatchers of Holland have long favoured a soft diet such as they can find in an agricultural environment; and the same applies to many of our oystercatchers in New Zealand, especially, of course, *finschi*. In short, Faroese oystercatchers have no more claim to be called malacophagous, if malacos simply means 'soft,' than many other forms of *Haematopus*.

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The Editor,  
Sir,

#### CLASSIFICATION OF THE RALLIDAE

Regarding Dr Fleming's suggestion that Storrs Olson's hypothesis that *dieffenbachi* was confined to the main Chatham Island and *modestus* to Mangere, could be tested by study of the abundant sub-fossil bone collections from the Chatham Islands, many of the earlier collections are labelled only "Chatham Islands," with no indication of the localities in the Islands from which the bones came. This is the case with the majority of the earlier collected specimens in Canterbury Museum.

However, my own collecting from 1972 to 1975 has yielded bones of *modestus* from dunes at Te One, Long Beach, Maunganui and between Maunganui and Tupurangi, Waitangi, Ouirā and Cape Young in localities on the main Chatham Island (Rekohe to the Moriori, Wharekauri to the Maori) but *modestus* is not nearly as common as *dieffenbachi* which I found in nearly every dune site I have visited. Incidentally, I do not believe that *dieffenbachi* is a derivative of *philippensis*, but that *philippensis* and possibly *modestus* had a common ancestor, which may possibly yet be found in the Chathams. I certainly shall not place them in *Gallirullus*. I regard them as generically distinct. Also *dieffenbachi* did not have an "early extinction." It was still alive in the first quarter of the 19th century.

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