SHORT NOTES

PHENOMENAL ANTARCTIC FULMAR WRECK

During September and October 1975 a total of 615 wrecked Antarctic Fulmars *(Fulmarus glacialoides)* was recorded from west coast beaches of the North Island; 525 of these occurred from Auckland northwards.

Up to the end of the 1950s, a total of 12 storm-wrecked Antarctic Fulmars had been recorded on the New Zealand coast. Of these, the farthest north record was from Kaipara Harbour Heads. Beach patrol records give only 7 specimens for the years 1935-59 from 1041 km of beach. For the next decade this species remained a comparatively rare straggler to New Zealand. Then, in 1970, 16 were picked up. In 1973 the figure was a phenomenal 134 (see Table 1), but dropped again the following year to 19.

BEACH PATROL RECORDS OF FULMARS
FOR ALL NEW ZEALAND AREAS

(Figures from reports of dead seabirds published in *Notornis*)

	No.	*Km covered*
1935-59	7	1041
1960	0	1027
1961	0	1379
1962	0	1176
1963	0	1371
1964	1	1057
1965	1	785
1966	0	661
1967	0	1047
1968	0	1304
1969	0	1711
1970	16	2013
1971	3	2473
1972	5	2752
1973	134	2456
1974	19	2847
1975	615*	–

* Provisional total at time of writing.

In both 1973 and 1975 the big wrecks occurred at about the same time of year and in association with high numbers of Kerguelen Petrels *(Pterodroma brevirostris)*. The wrecks occurred in the winter months when sea temperatures are at their lowest. In August 1975 a deep depression passed across the South Tasman Sea on 28-29 August and became complex south of New Zealand on 30 August with strong

SW winds which persisted through to 12 September gradually moderating.

At about this time, two sightings of Fulmars at sea were reported by Mr Neil Cheshire of Auckland as follows:— 1 bird 7 Sept. close to ship. Position: 40°S, 173°11'E, 52 miles SSW from Cape Egmont. Wind WSW 35-40 knots; and, 2 birds 8 Sept. flying close. Position: 36°27'S, 172°43'E, 64 miles west of Kaipara Harbour entrance. Wind SW 20-25 knots.

During coastal voyages since 1971, Mr Cheshire has only once before seen this species at sea; that was on 17 January 1973 when he noted one bird 15 miles off Baylys Beach, Dargaville. On 11 Sept. about 100 Fulmars were seen alive standing on the edge of the surf along the beach south of Glink's Gully by Mr Barry Searle and Mr John Parker. Two days later, a beach patrol in the same area found only 2 live specimens out of a total of 159 dead. A flying Fulmar was noted off Muriwai Beach on 12 October 1975 by Mr Pat Crombie of Auckland. Another was seen flying off the Cavalli Islands on 27 October by a group of 13 OSNZ members. On 27 September, 86 specimens of Fulmar were picked up on Ninety Mile Beach, considerably farther north than any previous records. The wreck of September-October appears to have occurred only on the west coast since no Fulmars were found on any east coast area in spite of checks on a number of beaches.

Undoubtedly weather conditions were among the main reasons for the large wrecks of 1973 and 1975, but they do not satisfactorily explain the wrecks. It is, perhaps, significant that in October 1965 somewhat similar conditions prevailed when there was a wreck of over 400 Prions on the Wellington west coast beaches, but only one Fulmar. Similar wrecks involving other species have been noted from time to time. It is well known that in winter the Antarctic Fulmar travels north with the Humboldt current into low latitudes in the western Pacific, some even crossing the equator into the northern hemisphere. In October 1972 one of the authors (SMR) was in Peru and saw many dead Fulmars on the beaches there; at that time, a warm equatorial current had displaced the Humboldt and thousands of seabirds perished. Hence, it seems likely that wrecks of species with seasonally differing migratory movements occur when exceptionally severe weather or abnormal hydrological conditions are encountered.

Of 26 bodies examined, 13 could be accurately sexed; all these were females. All bodies had squid beak remains in the gizzard and several contained Prion species, one even had the complete head, backbone, leg and foot of a Fairy Prion *(Pachyptila turtur);* some ramshorn shells *(Spirula spirula)* were found in one and in others a few rubber bands and one bootlace. The Animal Health Laboratory at Whangarei reported 11 specimens suffering complete exhaustion of fat reserves and wasting of pectoral muscle.

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SIGHTING OF A YELLOW-NOSED MOLLYMAWK OFF STEWART ISLAND

The recent record of a Yellow-nosed Mollymawk *(Diomedea chlororhynchus)* at the Chatham Islands (Robertson 1975, *Notornis* 22: 342-344) has finally prompted me to record a sighting of this species made near South Cape, Stewart Island. This bird was seen about two kilometres west of South Cape (47° 18'S, 167° 31'E), at about midday on 14 February 1974 by J. M. Clark, R. Schofield and myself. It was watched both in flight and on the water for several minutes and at times was less than 50 metres from us.

The head, neck and breast were entirely white, except for dark brown or black markings around the eye. The bill was entirely black, and the feet fleshy grey. The dorsal side of the wings, the mantle and the tail were black. The under wing was predominantly white, with very narrow black margins. These margins were too narrow for the bird to be a Black-browed Mollymawk *(Diomedea melanophris)*. The bird was noticeably smaller than a Shy Mollymawk *(Diomedea cauta cauta)* which it settled beside at one stage.

The black bill is characteristic of immature Mollymawks and the combination of the almost white underwing, entirely black bill and white head indicates it was a Yellow-nosed Mollymawk (Serventy *et al.* 1971, *Handbook of Australian Sea-birds,* Sydney: Reed: 76).

This observation was made while aboard the fishing vessel *Kowhai* (Skipper Murray Schofield). Dr J. Warham helped confirm my identification of the bird, and he and Dr W. Threlfall criticized the manuscript.

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