

## REPORT ON CUVIER ISLAND, JANUARY 1976

This report is intended as a follow-up to the Brief Survey by Blackburn, 1967, *Notornis* 14: 3-8). It is hoped that these two articles will form a basis of comparison for any future visitors to the island.

The following observations were made between 21 and 28 January 1976 by a group of six OSNZ members (Simon Chamberlain, Neil Cheshire, Bruce Keeley, Mark Neilson, Sylvia Reed and Jean Skinner) who explored the island as much as possible. Accommodation was available in the old radar hut on the summit, and from this members visited most parts of the island.

The weather was predominantly fine with variable winds, fresh southerlies reaching gale force on two nights, little cloud, and some rain on one night. The previous week there had been fairly heavy rain.

*Vegetation:*

No attempt was made to list all plant species in the fenced off forest area. The main regenerating species remain those recorded by Blackburn in 1967, namely kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*), kawakawa (*Macropiper excelsum*), hangehange (*Geniostoma ligustrifolium*), rangiora (*Brachyglottis repanda*), kanono (*Coprosma australis*), mahoe (*Melicytus ramiflorus*), five-finger (*Neopanax arboreum*). The following are common: nikau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*), karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*), mapou (*Myrsine australis*), kohuhu (*Pittosporum tenuifolium*), whau (*Entelea arborescens*), pigeonwood (*Hedycarya arborea*), parapara (*Heimerliodendron brunonianum*) in damp areas, wharangi (*Melicope ternata*), puriri (*Vitex lucens*) and broom (*Carmichaelia* sp.). Taurepo (*Rhabdothamnus solandri*) flourishes along the banks of the only permanent stream. Less common are *Hebe* spp., tea tree (*Leptospermum scoparium*), rewarewa (*Knightia excelsa*), karo (*Pittosporum crassifolium*) and several *Coprosma* spp. The climbers *Parsonsia heterophylla* and *Clematis paniculata* are abundant. It was noticeable that the large puriris were bare of epiphytes while many big pohutukawas were generously covered with climbing ferns and clumps of *Collospermum*. In the open coastal areas taupata (*Coprosma repens*), pohuehue (*Muhlenbeckia complexa*) and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum* var. *esculentum*) are common, the last quickly overgrowing tracks and obliterating them. Flax (*Phormium tenax*) is growing in odd clumps within the bush as well as abundantly in coastal areas.

*Birds:*

A total of 29 species was seen on the island; this does not include seabirds seen offshore only. Bellbirds were the most abundant, with a high proportion of juveniles. Saddlebacks were seen throughout the bush area, likewise with many juveniles. It was noticeable that wherever Saddlebacks were feeding, so also were Fantails which followed them through the trees. Most noteworthy was the record of a dark phase Kermadec Petrel (details in list) on 27 January 1976, which was captured and released.

NORTHERN BLUE PENGUIN (*Eudyptula minor*). Five nests of recent occupation were found.

GREY-FACED PETREL (*Pterodroma macroptera*). A number of empty burrows found and one juvenile bird sitting above ground looking very sick and emaciated; it died the next day and the body was taken for the Auckland Museum.

KERMADEC PETREL (*Pterodroma neglecta*). On 27 January 1976 one bird was observed from 1800 to 1830 hrs, soaring (up to 45 m) and gliding around the lighthouse settlement, occasionally going out to sea and returning, almost dropping to land several times. Twice it called while flying, a harsh 'kecow.' Occasionally it was chased by a Red-billed Gull and once it chased one. Characteristic marks noted in flight were the white underwing flashes and light primary shafts giving a striped area on the upper wing. The bird flew so close that these details were extremely clear; mottling round the base of the bill could also be seen. Finally the bird landed, disappearing into some long grass and sedge. An immediate search in the area soon revealed the bird sitting in a scrape, probably that of a Red-billed Gull, between clumps of the sedge *Scirpus nodosus*. Examined in hand (Fig. 1) the bird appeared similar in size to a Grey-faced Petrel but with the wings somewhat broader and not curved back; bill short and black, the light coloured mottling around the base more extensive above than below; inside of mouth pinkish mauve; back, upper wing coverts and tail uniform dark greyish brown; the white streaked effect on upper wing formed by white shafts of primaries, the shaft of the outermost being very broad. The white underwing flash is formed by the white inner webs of the base of the primaries. The tail was square with rounded corners; tarsi very pale fleshy-grey with light brown markings in front; feet black, paling to light grey at base, claws black. Measurements

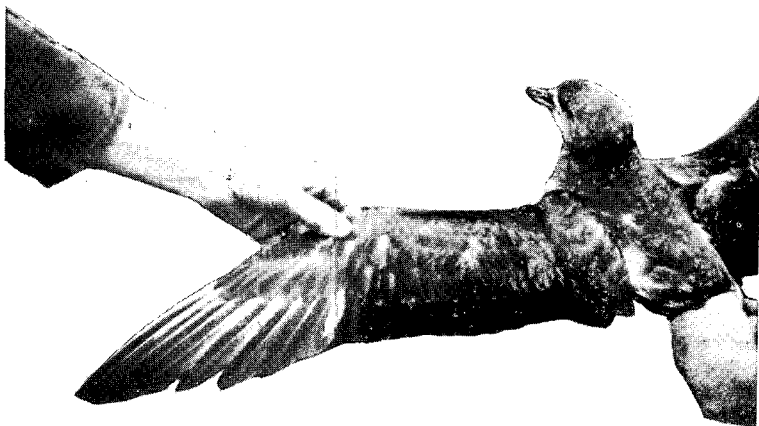


FIGURE 1 — Kermadec Petrel (*Pterodroma neglecta*), Cuvier Island, 27 January 1976. Photo: Neil Cheshire

(in mm): culmen 31, wing 305, tarsus 39, total length 371. Samples of lice were taken from the neck and nape area and sent to Professor R. Pilgrim at the University of Canterbury who identified them as *Halipeurus kermadecensis*. From cloacal inspection the bird was judged to be a female. According to the Principal Keeper, Mr Martin, this bird has been a regular visitor during Red-billed Gull nesting period for the last three seasons. This is the first New Zealand record of a live individual.

SCOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*). One bird found in a burrow with 3-4 day old chick. Three birds, probably of this species, seen flying at dusk. These birds were entirely silent as they came in.

PIED SHAG (*Phalacrocorax varius*). 12 birds counted at points round the coast. One breeding colony with 6 nests.

HARRIER (*Circus approximans*). One seen regularly, three on one occasion.

TATTLER (*Tringa* sp.). Two birds seen on beach near lighthouse settlement on 25 January. Not possible to define which of the two species as birds very timid and visited the island very briefly.

RED-BILLED GULL (*Larus scopulinus*). A breeding colony of about 500 pairs on Scott Monument and the nearby cliffs. In January nearly all juveniles were flying; many birds had probably already left the breeding ground.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*). One close inshore.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN (*Sterna striata*). A small breeding colony of about 50 pairs on cliffs adjacent to the lighthouse.

N.Z. PIGEON (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*). Present in bush area, about 8 sightings through the week.

RED-CROWNED PARAKEET (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*). Four birds seen. Calls heard twice. Two birds near one of the houses of the settlement. A difficult bird to find in the bush and not at all plentiful.

SHINING CUCKOO (*Chalcites lucidus*). One seen in pohutukawa at Radar Point.

KINGFISHER (*Halcyon sancta vagans*). Not uncommon. Four nests with young found, three of them in pohutukawa in the bush area, the fourth in cliff face.

SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*). Two on farmland near settlement. A nest reported by lighthouse keeper.

WELCOME SWALLOW (*Hirundo neoxema*). One seen in settlement area.

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*). One heard singing near the lighthouse.

GREY WARBLER (*Gerygone igata*). Common in bush area but not quite so abundant as Fantail and Bellbird.

FANTAIL (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*). Very common and nearly always to be found following feeding Saddlebacks.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*). Two observed, one in the bush, one near lighthouse settlement.

BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*). Very few in any part of the island.

SILVEREYE (*Zosterops lateralis*). Common, but not so much as Fantail.

BELLBIRD (*Anthornis melanura*). Abundant, especially flying juveniles being fed by parents. Calling and singing throughout the bush area; a few round the houses of the settlement.

YELLOW HAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*). One seen singing in clearing on edge of bush.

CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*). Not uncommon. Up to 4 seen together at one time on Lookout Spur.

REDPOLL (*Carduelis flammea*). One seen in clearing on main ridge.

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*). A flock of 20-30 round the settlement.

STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*). A flock of 30+ moving round the settlement and adjacent farmland.

SADDLEBACK (*Philesturnus carunculatus*). Abundant throughout the bush singly and in family parties. Many birds feeding low in bushes and on the ground. They were seen to feed on mahoe berries and flowers, tips of kawakawa catkins, coprosma and fivefinger berries, spiders, caterpillars and other insects. As they searched for food, often probing in the bark, pieces of twig and bark fell to the ground. The noise thus made can be imitated and will often attract the birds.

#### *Tuataras:*

Three were seen; two live near the houses of the settlement, the third near the only permanent stream. Length of third was 350 mm.

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### CRESTED GREBE IN THE NORTH ISLAND

While counting shags and swans at Lake Rotorua on 21 December 1975, my attention was immediately drawn to a Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*). The white neck, crest and bill, and the bird's position in the water made the identification quite positive. I spent the next half-hour watching it dive for small fish and just "loaf around" with shags behind some rocks off-shore. Immediately afterwards I contacted Dr and Mrs M. Wilcox who confirmed the sighting that afternoon. The bird was then seen every day until 30 December when it disappeared. Both Dr Wilcox and I have seen this species before in England.

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