

SOUTHERN BLACK-BACKED GULL AT CAPE BIRD,
ANTARCTICA

A Southern Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) was observed at Cape Bird (77°13'S, 166°27'E) on 27 November 1975 by Dr D. S. Horning and me. When first sighted, the bird was over the sea flying from the west towards the beach. It circled us three times, flying within 20 m of us and the orange spot on the gull's lower mandible was clearly visible through 8 x 30 binoculars. Also, the bird's flight feathers were conspicuously tattered. The bird then flew north along the beach, followed by three Antarctic Skuas (*Stercorarius skua maccormicki*), until out of sight. During this time two other skuas chased the gull as it flew over their territory.

Three days later, on 30 November, a Southern Black-backed Gull was sighted again. This may have been the same gull that was seen earlier as its flight feathers were also tattered. The bird flew north along the beach and, as it flew over an Adelie Penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) colony, a skua rose to chase the gull. No encounter between the gull and skua took place.

One record of a Southern Black-backed Gull sighted further south than Cape Bird has been published. A lone gull was recorded at Cape Royds (77°33'S) in 1965 by Spellerberg (1971, *Emu* 71: 161-171). It was chased, attacked and eventually driven away by Antarctic Skuas. Watson (1975, *Birds of the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic*, Washington, D.C., American Geophysical Union: 218) recorded several recent sightings of *L. dominicanus* on mainland Antarctica and thought these may indicate a future expansion of its breeding range. However, increased sightings are probably a result of increased human activity in Antarctica and awareness of birds rather than an increase in the breeding range of Southern Black-backed Gulls. Interactions between Antarctic Skuas and Southern Black-backed Gulls are of interest as these may indicate whether the breeding ranges of these two species could overlap.

We made these observations while stationed at Cape Bird as members of the Antarctic Research Unit, Department of Zoology, University of Canterbury.

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NEW ZEALAND FALCONS AT ROUND BUSH, FOXTON

The coastal Manawatu (100 km north of Wellington) is intensively farmed and the New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaesealandiae*) is a rare visitor (Falla 1957, *Proc. N.Z. Ecol. Soc* 5: 24-5). However, between Foxton and Himatangi on 15 and 18 August 1975, I saw a solitary falcon from a car. At each instance the bird was flying low over farmland, the first time about 4 km north of Round Bush Scenic Reserve, but subsequently within 400 m of it.

On 27 September 1975, to check for the presence of falcons, I went to Round Bush (NZMS1 N148/800248) and saw at least two birds as well as several Australasian Harriers (*Circus approximans*), flying and calling above the forest. Round Bush (Esler & Greenwood 1968, *Bull. Wellington Bot. Soc.* 35: 3-7) is a remnant of semi-swamp vegetation with tall forest dominated by kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) and pukatea (*Laurelia novaezelandiae*). It covers 50 ha and is the largest of only a few remnants in the area, the nearest major tract of forest being on the Tararua Ranges about 22 km to the east.

It appears likely that the bush was serving as a roost for the falcons in an area not otherwise providing suitable retreats. The sand-country is noted for its abundance of finches (Falla 1957) so that ample food would have been available. The *Field Guide* (Falla, Sibson & Turbott 1970) mentions that young birds wander over farmland in autumn, but these observations were in spring. That the species may sometime breed at Round Bush remains an exciting possibility.

Apart from the falcons on the one occasion, and despite many visits to the area at all times of year, I have seen no native birds at Round Bush or in its vicinity other than those common throughout the coastal Manawatu; namely Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*), Grey Warbler (*Gerygone igata*), Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*), Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*), Shining Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*), Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica neoxena*), Pukeko (*Porphyrio melanotus*), White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) and Harrier. This paucity of native species doubtlessly reflects the transformation of indigenous habitats into farmland, and provides circumstantial evidence for the inability of many native species to persist in a small and isolated remnant.

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WASHING OF FOOD BY SPOTLESS CRAKE

While observing Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis plumbea*) in a swamp in Waiuku State Forest on 24 May 1975, I noticed a feeding technique which I had not seen this species use before.

A bird, attracted by my taped calls, dropped into shallow water from among the leaves of raupo (*Typha angustifolia*) with a caterpillar in its bill. It was about 2.5 m away from me.

The head was then lowered, until part of the bill and the caterpillar were submerged, and moved vigorously from side to side, causing a splash. The bird repeated this washing action twice, swallowed the caterpillar, then quickly disappeared in the raupo, giving two very soft "mook" calls (Hadden, *Notornis* 17 (3): 200-213) as it did so. This observation was made on a cold, dull, showery day and lasted about a minute. The crakes had been generally active.

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