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## BIRDS OF THE 1976 - 77 SNARES ISLANDS EXPEDITION\*

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### ABSTRACT

Four new species, Black Shag, Feral Pigeon, Shining Cuckoo and Long-tailed Cuckoo, and one new breeding species, Chaffinch, were recorded from the Snares in the summer of 1976-77. A total of 57 species (23 breeding species) have now been recorded from the Snares. The origins of the new recorded species are discussed. Several interesting band recoveries are presented.

### INTRODUCTION

The 1976-77 University of Canterbury Snares Islands Expedition was in the field from 9 November 1976 to 3 March 1977. A full research programme included a continuation of long-term studies of the breeding biology of the Snares Crested Penguin (*Eudyptes robustus*) and Buller's Mollymawk (*Diomedea bulleri*); breeding biology studies of the Snares Cape Pigeon (*Daption capense australe*) and Antarctic Tern (*Sterna vittata*); and a comprehensive collection of bird ectoparasites.

Observations supplied by fellow expedition members, J. W. Early, G. D. Fenwick, Dr D. S. Horning and J. L. Woods, are gratefully acknowledged. All members participated in the band recovery and banding programme.

Place names mentioned in the text follow those of Warham (1967) and Horning & Horning (1974).

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\* University of Canterbury Snares Islands Expeditions Paper No. 32.

## SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT

SOUTHERN BLUE PENGUIN (*Eudyptula minor minor*)

One bird was found in the sea off Mollmaw Bay on 14 January 1977. The bird was very weak and died within an hour. Spots of oil were found on the abdomen. This bird was preserved and is deposited in the National Museum, Wellington. Two records of single birds have been reported previously (Warham & Keeley 1969; Horning & Horning 1974), indicating that this is a rare, but regular, vagrant to the Snares.

BULLER'S MOLLYMAWK (*Diomedea bulleri*)

A bird, originally banded as a breeding adult by Dr L. E. Richdale in 1948, was observed incubating near its original nest-site (a Richdale nest peg was found). Fifty-one birds banded as breeding adults on the Snares in 1961 were recovered alive and healthy on the breeding grounds. Two birds, banded as chicks in 1972 on the Snares, were recovered alive and healthy as non-breeders.

The first adult of the 1976-77 season was seen on a nest on 6 December 1976 and the first egg was found on 1 January 1977.

LIGHT-MANTLED SOOTY ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria palpebrata*)

There were three sightings of single birds: flying along the North Promontory (9 January 1977); gliding over Sinkhole Flat (10 January 1977) and gliding along the south side of the South West Promontory (25 February 1977). Warham (1967) recorded the only other sighting of this species at Snares, a single bird gliding along the South West Promontory Razorback on 12 January 1967.

Giant Petrels: *NORTHERN GIANT PETREL* (*Macronectes halli*) and *SOUTHERN GIANT PETREL* (*M. giganteus*)

All but one of the giant petrels sighted were of the northern form with chestnut nail of the upper mandible. A single white phase specimen of the southern form, with an unmarked green bill, was seen 1 km off the Western Chain on 21 November 1976.

Giant petrel numbers remained low (1-5 seen daily off Observation Rock) during November and December. Numbers increased rapidly during January, especially off the penguin landing sites. The highest number recorded in the Station Cove-Ho Ho Bay area was 32, a number much less than the 100-125 recorded by Warham (1967) and Horning & Horning (1974). Numbers declined during February.

SNARES CAPE PIGEON (*Daption capense australe*)

Birds were found on eggs on 20 November at the North Promontory breeding colony. Two birds originally banded at Tory Channel were resighted at the Snares. One, found breeding at North Promontory, had been banded in June 1961 and the other, captured off Mollmaw Bay, had been banded in August 1963.

**BROAD-BILLED PRION (*Pachyptila vittata*)**

Horning & Horning (1974) reported live birds of this species on Rocky Islet, the first published record from the Snares.

On 10 December 1976 two large chicks, in light grey down, were seen in a deep horizontal crevice on Rocky Islet. A near fully-feathered chick was found in a jumble of rocks on the south side of the South West Promontory Razorback on 2 January 1977. This is the first record of this species breeding on the Snares Main Island.

**AUSTRALIAN GANNET (*Sula bassana*)**

A single bird was seen flying off the North Promontory on 20 November 1976. It was not observed diving. The only published previous sighting of this species is that of Horning & Horning (1974).

**BLACK SHAG (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)**

This species was seen frequently on all the islands of the Snares group. On 20 November 1976 16 were seen during a boat trip around Main Island. A flock of 25 was flushed from a stack off the south side of Broughton Island on 30 November 1976. Seventeen were counted on a rock between Toru and Wha Islets of the Snares Western Chain on 4 December 1976. The largest number seen at any one time was a flock of 49 flushed from the South Promontory penguin landing rocks on 2 February 1977. All birds seen were in immature plumage with streaky white/brown underparts and dark brown upperparts. This is a new species record for the Snares Islands.

Eleven recently dead shags were found between 12 November and 15 December 1976. The gut contents of eight were examined. Five stomachs contained a dark brown semi-tarry substance, two stomachs contained pieces of *Durvillea antarctica* fronds and one stomach was nearly full of feathers (? *Puffinus griseus*) and peat.

The semi-tarry substance may be digested algae as it had an algal smell and the appearance of badly-decomposed wrack. The pieces of *Durvillea* were quite fresh and probably were floating fronds broken by wave action. It would seem unlikely that a shag could cut a piece of frond from a *Durvillea* plant. The feathers and peat in the gut of bird 8 probably were scavenged. These data suggest that the birds died from starvation. Also, the dates of death suggest that Black Shags had recently arrived at the Snares, in early November. Further evidence for their recent arrival comes from the irruption of Black Shags in south-east Australia. In November 1976 birds banded as nestlings in north-western Victoria and south-western New South Wales were recovered from north-eastern New South Wales and southern Tasmania (C. J. R. Robertson, pers. comm.). Such long distance recoveries were abnormal. It is possible that some of these birds reached the Snares.

**LITTLE SHAG** (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos* ssp.)

At least seven pied phase birds were present throughout our stay at the Snares. They were seen most frequently roosting in the *Senecio stewartiae* trees which overhang Boat Harbour. No breeding activity was recorded during the summer.

Pied phase Little Shags are uncommon in New Zealand, except in Northland (Falla, Sibson & Turbott 1970). This suggests that the birds seen at the Snares this summer were of Australian origin.

**SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris acuminata*)

A single bird was present throughout our stay. It was seen frequently feeding along the littoral zone in Boat Harbour and at the mouth of Muttonbird Creek. Warham & Keeley (1969) recorded the only other sighting, a single bird seen in November 1967.

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*)

A single bird was first seen in the Biological Station area on 10 December 1976. It was caught the next day and its band numbers recorded. When released, it stayed in the area and fed until 3 January 1977, when it was last seen flying north. This domestic pigeon had been released at Invercargill on 9 December 1976 and had not returned to its loft in Palmerston North by 21 March 1977 (G. Stowell, pers. comm.).

The weather on 9 and 10 December was overcast with light north to north-easterly breezes.

**SHINING CUCKOO** (*Chalcites lucidus*)

A single specimen was found dead (48-72 hours) on Skua Point on 12 November 1976. This is a new Snares Islands record.

**LONG-TAILED CUCKOO** (*Eudynamis taitensis*)

A single bird was seen in *Olearia lyallii* canopy from 10 m, near the Biological Station on 29 November 1976. Calls were heard subsequently on three occasions, the last on 10 December 1976. Twice it was seen being chased across the *Olearia* canopy by a Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). Both chases followed a period of intense Blackbird alarm calls. These may have been Blackbird responses to the hawk-like outline of the cuckoo. This is a new Snares Islands record.

**YELLOWHAMMER** (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Two were seen feeding in an area of *Poa astonii* at Seal Point on 13 and 14 November 1976 and a male was feeding on *Poa annua* seed heads near the Biological Station on 29 November 1976. Warham & Keeley (1969) recorded the only other sighting of this species, a mummified male found near the station.

**CHAFFINCH** (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Birds were seen and heard calling from the forest from November to January. A favoured area was the predominantly *Senecio* forest on the south side of Senecio Creek. On 18 December an abandoned nest with one egg was found 3 m up in the fork of a *Senecio* tree. This is a new Snares Islands breeding record.

**GOLDFINCH** (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Sightings of single birds and flocks of up to six were common during November. Sightings recorded by Warham & Keeley (1969) and Horning & Horning (1974) show this species to be a regular visitor to the Snares Islands, but no breeding has been recorded.

**GREENFINCH** (*Carduelis chloris*)

Sightings of from one to three birds were made during November. This species appears to be an uncommon but regular visitor to the Snares.

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus domesticus*)

Numerous sightings of from one to fourteen birds were made in the Biological Station area from November to January. All birds were very wary and did not allow close approach. On our arrival at the Biological Station the mummified corpse of a male was found on the Castaway Hut floor and another caught under the roof of the Dangerous Goods Store. There was no evidence of breeding activity during our stay.

**STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris*)

One bird was seen on two occasions in the vicinity of the Biological Station on 19 December 1976.

**DISCUSSION**

Warham & Keeley (1969) suggested Australia, while Horning & Horning (1974) suggested New Zealand, as the origin of Snares Islands finches. Warham & Keeley supported their hypothesis by referring to their recorded increase in the variety of European passerines, the Australian Tree Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*), waders of probable Australian origin and invasions of Australian insects. Horning & Horning noted that finches often arrived after a gale-force north-westerly, if the wind backed easterly, and also recorded two passerines of undoubted New Zealand origin.

Bird sightings during the 1976-77 summer suggest that species arrived from both Australia and New Zealand. Black Shag, Little Shag and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper are probably of Australian origin, while Shining Cuckoo and Long-tailed Cuckoo are probably of New Zealand origin.

Insufficient sightings of finches were made, except during November when *Poa annua* was seeding, and their origin remains conjectural.

Four new bird species (Black Shag, Rock Pigeon, Shining Cuckoo and Long-tailed Cuckoo), and one new breeding species (Chaffinch) were recorded for the Snares Islands during the 1976-77 expedition. There are now 23 breeding species out of a total of 57 bird species recorded from the Snares Islands.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### A G M 1977: A LATER REPORT

##### FIELD INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE

No requests for assistance or guidance have been received throughout the year.

Current national surveys:—

##### *Completed* —

- Nankeen Kestrel — *Nctornis* Dec.  
 Caspian Tern — *Notornis* Dec.  
 Australian Herons — Records being plotted and map compiled.  
 To be written up early 1978.

##### *In progress* —

- Reef Heron — completed and being written up but additional material still being received.  
 Shag Breeding Survey — information still being gathered. So far some information has been received from Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa in North Island; from Marlborough, Westland, Canterbury and Otago in the South Island. None of these returns is exhaustive and there is still much to be done. This survey has a further 2 years to run.

B. D. BELL, Convener