

SHORT NOTES

TRANS TASMAN SHAGS

On a recent cruise of RV *Tangaroa*, working in the south Tasman Sea between latitudes 37° and 46°S, immature Black Shags (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) were frequently seen near and on board the ship. Of particular interest was the return, Hobart to Wellington, leg of the cruise when a group of these shags appeared to stay near the ship for the trans-Tasman crossing. These observations were made in October-November 1977 during a regular daily bird-watching schedule.

All the shags seen were immature Black Shags and were identified by their large size and their facial markings. They had dark upper-parts and tail, black feet and mottled black and white breast and throat. The long slender bill was dark above, shading to light horn colour below with a bright yellow gular pouch. The head was black with a small crest, and the skin around the eye was yellow with a particularly bright yellow marking below the eye. The iris was green. Colour photographs were taken of one of these birds while it was on board.

Shags were first seen on the outward voyage. On 14 October 1977, at position 42.5°S 166.3°E, some 250 km off the south Westland coast, one shag rested for most of the day in the ship's rigging. On the following day two shags were seen near the ship. No shags were sighted on 16 October but on the next evening a shag was found sleeping in one of the lifeboats. This shag left the ship the following morning by which time our position was 43.1°S 159.4°E, close to midway across the Tasman Sea. No further shag sightings were made on the outward voyage.

On the return voyage the first sighting was late on 31 October at position 41.0°S 159.5°E some 240 km east of Tasmania, when one shag came on board. On the following day (1 November), three shags were seen and at least two slept on board that night. On 2 November, five shags were perched in the rigging most of the afternoon (position 43.7°S 155.3°E). Eventually another shag arrived and after circling the ship the others followed it in an easterly direction. On this day and the next, shags were frequently seen, seven being the most seen at one time. On the evening of 3 November five shags were seen close to the ship (position 43.1°S 157.2°E) and at least three slept on board. Over succeeding days while the ship worked a leg towards 38°S 162°E and then a leg towards Cape Farewell, shags were commonly sighted in twos or threes. A general pattern emerged, the shags congregating near the ship in the evening and coming on board to sleep after dark. They favoured a sleeping position on the forecastle deck among the

anchor gear. The last two shags were seen on the evening of 8 November at a position 39.9°S 170.3°E, some 160 km off Cape Farewell. By morning, land was in sight and presumably these shags made for the coast.

It is impossible to know if the same birds followed the ship across the Tasman but some of the behaviour suggests they may have. For example, the shags on occasions seemed content to swim near the ship while it was on station rather than to fly off. Also, the same sleeping positions were occupied each night, suggesting that the same birds returned to the ship. On occasions birds coming on board seemed exhausted and, while resting, were easily approached.

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ADDITIONAL BIRD RECORDS FROM RAROTONGA

In his recent account of Rarotongan birds, Turbott (1977, *Notornis* 24 (3): 149-157) lists only three waders, which had all been previously recorded by Holyoak (1976, *Bull. Br. Orn. Cl.* 94: 145-150). My wife and I visited Rarotonga in August 1975 and noted two more waders.

Two Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) were seen in Natangia Harbour on 25 and 27 August 1975.

A Yellowlegs was seen on the reef at Avarua on 24 August and one in Ngatangia Harbour on 25 August. Since these birds are uncommon in the S.W. Pacific and unknown in southern Polynesia, the following identification data are provided from field notes. On both occasions the birds were estimated to be about the size of a Pied Stilt and rather larger than some Wandering Tattlers (*Tringa incana*) which were not far away in Ngatangia Harbour. The most conspicuous features were the long yellow legs, white tail, and mottled black/grey/white back. The beak was typically sandpiper-like and dark. There was a pale supercilium. The chest was dark, but one bird had a whitish patch beneath the chin; the abdomen and undertail were white. The wings were uniformly dark with no white patches in flight. Flight was rapid and erratic. On the shore they were busy birds and, when they ran, the tail bobbed. The call was a shrill piping. Whilst I feel that the records refer to the Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*), Dr D. T. Holyoak considers that the field description is inadequate to decide between this and the Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*).

Most of Turbott's records of land birds are from the northern part of the island. The following birds were either seen or heard in the southern part of the island.

White-tailed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon lepturus*) — six birds around the cliffs of the prominent peak Te Kou.