PLANT MATERIAL FROM GANNETS' NESTS.

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Various plants play an important part in the breeding activities of the Australasian gannet **(Sula serrator)**. The male bird picks up seaweed and sometimes flotsam at sea, and occasionally gathers material in the vicinity of the nesting site. These pieces are offered to the partner during the "presentation" display, and are used in the early stages of breeding for nest construction. It should, however, be stressed that plant and other material carried up by the gannets together form only a small part of the nest, the bulk being built up gradually by the excreta into the well-known typical guano mound.

Oliver (1930) states that gannet nests are "often well formed of seaweed, generally the common brown **Carpophyllum**, but sometimes plants such as **Chenopodium** are also used." The British Handbook (Witherby, 1943) describes the nests of the North Atlantic gannet **(Sula bassana)** as being "built often of seaweeds, especially tangle **(Laminaria)** and **Fucus**, though grasses and campion **(Silene)** are also used, and any kind of flotsam and jetsam may be carried to the nest."

Since so little has been recorded of the species of plants found in gannets' nests in New Zealand, samples of fresh material were collected at the Cape Kidnappers gannetries, Hawke's Bay, and at those on White Island, in the Bay of Plenty. The table lists the species found and gives some indication of their relative importance.

PLANTS FROM GANNETS' NESTS.

	CAPE KIDNAPPERS		WHITE ISLAND	
	Gannetry C Oct., 1949	Gannetry A Nov., 1949	Rocky Point Gannetry B 26/11/49	West Point. Gannetry 27/11/49
SEAWEEDS—				
Brown—				
Carpophyllum plumosum	†	all	a	a
C. maschalocarpum	†		b	b
C. maschalocarpum, pool form	†			
C.. flexuosum			c	c
Cystophora retroflexa			c	
Sargassum sinclairii			c	
Glossophora kunthii	†			
Green—				
Enteromorpha acanthophora				c
Red—				
Plocamium sp.			d	
Pterocladia lucida			*	
FLOWERING PLANTS—				
Mesembryanthemium australe				†
Coprosma repens				†
Chenopodium allani				†
Grass			*	

†, present; *, trace; a, b, c, d, order of importance by quantity.

No conclusions could be based on such a small amount of material. It may, however, be pointed out that the list (like Witherby's (loc. cit.)) includes both seaweeds and flowering plants of species growing near the nests. The bulk of the material in each case was of the two coarse brown seaweeds **Carpophyllum plumosum** and **C. maschalocarpum**. These are

the most abundant weeds about low tide level and in drift both at Cape Kidnappers and at White Island. Plants of the first five species in the table float readily but **Glossophora** and the green and red weeds, though they are brought ashore in drift, are not particularly buoyant and one would hardly expect them to be easily picked up on the sea surface. The presence of the pool form of **C. maschalocarpum** in a Cape Kidnappers nest suggests also that, at least in some cases, seaweed is picked up close inshore. As in the case of the Atlantic gannet, the principal seaweeds used are the large and easily available ones, without any indication that these have been specially selected.

The flowering plants all belong to species growing in the immediate vicinity of the colony and are probably taken at random. These plants were not recorded in the samples from Cape Kidnappers where little of such vegetation is available. Finally, it may be added that amongst flotsam picked up by gannets a breast-skin with feathers of a cock pheasant was noted at Cape Kidnappers.

It is intended to carry this survey of the nesting material further during this year's breeding season. The authors would be grateful if any visitors to gannetries in the spring of 1950 would co-operate by providing further nesting material. Since the weeds are invariably fouled in the nest, they should be either thoroughly dried or well sterilised with formalin or otherwise before being parcelled up for despatch.

Seaweeds from a shag's nest, to be reported on elsewhere, recently provided extensions of records for two rather rare seaweeds; these two lines of inquiry raise the hope that further collaboration between botanists and ornithologists may be mutually profitable.

References:

Oliver, W. R. B. (1930): New Zealand Birds, Wellington, p. 209-210.
Witherby, H. F. et al. (1943): The Handbook of British Birds, London; Vol. IV., p. 17.

NOTES.

PARTIALLY ALBINO GOLDFINCH.—Albinism is reported fairly often among blackbirds, starlings and sparrows, but I have only once come across that state in the goldfinch. On June 4, 1950, among a flock of over 500 goldfinches seen near Masterton, was a bird wholly white except for yellow on the primaries (no yellow on the coverts) and black ends to the primaries and to the tail, the black markings showing up distinctly only when the bird was in flight. The yellow did not show in flight but was seen clearly when the bird perched in full view on a dead pine tree. The goldfinches were feeding on the green seeds of the small introduced nettle, an annual, which was growing profusely in this area.—R. H. D. Stidolph, Masterton.

SPARROWS DRINKING NECTAR.—On December 28, 1949, I observed nine sparrows through a pair of binoculars drinking nectar from pohutukawa **(Metrosideros excelsa)** flowers with evident relish. I had suspected this for some time, as flocks of sparrows had flown out of flowering pohutukawas from time to time on my approach in this vicinity. Dr. R. A. Falla informs me that he has seen sparrows drinking nectar from pohutukawa blossoms in the Auckland district some years ago. Mr. D. H. Brathwaite also observed sparrows doing likewise at Miramar, Wellington, about the same time as I did.—F. E. Wilkin, Wellington.

MAGPIE CARRYING OFF UNFLEDGED SPARROW.—About the middle of November, 1949, in Lindsay Road, Levin, a magpie flew across the front of my car, carrying an unfledged sparrow in its bill. It was followed by about 40 sparrows. The magpie flew under a thick barberry hedge and the sparrows alighted on the hedge, chirruping loudly.—A. A. Savell, Levin.