

## BROWN BOOBY IN THE HAURAKI GULF.

By P. A. S. Stein, Auckland.

When we were completing the ringing of the gannet this season on Hornohoru, north of Waiheke, on March 8, 1952, we were astonished to find in a small group of twelve full-grown chicks, a large brown bird with a blue beak. In general outline it was very like a gannet. The body was nearly as big as a gannet's, but the bird carried itself with the legs sloping further back, so that the gannets in the group appeared to be about an inch taller than it was.

The bird had obviously settled down temporarily with the others and allowed us to approach within thirty feet. We sketched and noted details for about ten minutes. The most startling aspect was the shining bluish horn-colour of the beak, at the base of which a narrow white band stretched across from eye to eye. This might be bare skin, but it protruded slightly above the eyes as if it were of feathers. Above this a rich brown cap stretched to the top of the neck. Under the beak was a lighter area which stretched back and upwards towards the cap. Right round the neck and extending well down on to the breast was a broad band of bright chestnut, in which the feathers fluffed out so far that the bird seemed to have a ruff. The wings and back were a shining chocolate. The abdomen was a lighter brown anteriorly, and still lighter between the legs. Here the brown was that delicate shade seen under a mushroom after the first pink tint has gone. The legs were sturdier than those of a gannet, and had bright orange-yellow feet.

The bird was identified as a brown booby (*Sula leucogaster*), and later our drawings and notes were compared with museum specimens by Mr. E. G. Turbott at the Auckland Museum. It flew off as an adult gannet approached. Wheeling in behind the gannet, the booby followed, turning and swooping close behind the other bird. For twenty minutes they came and went, each time passing so close above our heads that we could see that the stranger had a feather missing from his right wing. The birds were within four feet of each other, so that we could easily compare their wing-span. The gannet, with a wingspread of seventy inches was about four inches wider than the booby. Three interesting differences between the two species were noted. The under surface of the wings was an ivory colour edged with chocolate. The coloured border was very regular in width, about an inch in front and three inches behind. This gave the remaining area the appearance of a pair of white wings spread out below a larger pair of brown ones. The feet were not carried concealed in the feathers as in the case of the gannet, but were in sight, and so far apart that they extended to the sides of the broadest part of the tail. Behind the feet, the tail narrowed, forming a wedge with a comparatively sharp point. The whole was much longer than the gannet's tail.

When we returned to Auckland and Mr. Turbott compared our notes with his specimens, it was evident that the bird we saw was in the wholly brown immature plumage. This is apparently the fourth brown booby recorded in New Zealand. We note that, for the past four weeks, we have had almost continual northerly winds in this area.

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GIANT PETREL RECOVERY.—A giant petrel ringed as a fledgling, still in down, at North Point, Signy Island, South Orkneys, by the Falkland Island Dependency's scientific bureau on February 11, 1951, was found dead on the beach at Chaser Gorge, Dargaville, on September 14, 1951, by Mr. Percy Wright, of Urquhart's Bay. Its ring was marked SBL No. 63,526. By the shortest route, this is about 6,500 miles from where the bird was ringed. According to the Scientific Bureau most of the giant petrel chicks leave their nests where this bird was ringed in early May.—D. R. Purser, Whangarei.