

BROWN BOOBY IN THE HAURAKI GULF.

By P. A. S. Stein, Auckland.

A year ago, we recorded the finding of a brown booby in immature plumage, among the gannets on Horuhoru (Waiheke Island) on 8 March, 1952 (*Notornis*, Vol. 4, No. 8, page 213). When we returned to the island three weeks later, equipped with a camera, most of the gannets had gone and the booby with them. On our first visits in the 1952-1953 season we kept a close look-out, but we saw no signs of this bird and finally gave it up for lost.

On 21 January, 1953, we crossed the Gulf from Waiheke to count the gannets on the islands near the Colville Coast. We came first to Motutakapu, which lies about twenty miles to the east of Horuhoru, and has over three hundred pairs of breeding gannets. As we were rowing in from the launch to count the chicks, P. F. Stein noticed a booby on the western bluff overlooking the landing place. The bird flew off as we came ashore, but circled with the adult gannets for over a quarter of an hour.

We had time to climb to the top of the North-West Ridge, which the booby crossed each time it circled the island. When it was over the sea to the west it was below us, and we could see its back and the upper surface of its wings. As the bird approached us it rose and passed twenty-five to thirty feet above our heads, affording us an excellent view of its colouring from below. Three times the bird paused as it passed overhead, hovering and fluttering down a few feet. During this manoeuvre it partly closed its wings and spread its tail until every feather spread out, fantail fashion, a narrow inverted V showing between the two middle feathers. I had time to sketch the extent of the coloured areas of the plumage before the bird finally settled for a short time and then flew off to the north with a number of adult gannets which were disturbed by our further ascent of the rock.

The booby had many colour differences from the immature bird of March, 1952. The beak was yellow, approaching closely the orange of the feet; there was no trace of blue. From above, the head and tail were chocolate and between them the back was brown, not a uniform shade, but lighter on the shoulders and becoming deeper on the wings, which were tipped with chocolate. From below the belly was a pure milk white, changing abruptly to chocolate on the breast and tail. The chocolate breast feathers gave the appearance of a ruff round the neck, as they bulged out slightly over the white belly. The wings were mainly white underneath, edged all round with chocolate. The leading edge of the wings was exactly level with the ruff on the neck so that an unbroken line of chocolate ran right across the breast from one wing-tip to the other.

On our return to Waiheke, I compared our notes and sketches with reference books, and it was evident that we had been watching an adult brown booby (*Sula leucogaster*). One marking we noted on the under surface of the wings is not mentioned in any of the reference books I have seen. Halfway along each wing there was a chocolate stripe running two-thirds of the way across the white. It ran from front to rear diagonally towards the body.

I think that there can be little doubt that our immature bird, blown south from Fiji by the strong northerlies of March, 1952, spent the winter among N.Z. gannets, and during that period developed its mature plumage. On 5 April, 1953, we again visited the Colville Islets, but saw no trace of the booby. There were only six adult gannets seen within five miles of Motutakapu, and only one chick remained on the island.

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