

A little excavation enabled us to remove the adult bird. On release, she flew to her perch and proceeded to screech almost continuously. The young replied to her with the same harsh screech, the only apparent difference being the lesser volume. The young birds were carefully removed, photographed and returned to the nest. They were so fat that they had difficulty in standing upright for long and soon squatted down or rolled over sideways. One was considerably smaller than the other two but even it was quite fat.

The body of each was covered with long, pale grey down. Six of the wing feathers were quite well-developed in each bird; they were the well-known bright olive-green in colour with an edging of bluish black. The most striking part of the young was the bill and the surrounding tissue, all of which was a bright yellow shade.

After replacing the young birds, the outside of the nesting chamber was restored as nearly as possible to its original condition, and we retired to a distance of a chain. The adult bird, which had been watching events closely, at once landed on the ground, inspected the surroundings minutely and returned to the young.

The nesting chamber was located about thirty yards from the bush edge at a height of about 2200 feet. The bush opened on to a bare face above the valley of the stream which drains Lake Minchin.

As a result of these observations, it is suggested that people interested in nests of the kea might look for them in January and in bush in a situation similar to that described.

ROYAL ALBATROSS A 99. (*Diomedea epomophora epomophora*.)

By J. H. Sorensen, Wellington.

Royal Albatross A. 99 (*Diomedea epomophora epomophora*) was ringed as a fledgling by the writer on Campbell Island on 4th October, 1943, when about seven months old. Several hundred fledgling royal albatrosses, and some adults (apart from the mated pairs studied intensively), were ringed about this date. The rings were home-made ones of aluminium from old pots, copper from an old boiler, and even the alloy from discarded dry battery cases. Each ring was stamped "Return Southland Museum, N.Z.", and carried the serial letter A followed by the number allocated.

In September, 1953, almost ten years later, the Director of the Southland Museum, Mrs. O. Sansom, received a letter from Dr. R. A. Philippi, Director of Ornithology, Natural History Museum, Santiago, Chile, advising that an identification ring No. A.99 had recently been handed to him. Dr. Philippi wrote as follows:—

"In the year 1944 a specimen of Royal albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*) was captured on the beach at El Tabo, Province of Santiago, Chile, with this ring attached. The bird was in an exhausted condition and died soon after." Mr. P. C. Bull, convener of the Ringing Committee of the Ornithological Society, then wrote to Dr. Philippi and told him the bird's ringing record. At the same time he requested further information, especially as to the date in 1944 when the bird was found, what had happened to the body, and whether any photographs were available. On 29th December, 1953, Dr. Philippi replied, and I quote his letter in full:—

"With regard to the ringed specimen of the royal albatross found on the beach at El Tabo at the end of March or beginning of April, 1944, I can give you the following data: The specimen (A-99) is mounted and preserved in a Catholic School of this city. As can be appreciated by the enclosed photographs, it is undoubtedly a very young bird. The discovery has only recently come to light due to the fact that the person who found the dying bird at El Tabo took the ring to the British Embassy, where an official informed him that it would be inadvisable to make any comment or announcement at all as the ring might indicate a message from a German

submarine! (war-time) a remarkable statement possibly due to nerves or bureaucratic officialdom—which I pass on to you on account of its humorous aspect. Thus the find was forgotten until by a pure accident I became acquainted this year with the person who picked the bird up, thereby giving us the opportunity of confirming the surprising fact that this albatross migrates to Chile."

Dr. Philippi returned the ring which shows no wear after its five months on the bird's leg. It is one of the aluminium ones. Judged by the photographs of the mounted bird, it is certainly very young. The absence of white feathers on the humeral flexures does not tell much; the bird could be a female. Apparently the sex was not determined when the bird was skinned. One photograph, however, is a dorsal view showing "mottled" feathering on the rectrices and on the back between the wings, which indicates (quite apart from the known date of ringing); that the bird is juvenile. In older birds such "barring" and "mottling" disappears and is replaced by pure white plumage on these parts.

As recorded elsewhere (Sorensen, 1950) an attempt was made, when ringing fledgling albatrosses on Campbell Island, to sex the birds by sight, using the presence or absence of brown feathers on the crown of the head as a sexual character. It was realised at the time that this "mottled crown" character was not entirely satisfactory, for a slight mottling was known to occur on some which, from their size, were obviously males. But it was always present in a marked degree on female chicks. In borderline cases ringed birds were recorded as males if they were heavier than typical females and had stouter tarsi, the latter feature being very evident when crimping on leg-rings. During the ringing, males were ringed on the right leg and females on the left leg. No information has been supplied as to which leg was ringed on the present bird when it was found. According to my records, it was ringed on the left leg, had a "mottled crown," and was recorded as a female. The photos supplied by Dr. Philippi show no obvious barring or mottling on the crown of this bird. It has thus lost this character within six months.

This proof of trans-Pacific migration of *Diomedea epomophora epomophora* does not, however, rule out the possibility that the royal albatross may also breed in Tierra del Fuego. Dr. R. C. Murphy has stated that albatrosses emigrate from the New Zealand region to the coast of Chile, and that there is a breeding ground for this or another subspecies in the hinterland of Tierra del Fuego. Murphy goes on to give the records of birds taken off the South American coast. In discussing these birds, he stated:—

"Whence come the royal albatrosses which visit the coasts of Chile and of Argentina and Uruguay? The orthodox answer would be to say that they cross the Pacific to South America, round Cape Horn from the westward, and enter the South Atlantic. But there are several objections to such a theory, and much likelihood of the existence of a South American breeding ground as suggested in two letters I have received from Dr. Dabbene, the substance of which is as follows:—

"Mr. P. Reynolds, a member of the British Ornithologists' Club, who resides at Harborton Harbour, Beagle Channel, Tierra del Fuego, has discovered large white albatrosses nesting on the slopes of the mountains near Lake Cami, in the interior of Tierra del Fuego. To reach this locality from the Strait of Magellan the birds pass up Admiralty Sound. Mr. Reynolds does not know to what species these great albatrosses belong; but Dr. Dabbene believes that they are *Diomedea epomophora*.

"Dr. Debbene writes, furthermore: All of the large albatrosses captured during the winter months by the *Compania Argentina de Pesca*, at points some two hundred miles off the coast of the province of Buenos Aires, are royal albatrosses. About 50 specimens have thus far been obtained and received at the National Museum.

"Now, it is hardly to be credited that birds captured in such numbers in the South Atlantic come all the way from New Zealand breeding grounds.

Rather, they should originate in islands off South America, and the discovery made by Mr. Reynolds in Tierra del Fuego doubtless supplies the clue."

Dr. Murphy's account is given rather fully because it does show that the hypothesis that the species nests in Tierra del Fuego cannot be discarded but remains to be proved by the identification of the species and subspecies which almost certainly breeds there. At the same time, the finding of the bird A.99 does conclusively prove that birds breeding on Campbell Island in the New Zealand region do reach the South American coast. It is generally thought that the subspecies *sanfordi* also makes the journey and the Corral specimen, the type of this subspecies taken off the South American coast, has been attributed to the Chatham Island breeding population by Dr. R. A. Falla. The finding of a ringed *sanfordi* on the South American coast would put the latter hypothesis beyond all doubt.

REFERENCES.

- Falla, R. A., 1938—*Rec. Cant. Mus.*, 4.
Murphy, R. C., 1936—"Oceanic Birds of South America," New York.
Sorensen, J. H., 1950—"The Royal Albatross," Cape Expedition Series, Bulletin No. 2.

CORRESPONDENCE.

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—So many requests for information as to the status of Peter's Check-List of Birds of the World have come to the Museum of Comparative Zoology that we think your readers would be interested in the matter. We have been appointed joint editors to see that the work is completed. Probably seven volumes will be required to contain the families not treated by Mr. Peters. A volume has almost been finished by Dr. Zimmer of the American Museum in New York. Sixteen collaborators have most kindly agreed to contribute the families that remain to be done and each one will be the responsible author of his contribution. We hope by this means to assure that the work will be completed in as short a time as possible.—We are, etc., ERNST MAYR, J. C. GREENWAY, Jr. Feb. 11, 1954.

REVIEWS.

Check List of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland. Published by the British Ornithologists' Union. London.... 1952.

The British Ornithologists' Union issued its first list of British birds in 1883. Revised lists followed in 1915 and 1923. The compilation of a new list was begun in 1946 and the "Checklist of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland" (1952) is the outcome of more than five years' work by a committee of distinguished ornithologists. Not unexpectedly, it is an important publication which will set the standard of national and regional checklists for many years to come. The general classification has been changed from the 1923 list to bring it into line with modern practice. The new list sets out to emphasise the importance of the species as a biological unit. Only species are numbered.

In the introduction there is a concise statement of the functions of a checklist and there are wise words on the difficulties—the acceptance of sight records, the recognition of obscure geographical races, correct orthography and vernacular names—which are likely to beset all authors of checklists. No checklist is ever likely to satisfy all critical readers, because in the words of the introduction, "the truth concerning natural phenomena cannot be arbitrarily decided."

Of especial interest to New Zealand ornithologists are the sections on petrels and arctic waders. The authors believe in big genera. It is good to see *puffinus* discarded and the shearwaters from the small *baroli* to the large *gravis* all grouped under *procellaria*. *Bulweria* as a generic name has displaced *Pterodroma*, a change which some in New Zealand may regret. The range of the black-browed mollymawk, of which there appear to be two