

centration of small native birds. There must have been at least fifty or sixty birds visible, and, judging from the noise, many more hidden in the tree tops. The birds did not appear to be at all agitated by our presence. Several Robins, Fantails and Tomtits came closer to inspect us. The birds were feeding on insects in the higher branches of the trees. Although it was mid-morning, the animated conversation of the birds was comparable to that heard in the dawn.

Upon enquiry, I learned that this particular area, where the birds were concentrated, was six miles from the nearest native forest, Te Apuahou, and eight miles from Tauhara Mt. Te Apuahou Forest consists mainly of Five-finger, Rewarewa, Whau, Tutu, all second growth, as fire destroyed that stretch of forest some years ago. The plantation at the spot where I observed the birds consisted of *Pinus radiata* and was planted in 1932. There was scarcely any native growth visible in the fire-breaks, which are bulldozed fairly regularly. In another part of the forest we saw a large flock of Silvereyes feeding high up in the trees.

On our return journey I observed two Blackbirds, a Song-thrush and several Pipits on the outskirts of the plantation.

Mrs AVIS ACRES

BIRDS ON TRAWLER 'THOMAS CURRELL' IN COOK STRAIT

During a period of fog and drizzle between 10 and 13 April 1956 a number of land birds appeared aboard the trawler 'Thomas Currell' when she was operating between Cape Campbell and Kaikoura. Some sea birds also came on board. Details were as follows —

10 April: Position seven to ten miles off Welds Cone, eight miles south of Cape Campbell; light drizzle. Lying to, awaiting daylight to start fishing operations. Four Fairy Prions came on board between 8 p.m. and midnight.

11 April: Position three to four miles off, steaming south towards Kaikoura; thick fog over land. At 9.30 a.m. eight small birds, which appeared to be Goldfinches, flew by in an erratic manner and disappeared in a southerly direction. At 11 a.m. seven more small birds, this time definitely Goldfinches, circled the vessel, and then, after appearing to be about to settle, made off to the south.

12 April: Position four to six miles off, just north of Kaikoura; intermittent fog, thick over the land. A Fantail came on board at 9 a.m. and seemed to be very exhausted; its tail feathers were wet. It immediately drank salt water and died some three hours later.

Between 8 p.m. and midnight several land birds were seen flying about the vessel in the glare of the deck lights, and their call notes could be clearly heard. Two Fairy Prions and a Diving Petrel came on board during this time.

13 April: Position five to eight miles off and south of Cape Campbell; fog cleared at noon. At 7 a.m. a Song-thrush, a Goldfinch and two Pipits or Skylarks were on board.

Observations of the above type are not unusual aboard 'Thomas Currell'. In rainy weather or in fog, the birds seem to get dazzled by the deck lights. Prions and Storm Petrels are the most common of the sea birds, and Diving Petrels appear occasionally. When found the birds are gathered up and placed in the lifeboat, where they remain until the first sign of daylight; then they fly away. On occasions land birds have stayed about the ship for two or three days when fog or rain has persisted.

F. ABERNETHY

POMARINE SKUA AT WAIKANAE

On 26 April 1953 we twice saw a large *Stercorarius* Skua chasing a Caspian Tern up the meandering tidal estuary of Waikanae River. The Skua appeared larger than the Caspian, and had projecting central tail feathers, conspicuously longer than the rest. The projecting feathers were broad and

blunt-ended like two fingers, and appeared so at all angles as the bird turned in pursuit of the Tern. The bird was wholly dark in plumage, and the white wing flashes formed by the bases of the primaries were inconspicuous.

Arctic Skuas are smaller than Caspian Terns and seldom chase them. Their projecting tail feathers, if visible at all, are pointed and inconspicuous. The projecting feathers of the Pomarine Skua are broad and are twisted so that they appear as broad from the side as from below. Two days later one of us (R.K.D.) examined mounted specimens of a Caspian Tern and an Arctic Skua. From the difference in size and the structure of the tail feathers it was obvious that the bird observed on the wing could not have been an Arctic Skua. The Waikanae bird is identified as a Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) from its larger size and conspicuous broad blunt central tail feathers.

R. K. DELL and C. A. FLEMING

ARCTIC SKUA CHASING SMALL PASSERINE

On 17/6/56 an Arctic Skua (*S. parasiticus*) was seen engaged in a typical pursuit-flight after an invisible quarry far out over the shallows at the southern end of the Firth of Thames. As the pursuit drew nearer, the quarry was seen to be a small finch-like bird with a loping flight, most probably a Yellowhammer (*E. citrinella*). When hard pressed by the Skua the small bird would drop suddenly and almost vertically to sea level; and while the Skua was recovering from overshooting the mark, the small bird would rise steeply and gain both height and distance before the Skua was in a position to swoop again. After this had been repeated several times, the small bird reached the safety of the saltings and the sea-wall, where other finches, especially Goldfinches (*C. carduelis*) and Yellowhammers, were plentiful.

According to the *Handbook of British Birds* (vol. 5, p. 134) the Arctic Skua on its breeding grounds habitually takes small birds, among which four species of passerines are listed; but in their southern winter quarters opportunities for capturing such small birds cannot often come their way. There are now enough reported occurrences of Arctic Skuas between May and August to suggest that a few, probably immature birds, remain in northern New Zealand waters throughout the winter. It seems, therefore, that these would be an added hazard to the small passerines, mostly non-indigenous, which brave considerable distances of open sea to turn up as winter visitors on the outer islands of the Hauraki Gulf.

R. B. SIBSON

GODWITS CHASING DOMESTIC PIGEONS

A farmer living on the southern shore of Manukau Harbour near Clark's Creek witnessed an unusual spectacle when some of a passing flight of about twenty Godwits (*L. lapponica*) turned to pursue some Homing Pigeons (*C. livia* var. *domestica*). The pigeons were circling the pine-trees near the farmhouse when five godwits broke away from the main flight and, whether in playful mood or not, joined the pigeons.

In the display of aero-acrobatics that followed, the pigeons were hopelessly outclassed. So much were they dived at and tossed about that four of the pigeons literally tumbled out of the sky to take refuge in the pine-trees. The remaining pigeon, a white one, was not so lucky, for it was borne aloft and after a gruelling experience escaped to the pigeon loft exhausted.

As a finale, the main flight of godwits returned to circle the pines once, and then disappeared in the distance.

R. D. WRIGHT

[D. A. Urquhart has described (*Notornis* 6, p. 159) how on this coast a White-winged Black Tern (*C. leucopterus*) was chased by godwits.—Ed.]