

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.]