

at colony B. On this date several fully fledged chicks were seen and two were observed flying with adult birds.

(b) Feeding Habits

Observations on feeding gulls were made with the aid of binoculars. Also 20 gulls were shot and an examination of stomach and crop contents made. As far as possible, birds shot were those which had been observed feeding on the river margins but in some cases birds were shot at random from flocks returning from the feeding areas.

Feeding, especially after rain, appeared to take place mainly in areas away from the river, e.g. cultivated areas. Prior to the severe flood (18/11/57), birds were observed feeding on the river margins. 25% of the birds shot contained food taken from the river bed consisting of Caddis Larvae (*Olinga* spp and *Pycnocentria* spp) and one creeper (*Archichauliode* spp). The remaining 75% contained vegetable material, earthworms, grassgrubs and wire worms.

No birds were seen to take fish nor were any fish remains found in any stomach. Gulls were seen to dip down to the surface of the water and to snap at flying insects. This usually took place during a hatch of mayflies. However, no birds seen feeding in this manner were shot. The flocks of gulls range at least six miles from the colony to feed, and probably they feed in the paddocks. It was not always possible to note where the gull were feeding.

The adult birds disgorge food to the chicks and worms were fed to all chicks which were observed being fed.

*Conclusion:*

The results show that the Black-billed Gulls did not take trout or fish during the nesting season, and little feeding was done in the river. However, the severe flood of 18th-19th November may have reduced the availability of larvae of aquatic insects on which some gulls would feed.

Marine Dept.

R. BOUD

B. T. CUNNINGHAM



EARLY BREEDING OF THE MOREPORK IN 1958

The late Dr. W. R. B. Oliver, in his recent book, *New Zealand Birds*, in describing the breeding habits of the Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) followed the late Edgar Stead (*The Life Histories of New Zealand Birds*) in respect of the egg-laying period. They write: "laying season extends from October to November" without reference to any particular area or latitude. A slight variation might well be expected in response to latitude.

On 2/9/'58, when going down the road in Khandallah, Wellington, after 8 p.m. my attention was attracted by the "weezie" call of a Morepork. On looking up, I saw one sitting on a power pole and another hawking insects around the light and the neighbouring trees. The perched one was in full light and was clearly visible. The plumage was that of a young bird with clear roundish white spots on the breast. It kept up calling at short intervals. From time to time the one that was hawking insects would return to the power pole and deliver a moth or

other insect to the one on the pole and fly off again to resume its hawking. The recipient always received the insect in its bill and then transferred it to a foot and "billed" it for a while before eating it. The darker plumage of the older bird could easily be contrasted with that of the young one it was feeding as it sat alongside. I watched these proceedings for close on half an hour. The following night the two birds were again at the same pole and repeated the behaviour of the previous night. They were not seen again.

The colour and behaviour of the two birds were unmistakably of parent and young — not courtship. As the parent was still feeding its young, it seems evident that the latter had only recently left the nest. Allowing six to seven weeks for incubation and nestling stages, this would indicate that the eggs were probably laid about the middle of July — two months earlier than the recorded time. Could this earlier breeding have been occasioned by the mild winter of 1958?

C. McCANN



#### SPINE-TAILED SWIFT OVER STEPHEN ISLAND

When I was on the summit of Stephen Island, Cook Strait, about 1.45 p.m. on 19/11/58, in the company of D. Merton, a very fast-flying bird was noted circling the top. At first glance the bird appeared very dark, with swept-back wings. It continued to circle high above the island for about thirty minutes before disappearing. The flight was very fast, consisting of long periods of gliding and soaring with short periods of very rapid wing-beat. Occasionally, the bird swooped lower, and the rush of wind through the feathers could be heard.

The bird was estimated to be about the size of a Black-fronted Tern or slightly smaller; the plumage generally appeared black or very dark brown with the face, throat and under tail coverts white. The back was a fawn shade. The bill was short, and also the tail, which was held fan-shaped in flight, but was not forked as in terns or swallows. After consulting Oliver (1956) it was decided that the bird was a Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacula*).

The bird was observed under ideal conditions, but its speed made it difficult to determine the exact colouration. The weather was fine, and the temperature warm. There was a light breeze from the south.

— BRIAN D. BELL



#### ALBINO BLACK-BACKED GULL IN BAY OF PLENTY

Since late in May, 1958, an albino Black-backed Gull (*L. dominicanus*) has been seen about the beach at Mt. Maunganui and has been fed by Mr. A. Watson and others. The description of the bird is as follows:—Beak, dark at the tip, fading to cream; eye, dark; tarsus, greyish; feet, stone colour to fawn. Generally the bird is a milk white colour, except for delicate fawn markings; an oblique line of fawn crosses the breast; there are fawn marks on mantle and lesser wing coverts and a band of fawn is visible near the end of the tail when it is spread. The bird appears to be immature.

R. V. McLINTOCK