

## SHORT NOTES

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### WINTER SIGHTING OF GANNETS

Since 1949 we have learned a great deal about the life of the Gannet (*S. serrator*) near its breeding ground, but we still have a lot to find out about what it does during the rest of its life. We must call on readers to help to fill in the gaps in our knowledge. A year ago (*Notornis* IX, 156-158), we recorded three dates between June and December on which Gannets in juvenile plumage had been seen in New Zealand waters, when ordinarily they would have crossed the Tasman to Australia. Two observers replied to our request for further information.

On 30/8/60 A. T. Edgar had seen a young Gannet at Whatipu; it was flying along parallel to the breakers. This adds a third bird to the two found by Peter Skegg, Michael Hogg, and Nick Ledgard in this area, a few days earlier. Another was seen on several occasions in June by Ray Wiblin. It was feeding in the area between Pukerua Bay and Paremata. He found it dead on June 30th; the corpse was fresh enough for the skin to be preserved. The 1961-1962 season has been a very late one in several of the colonies. We shall be pleased if readers send in further reports of juveniles sighted from June onwards this winter.

We would also like to know more about what the adults do in the winter time. From late July until January most of them are fully employed quite close to their breeding grounds. At some colonies a check has been made, and although it has not been a very exhaustive one there is evidence enough to show that while food is in good supply near the colony, breeding adults are content to remain within ten or twenty miles of home. Then, as their chicks depart, parents lose interest in the colony and scatter up and down the coast until only a few remain in its vicinity. A late June count at Horuhoru has shown only three on the rock itself, and no other gannets within four miles of it. How far they go we do not know. An adult with a nest on Horuhoru has come ashore sick at Warkworth, forty miles away. Another that lost its chick in January turned up one hundred miles to the north near Whangarei Heads in March. An injured bird, which when it recovered was liberated in the Ponsonby Boat Harbour, was next seen on a nest at Horuhoru, 30 miles to the east. In the space of a month or two, these birds made a change in locality varying from thirty to one hundred miles. In some cases, as at Farewell Spit, the movement is much greater; from a distant summer breeding ground to an area which affords good fishing conditions in the winter. We would like to hear details of seasonal concentrations of adults in any district, and of any unusual movements along the coasts. At present John Jenkins, who is a frequent traveller up and down the coast, is sending in a list of the Gannets he sees en route. One set of observations off the Australian coast seems to line up with what we should expect from sub-adults setting out to return to New Zealand.

Observations of anything unusual may lead to something important. Gannets seldom venture inland. Only when they can see the water on the far side will they fly over even a narrow isthmus. Among the four hundred odd banded Gannets so far recovered, only two have

been found inland; in each case the bird was in a weak state after having been blown ashore in a gale. On 15/1/62, H. O. Ingram and J. D. Jepson, standing near the top of Ruapehu saw an adult gannet quite close to them. Although it was flying before a strong east wind, it did not seem in any way distressed. It circled briefly as if trying to find a way round the mountain. Then, flying up above them it soon climbed to about 9000 feet, and disappeared to the south. The nearest rookery, off Kawhia, is over 100 miles away.

Early reports about Gannets trying to start new colonies may be of great importance. Some of the older colonies are getting very crowded and it is likely that some of the sub-adults returning there may have to find new homes. North of the Bay of Islands two new colonies were reported in 1959. One on the Ninepin off Cape Wiwiki was said to have hundreds of nests. I visited it twice in December, 1960. Towards noon on the first visit we found no Gannets within two miles of the stack. A few days later, towards evening, we found a dozen adults roosting; no sign of nests. Again in March, 1961, there were a few roosting birds but no nests.

D. I. McKay of Mangonui reported that there were usually some Gannets on the islet at the end of Berghan Point and up to two hundred at night. In December, 1960, I found about twenty ashore near mid-day and at daybreak the following morning there were 24. There was no sign that they were nesting.

Late one afternoon in January, 1960, we passed "Never Fail," an islet off the Great Mercury. There were no Gannets on or near it. In December, 1960, and again in 1961, Peter Densem found a single nest with adult and chick. There have been previous attempts at establishing colonies in the Mercuries and in the Aldermen. The nearest rookeries to the north are in the Hauraki Gulf, and to the south, at White Island. Early reports of any developments will be much appreciated.

— P. A. S. STEIN

[If you have any contribution to make on any of these four topics will you please write direct to Peter Stein at 9 Cameron Street, AUCKLAND, W.I. — Ed.]

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#### WELCOME SWALLOWS IN NORTHLAND

My wife and I toured in Northland during the first half of February, 1961, and in the course of our tour observed a total of twenty-eight Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) in nine separate localities, as follows: Waioomio, seven; Ngawha, four; Kaitaia, four; Awanui, three;  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile east of Kaingaroa, one; Lake Ngatu, two; Waiharara, two; Kaimaumau, three; Houhora harbour South Head, two. We also visited Herekino, Tokerau and Aurere, where swallows have previously been reported, but drew a blank at these three localities, probably merely because we did not happen to be at the right spot at the right time. After the nesting season is over it must be largely a matter of luck how many birds one sees on a brief visit to any one locality. At Waioomio, Ngawha and Awanui swallows were seen to make extended flights over the surrounding country, periodically returning to base but sometimes only after long intervals of time. On our first visit to Waioomio (1/2/61) we saw seven swallows, but when on