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First report of the Southern Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua lönnbergi*) at Cape Bird, Ross Island, Antarctica

The Antarctic Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)¹ is a common breeding bird on Ross Island, Antarctica (Young 1963, Spellerberg 1967), whereas the larger Southern Great Skua (*S. skua lönnbergi*)¹ is an uncommon summer visitor to this region. Spellerberg (1971a) compiled species records for birds in McMurdo Sound over three consecutive summers, 1963 to 1965, and recorded the Southern Great Skua only once, a mature female collected at Cape Royds (77°33'S 166° 09'E) in December 1965. Ainley *et al.* (1978) reported five sightings of this species at Cape Crozier (77°27'S 169° 14'E) over 12 summers between 1961 and 1975. All of the birds were seen between early November and early January, and the authors noted that these birds were on or near the beach, usually in clubs (groups of non-territorial birds) of Antarctic Skuas.

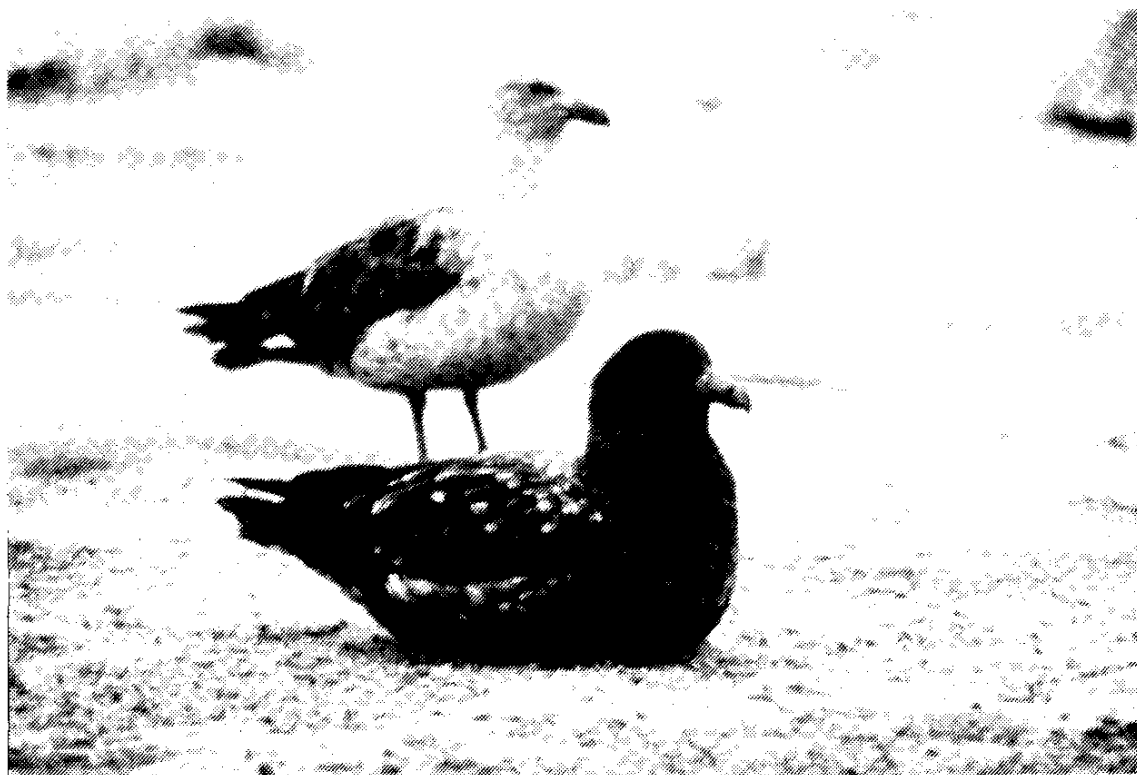


FIGURE 1 — Southern Great Skua (sitting in foreground) and Antarctic Skua at the Northern Rookery, Cape Bird (Photo: L.S. Davis)

¹ Pending resolution of the taxonomic status of Southern Hemisphere skuas, we name the species here in accordance with the *Checklist of New Zealand Birds*. Furness (1987) recently reviewed the taxonomy of the world's skuas and referred to the Antarctic Skua as the South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki* and the Southern Great Skua as the Brown Skua *Catharacta skua lönnbergi*.

On 29 November 1988 we saw a Southern Great Skua at the Northern Rookery of the Adélie Penguin colony at Cape Bird, Ross Island (77°13'S 166°28'E). Like the birds seen by Ainley *et al.* (1978), it was standing among club skuas in a part of the rookery that club birds had frequented for several seasons. Its plumage was as dark as that of the dark morph of the Antarctic Skua, but its noticeably larger body, the buff-coloured flecks on its dorsal plumage, and a more robust bill identified it as a Southern Great Skua (Figure 1).

It was more wary of humans than most of the Antarctic Skuas and walked away to the centre of the club area when we placed a baited trap among the club birds. All skuas immediately showed interest in the bait (a dead Adélie Penguin), but the Southern Great Skua defended access to the carcass. Assuming the Aggressive Upright posture (terminology of Tinbergen 1959, Spellerberg 1971b), it would walk toward any Antarctic Skua that came within about 2 m of the bait. It also gave the skua Long Call (Perdeck 1960) while defending the bait, and the tone of this call was clearly different from that of local Antarctic Skuas. Antarctic Skuas responded with Intimidated Upright postures (Tinbergen 1959, Spellerberg 1971b) and were subordinate in all interactions. No fighting was seen.

The Southern Great Skua was first seen in the club at about 4.00 p.m.; it stayed among the club skuas and was still there when we left at 11.30 p.m. It was absent when we returned at 9.45 a.m. the next day. The club population was checked daily from 28 November 1988 to 29 January 1989 and all skua territories in the Northern Rookery were visited daily from 20 November to 5 February. We made no further observations of Southern Great Skuas at Cape Bird during this period.

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