SHORT NOTE

South polar skua (*Catharacta maccormicki*) and Cook's petrel (*Pterodroma cookii*) on the Chatham Rise

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There have been few records of south polar skua (*Catharacta maccormicki*) in New Zealand waters, even though it is now known to migrate from Antarctica to the north Pacific (Higgins & Davies 1996). On 9 November 1998, I was an observer on a vessel fishing on the Chatham Rise, about 44°S 179°E (all positions truncated to the nearest half degree), when a pale phase south polar skua spent at least 1 h behind the vessel. The bird stayed mainly very close to the stern, continually dropping to the water to feed on small scraps of offal (Plate 1A), and showed no signs of piracy towards the numerous other sea birds around. Higgins & Davies (1996) state that this species scavenges about human bases in Antarctica, and is quick to to take advantage of whaling and sealing activities, but do not mention scavenging about fishing vessels, though Harrison (1983) does mention that it "attends trawlers".

The bird was identified by its light brown body, slighter build and more buoyant flight than a southern brown skua (*Catharacta skua lonnbergi*), less prominent white wing flash, and smaller bill (Plate 1B). My other records of south polar skua seen from fishing vessels in New Zealand waters are as follows: 1 loosely followed our vessel in company with 1 southern brown skua as we steamed north about 44°S 173°E on 25 March 1991 (identified by its noticeably smaller size and its head, nape, and chest being a lighter brown than the wings and rest of the body); 1 on 14 November 1991 at 38°30´ 174°E (identified by smallish size, and head and fore-body being much paler than the rest of the plumage); and 1 close astern on 22 January 1995 about 40°S 173°30´E (identified by small size, nape light grey/brown and slightly streaked, and smaller white wing flash).

The distribution of Cook's petrel (*Pterodroma cookii*) at sea is not known in detail (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

After 11 years of sea work, mainly in southern New Zealand waters, I had identified only a single bird south-west of Stewart Island on 4 April 1994. However, in November 1998 whereas I saw no birds while we fished at 43°S 174-175°E, at 43°S 176°E I saw up to 20 birds from 17 to 20 November 1998. Birds generally fed well back in the wake of the vessel in company with storm petrels and prions, but some birds were also noted feeding independently of the vessel, and one bird came in close to the stern scavenging on offal, when the whitish outer tail feathers could be seen, confirming identification as this species. Farther east, at 43°S 179°E, about 10 birds were seen on 9 November, again mainly staying far back in the wake, but a few were observed feeding in front of the vessel. These sightings on the Chatham Rise are midway between the northern and southern feeding areas reported by Marchant & Higgins (1990). Presumably the birds that I saw came from the northern population, which is by far the larger (Marchant & Higgins 1990).
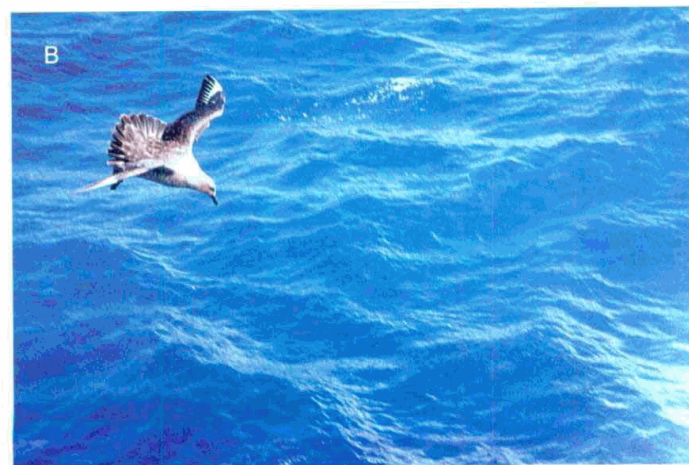
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Plate 1 (A, B) A, South polar skua *(Catharacta maccormicki)* in ship's wake in company with a white-capped albatross *(Diomedea cauta)* and two white-chinned petrels *(Procellaria aequinoctialis)*. **B,** South polar skua descending on offal, showing characters mentioned in text