LETTERS

The Editor

Sir

Weka and petrels

The weka (*Gallirallus australis*) is a remnant species of the diverse suite of avian predators known to have consumed petrels on mainland New Zealand and its offshore islands. The paper by Harper (2006) detailing weka predation of sooty shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) chicks and eggs is therefore a welcome contribution to understanding the ecological relationships between petrels and predators. Unfortunately, I believe that Harper (2006) mis-cited Hawke & Holdaway (2005) in his assertion that weka may present a threat to breeding Westland petrels (*Procellaria westlandica*).

The stable isotope study carried out by Hawke & Holdaway (2005) showed that petrel material is important to weka during feather (re)growth. Being winter breeders, Westland petrel chicks will be absent at the time wekas are growing their feathers. As such, the results of Hawke & Holdaway (2005) do not relate to the observations reported by Harper (2006). Instead, Hawke & Holdaway (2005) proposed that the petrel material came from adults killed or injured during territorial disputes. While Hawke & Holdaway (2005) noted that weka have been filmed within Westland petrel burrow entrances, it was not far enough to reach eggs or chicks. Weka may have entered Westland petrel burrows in the absence of filming, but the results of Hawke & Holdaway (2005) do not justify its citation by Harper (2006).

Waugh *et al.* (2006) in a study published concurrently with Harper (2006), showed that both Westland petrel adult survival and fledging rate for the colony studied by Hawke & Holdaway (2005) is among the highest observed for the *Procellaria* petrels. Although this study was not available to Harper (2006), it reinforces the conclusion that weka and apparently vulnerable petrel colonies can co-exist to the ultimate detriment of neither.

LITERATURE CITED

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