

Notornis, 2009, Vol. 56: 223-224
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SHORT NOTE

A Pycroft's petrel (*Pterodroma pycrofti*) in Papua New Guinea

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The Pycroft's petrel (*Pterodroma pycrofti*) breeds in northern New Zealand and formerly also Norfolk and Lord Howe Is (Heather & Robertson 2000). The breeding grounds are on islands off the east coast of Northland and Coromandel Peninsula (35-37°S). Adults return to these islands in Oct to clean out their burrows with egg-laying occurring in Nov-Dec and young departing in Mar-Apr (Dunnet 1985; Pierce 2002).

Little is known of the range of Pycroft's petrels outside the breeding season, but regular beach patrols and intensive work on their breeding islands

indicate that they are absent from New Zealand waters at this time (Bartle *et al.* 1993; Heather & Robertson 2000; Taylor 2000). While there are few confirmed records of this species at sea there are some reports of apparent Pycroft's petrels north of the equator during the austral winter. These reports stem from the northwest Pacific (Japanese waters), northeast Pacific (USA waters) and in the tropical Pacific (BirdLife International 2006), suggesting that the bulk of the population migrates to the tropical and north temperate Pacific in Apr-Sep.

On 5 May 2005, a metal-banded Pycroft's petrel was found alive 15-25 m offshore from Lelehudi Village, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea (10.31°S 150.73°E). It was discovered by Mr Kima

Peter and appeared to be tame when handled. There was no external sign of injury or emaciation, but it died c.15 minutes after being found. The recent weather was not unusual at the site, with winds blowing at a typical 30 knots from the southeast (D. Mitchell, Conservation International, Alaotau, PNG, *pers. comm.*).

The bird had been banded as a breeding adult with a stainless steel band (D 155396) at Coppermine I, Hen and Chickens Group, New Zealand, on 7 Dec 1992 and it was also recorded nesting in the same burrow in Dec 1993. Based on banding returns (R. Pierce, *pers. obs.*), it is likely to have been at least 4 years old at the time of banding, and therefore 17+ years old at the time of death. This bird was banded as part of a study on the impacts of Pacific rats (*Rattus exulans*) on small seabirds (Pierce 2002).

This is the 1st record of a Pycroft's petrel in Papua New Guinean waters and the 1st overseas recovery of a New Zealand-banded Pycroft's petrel. It raises the question of whether some Pycroft's petrels spend the non-breeding season in the Papua New Guinea region, rather than the north or central Pacific. However, the timing of the recovery (early May) does not rule out the possibility that the bird was a passage migrant. For example, during mid-Apr to mid-May 2006, several austral breeding species including mottled petrel (*Pterodroma inexpectata*), flesh-footed shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*), sooty shearwater (*P. griseus*) and short-tailed shearwater (*P. tenuirostris*) were seen on northern migration in the Samoa-Phoenix Is area (3-12°S) (R. Pierce, *pers. obs.*).

The rarity of Pycroft's petrel (population of c.10,000-20,000 birds and Red listed as Vulnerable; Heather & Robertson 2000; Taylor 2000; BirdLife 2006), together with the difficulty of distinguishing it from some other small *Pterodroma* species at sea,

means that confirmed records at sea will continue to be elusive. One thing is certain, if the current bird had not been banded we would be no wiser about the occurrence of the species in this region as it was originally reported to Conservation International in Papua New Guinea as a "white seagull"!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to David Mitchell of Conservation International for providing information on the circumstances of recovery, Graeme Taylor (New Zealand Banding Office, Department of Conservation) and Mike Imber for discussion, and Paul Sagar for editing the manuscript.

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Keywords Pycroft's petrel; *Pterodroma pycrofti*; banding recovery; Papua New Guinea