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SHORT NOTE

Petrels nesting in the Tutamoe Range, Northland, 1916-1923

M. J. Imber (1987) has given a comprehensive account of the past and present status of the Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*), including the inset of his Figure 6, which shows former breeding sites of this petrel on the main islands of New Zealand.

The information in his report has brought into focus some events which I have long thought should be placed on record. Perusal of Imber's account confirmed that this information was not in the literature.

From 1916 to 1923 I lived, as a schoolboy, on a bush farm on the Tutamoe Range. My father, H. A. Olsen, was manager and part owner of this farm of 750 ha. As well as being a bush farmer, he was very interested in anything related to the bush and the wildlife in it. He had been brought up in the Seventy Mile Bush in southern Hawke's Bay, and his father, A. Olsen, was one of an enthusiastic band of amateurs, led by Henry Hill, who collected botanical specimens for Colenso in 1880-1890.

One of H. A. Olsen's jobs in running the farm was to round up cattle which had wandered into the bush. For this purpose he had two, sometimes three, dogs with him, one of which, Sandy, was an enthusiastic forager. Soon after we moved on to the farm, probably in early 1917, Sandy surprised H. A. Olsen by rushing in under a big rata (*Metrosideros robusta*) and coming out with a struggling bird which was completely new to him. He was familiar with the birds of the bush. Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) were then quite common in the Tutamoe Range. Red-crowned Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*) were present and, in the evening, Brown Kiwi (*Apteryx australis*) could be heard calling adjacent to the farmhouse. On one occasion, probably in 1919 or 1920, H. A. Olsen saw a pair of Kokako (*Callaeas cinerea*) to the south of the farm block in heavy bush of what is now the Kaihu State Forest. At this time Kokako were considered to have gone from Northland by about 1900 (Oliver 1955), which surmise has happily proved incorrect.

Meanwhile the identity of the birds which Sandy used to drag from under the tree roots continued to elude H. A. Olsen. Sandy would catch three to five each year; sometimes the dog would be restrained when it was realised in time what he was after, and sometimes he was unable to get at the birds because of the length of their tunnel. Almost always the birds Sandy caught were adults, and only once or twice were they obviously well-grown immature birds. H. A. Olsen employed a few regular farmhands, and in 1919 two ex-sailors came to work on the farm. When they were shown one of the birds

they immediately pronounced it to be a "mollyhawk", but they were puzzled at its being in the bush. My recollection is of a strongly built bird with dark plumage; I also remember the interest shown in what appeared to us to be the complicated structure of the bill, as we compared it with the much simpler structure of the bills of bush birds.

The Tutamoe Range is actually a plateau of Miocene Basalt (Stipp & Thompson 1971), rising to 770 m at the south end in the Kaihu State Forest and extending north through the Marlborough State Forest to the southern confines of Waipoua Forest. At the locality of the nesting sites it is c. 3-4 km wide, c. 550 m a.s.l., and 14.5 km directly from the Tasman Sea. There, it presents a definite escarpment to both east and west, with the eastern side the higher of the two.

The petrel nesting area extended from the western escarpment to about 800 m further inland and ran south-west from where Opouteke Road climbs on to the plateau on the south bank of the Mangatu Stream, almost to where the Waingarara Stream leaves the plateau. During the period 1916-1923, this area was in bush which was being felled. The bush was a podocarp-hardwood complex with only two kauri (*Agathis australis*) on the whole farm block. Largely it consisted of rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*), miro (*Podocarpus ferrugineus*), rata, pukatea (*Laurelia novaezealandiae*) and toru (*Persoonia toru*). Since 1923 I have been back only in 1965. The nesting area was then all cleared for farmland. I am told that it is now being planted in *Pinus radiata*.

The nesting colony discussed therefore no longer exists. However, to the south in Kaihu State Forest and to the north in Marlborough State Forest, identical habitat to that used in 1916-1923 by that colony still exists. It may be that petrels still nest in the Tutamoe Range.

From my reading of Falla *et al.* (1981), the three species that qualify are Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*), Grey-faced Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*) and Black Petrel. After so long, I can offer no final opinion as to which species was found by the dog. My only clue is that, in patrols of Horowhenua beaches in recent years, I have picked up specimens of Sooty Shearwater and Grey-faced Petrel. Neither species registers with me as being the same as the fairly large dark-plumaged petrel I remember from the Tutamoe Range. My presumption therefore is that these birds were Black Petrels.

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[M. J. Imber commented that the description of the habitat and habits of the petrel concerned is identical with other accounts (e.g. Buller, Dieffenbach) of Black Petrels nesting on mainland New Zealand and that, in his opinion, it was this petrel that Olsen observed, - Ed.]