

SHORT NOTE

Petrels at sea off South Westland in June-July

From 27 June to 2 July 1988, I made observations of seabirds while on a trawler over orange roughly spawning grounds, centred on 43° 05' and 169° 00', adjacent to the Cook Canyon, about 98 km west of Okarito. My observations were made from 900-1100 metres. The sea was constantly rough, and winds were occasionally at gale force. Offal discharge consisted of less than 5% of the catch but this provided a rich food supply for offal-feeding birds. Deep sea trawlers nearby were also discharging offal.

In total I recorded 15 species of Procellariiformes. The offal-feeding species which congregated each time the net was lifted were as follows, together with the range in numbers:

Cape Pigeon (*Daption capense*) 600-1000, Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) 50-100, Northern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes halli*) up to 20, Shy Mollymawk (*Diomedea cauta cauta*) 10-15, Buller's Mollymawk (*D. bulleri*) c.10, Black-browed Mollymawk (*D. melanophrys*) up to 10, Westland Black Petrel (*Procellaria westlandica*) c.5, Grey-faced Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*) c.5. I saw also singles of Grey-headed Mollymawk (*Diomedea chrysostoma*), Salvin's Mollymawk (*D. cauta salvini*), Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) and Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*).

A stream of tens of Grey-backed Storm Petrels (*Garrodia nereis*) was also over the fishing grounds. Prions (*Pachyptila* spp.) congregated when the trawl was retrieved, and I saw one White-headed Petrel (*Pterodroma lessonii*) just north of the grounds.

Of the 15 species, the Cape Pigeon and Wandering Albatross were the most numerous. Cape Pigeons are highly seasonal in New Zealand waters, and Cheshire *et al.* (1979) noted an increase in South Island coastal waters during April and May, their numbers reaching a peak in August and September. According to Warham (1985), the Wandering Albatross migrates northwards during winter.

Seeing only 5 Westland Black Petrels was surprising, considering their tendency to follow trawlers (Bartle 1974). In late June many Westland Black Petrels are on the breeding grounds incubating (Bartle 1985), but non-breeding birds could be expected on these trawling grounds. The Royal Albatross (*D. epomophora*) was notably absent. It is rare in the Tasman Sea, only occasionally reaching Australia (Blakers *et al.* 1984).

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