## SOUTHERN SEABIRDS IN NEW ZEALAND COASTAL WATERS, JULY 1984

Mid-July was a period of strong southerly winds over New Zealand. Figure 1, the mean sea level analysis for noon 16 July NZST (160000Z), shows why. The high in the Tasman Sea and the deep lows to the east of New Zealand produced a steep pressure gradient across the country and with it very strong southerly winds. The gradient had been even steeper on 15 July, when the low-pressure areas were closer to the east coast.

Figure 1 shows that the winds were strong southerly down to and beyond 60°S, from where birds could have been collected and blown up to the New Zealand coast, the shape of New Zealand tending to funnel them towards the east coast of the North Island or through Cook Strait.

On 17 July, *Kuaka*, on passage from Marsden Point to Timaru, was off East Cape at 0815 (Fig. 2). The wind was SSW 30 knots with a rough high sea and heavy southerly swell. The wind, sea, and swell increased throughout the day.

Fewer birds than usual were about East Cape, as was to be expected in the heavy weather. Those seen, generally being blown rapidly northwards, were birds normally in the area — Shy, Salvin's, and Black-browed Mollymawks, Giant and Grey-faced Petrels, Fluttering Shearwaters, gannets, prions, and one Black Petrel. This was the

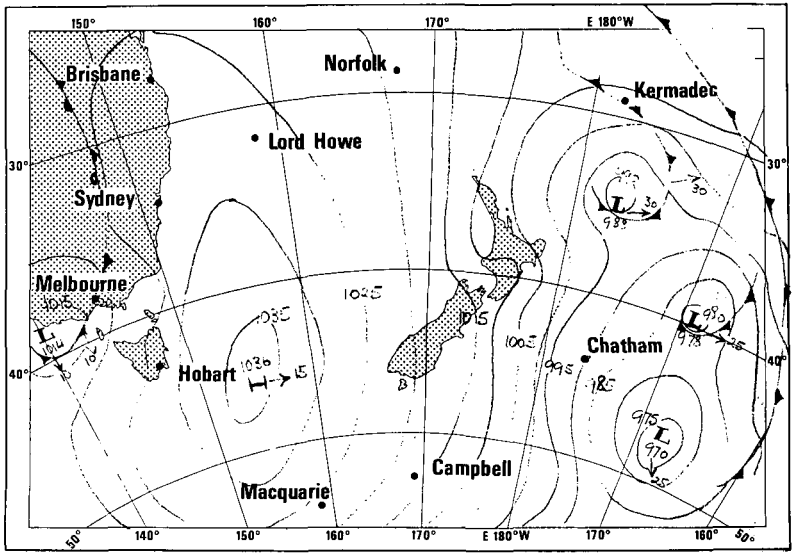


FIGURE 1

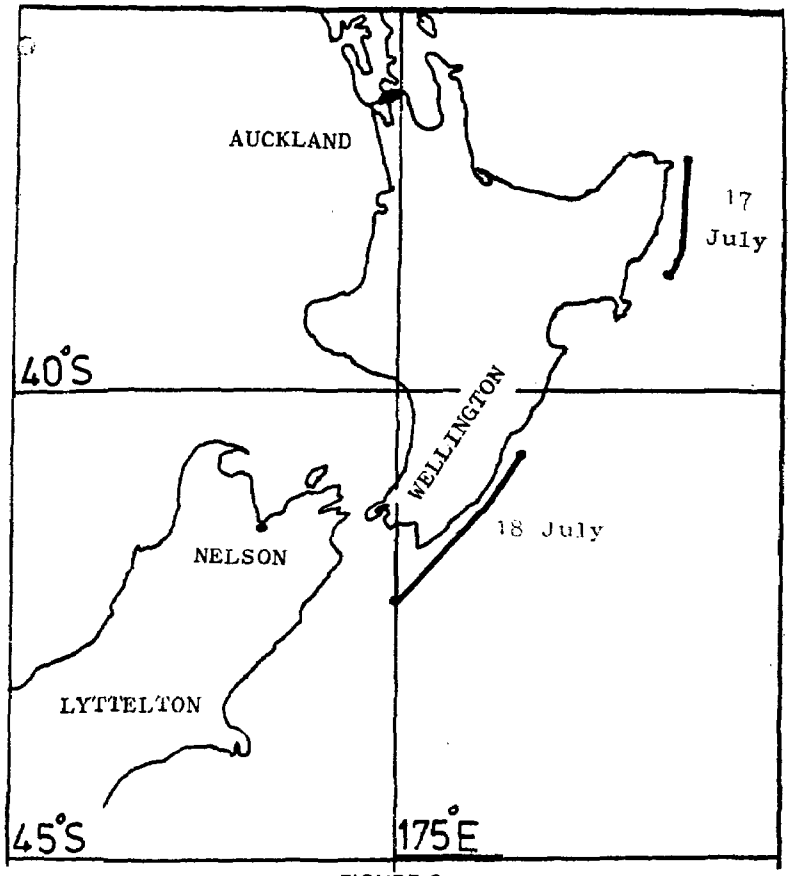


FIGURE 2

situation throughout the morning, but at 1315 a Blue Petrel *(Halobaena caerulea)* was sighted among the " regular " birds, and from then on Blue Petrels were in sight until dark. We had plenty of time to study them and found them easy to distinguish from the prions about the ship. The Blue Petrels looked larger and their flight was higher, being more active like that of the smaller gadfly petrels. The white bar at the tip of the upper tail was prominent and could easily be seen with binoculars from over 500 metres. This, their white-looking undertail, and their flight made them easy to separate from the prions. Some of the Blue Petrels flew along with the ship, seeming to be sheltering in the disturbed water caused by the ship's bow wave, but most flew by on their wind-assisted passage.

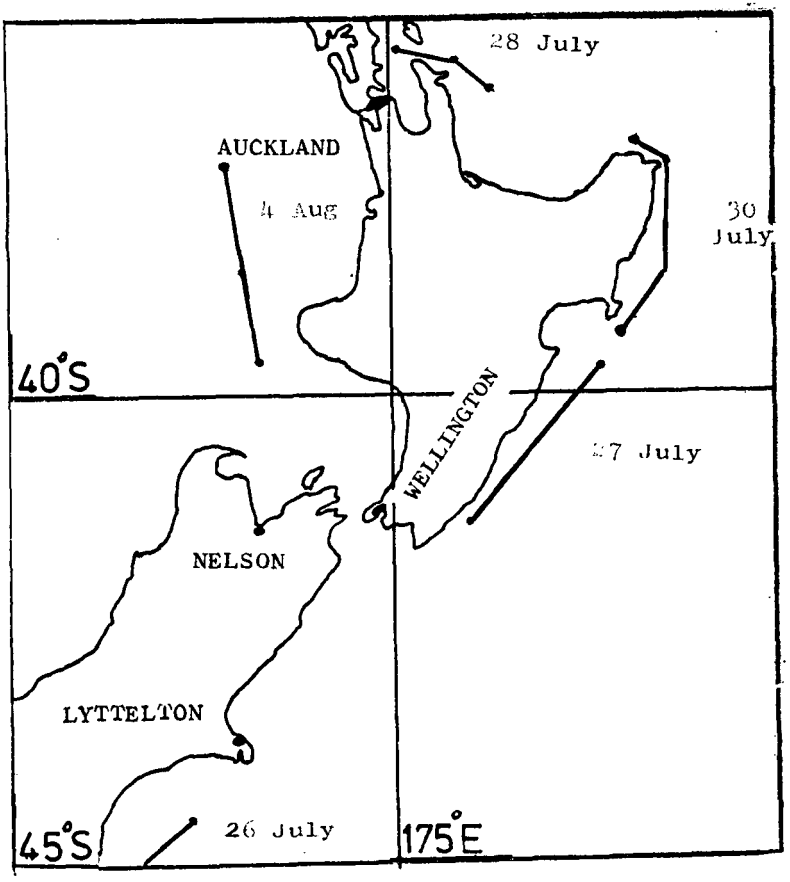


FIGURE 3

Though Grey Petrels *(Procellaria cinerea)* are irregularly seen in the Bay of Plenty and the East Coast region during the winter, their numbers are usually low (1-3 birds). On 17 July, after the first was seen at 1330, Grey Petrels were in sight until dark. They did not attempt to follow the ship but were blown past, often flying as high as 30 metres.

At 1400 on 17 July a white Giant Petrel *(Macronectes giganteus)* flew past the ship.

On 18 July, with the weather much moderated, the vessel was off the Wairarapa coast and in the eastern approaches to Cook Strait. Although we kept a careful watch, we saw no Blue Petrels and only one Grey Petrel. However, among the " normal " birds of that area we saw (at 0830) one Grey-backed Storm Petrel *(Garrodia nereis)*

TABLE 1 — Sightings of Blue and Grey Petrels, 17 July

| Time | Position | Blue Petrel | Grey Petrel |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1315 | 38.4°S 178.6°E | 1 | - |
| 1330 | | 1 | 1 |
| 1345 | | 2 | 3 |
| 1400 | 38.5°S 178.6°E | 1 | 6 |
| 1415 | | 8 | 5 |
| 1430 | | 10 | 6 |
| 1445 | | 10 | 2 |
| 1530 | | 4 | 4 |
| 1600 | 38.8°E 178.5°E | 2 | 3 |

TABLE 2 — Sightings of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, 18 July

| Time | Position | Number in Sight |
|---|---|---|
| 1030 | 41.3°S 176.1°E | 1 |
| 1100 | | 1 |
| 1200 | 41.6°S 175.8°E | 1 |
| 1245 | | 1 |
| 1300 | 41.8°S 175.6°E | 3 |
| 1315 | | 5 |
| 1330 | | 7 |
| 1345 | | 12 |
| 1400 | 41.9°S 175.4°E | 16 |
| 1445 | | 3 |
| 1530 | | 14 |
| 1600 | 42.3°S 175.0°E | 15 |
| 1630 | | 19 |

and, at 1030, the first Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *(Phoebetria palpebrata)*. The numbers of Light-mantled Sooties increased throughout the day, as shown in Table 2.

The ship seemed to ' collect ' Light-mantled Sooties all day until, just before dark, the highest numbers we have seen about the New Zealand coast were present. Even at the breeding islands 19 together would be a lot.

On 30 July, when in the East Cape-Portland Island area again (Fig. 3), we found Blue and Grey Petrels still there (Table 3). In the good weather we noted that the Grey Petrels tended to be attracted to the ship, flying in the wake and up alongside, whereas the Blue Petrels ignored the ship.

Apparently, when the wind died away during the night of 17/18 July, many Blue Petrels and Grey Petrels were becalmed in the East Coast region, and some of them had made little effort to move back south by 30 July.

In early August there was a wreck of Blue Petrels and Kerguelen Petrels *(Pterodroma brevirostris)* on the west coast of the North Island. We saw no Kerguelen Petrels between 17 July and 5 August. The other areas in which we made observations during this period may be of interest: 20 July, Nugget Point to Bluff; 23 July, Bluff to Nugget Point; 26 July, Dunedin to as in Fig. 3; 27 July, see Fig. 3; 28 July, see Fig. 3; 1 August, Napier to Cape Palliser; 4 August, see Fig. 3; 5 August, North Cape to Marsden Point.

TABLE 3 — Sightings of Blue and Grey Petrels, 30 July

| Time | Position | Blue Petrel | Grey Petrel |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1130 | 38.1°S 178.6°E | - | 1 |
| 1200 | | 1 | 2 |
| 1300 | | 1 | 4 |
| 1315 | | 4 | 4 |
| 1330 | | 2 | 2 |
| 1345 | | 2 | 2 |
| 1400 | 38.8°S 178.5°E | 4 | 3 |
| 1415 | | 2 | 4 |
| 1430 | | 1 | 3 |
| 1445 | | 1 | 3 |
| 1530 | | 5 | 2 |
| 1545 | | 1 | 1 |
| 1600 | 39.2°S 178.1°E | 5 | 1 |

We saw no Blue Petrels or Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses on any of these passages and Grey Petrels only on the afternoon of 27 July, when we saw a maximum of three together.

During the afternoon of 5 August, between Cape Brett and Bream Head, the ship was struck by very strong westerly squalls, which must have been even stronger on the west coast of the North Island. It is possible that some of the Blue Petrels that had arrived in New Zealand coastal waters on 16/17 July had by 5 August been weakened by their inability to find proper food — possibly the reason why they do not normally occur in local waters — and were driven ashore by the squalls.

We thank Bert van Krieken, Port Meteorological Officer, Auckland, for his help with met. information, and Barrie Heather and Ralph Powlesland for their comments on this note.

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## WILSON'S PHALAROPE AT MANAWATU RIVER ESTUARY — A NEW BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND

On the morning of 25 September 1983 a count of waders was made at the Manawatu River estuary. It was evident that an influx had occurred since the previous day as Wrybill *(Anarhynchus frontalis)* had increased from 10 to 57, Bar-tailed Godwit *(Limosa lapponica)* and Knot *(Calidris canutus)* had increased slightly, and four Least Golden Plover *(Pluvialis fulva)* had arrived.

Among the feeding waders on the exposed mud was an unusual bird clearly different from any of the 27 wader species which we had previously encountered at the estuary. Close observation for other than short periods was difficult, owing initially to the bird's position on the open mudflats and later, as the tide rose, to disturbance as yacht racing began. By midday, when M. K. Tarburton arrived in response to a phone call to the Manawatu RR, repeated disturbance had forced the wader flock to quit their normal high tide roost for a small sandspit close to the bar. Here the bird was found again, seen better, and photographed at a rather long range.

First impressions of the bird — yellowish legs and distinctive flight pattern with square white rump, lack of wingbar and feet protruding beyond the tail — suggested a Lesser Yellowlegs *(Tringa flavipes)*. However, certain features were not entirely consistent with this species, particularly the lack of spotting on back and wings, the distinct head pattern, and the very thin bill.

When studying the literature in the next few days, we could not fit these points within any of the plumage variations for the Lesser Yellowlegs. We therefore had to examine other possibilities, including species not previously recorded in New Zealand. Of the three other