

SHORT NOTE**SOME SIGHTINGS OF****LIGHT-MANTLED SOOTY ALBATROSSES**

The following sightings of *Phoebastria palpebrata* were made about the coasts of the South Island during June, 1969.

1. 9/6/69 N.E. of Banks Peninsular in position 43° 35' S 173° 5' E; wind South 18 kts; Air temp. 47° F; sea 50°F. 1 bird which flew about ship for half an hour.
2. 15/6/69 Between 46° 20' S 166° 40' E and 45° S 166° 55' E, that is from south of Puysegur Point to north of Doubtful Sound; Wind N.W. 60 kts, to W.S.W. 30 kts. Mean air temp. 46° F; Sea temp. 54° F. 4 birds followed ship throughout hours of daylight.
3. 16/6/69 Off Greymouth in position 42° 50' S, 171° 07' E. Wind S.W. 60 kts; Air temp. 44° F; Sea temp. 54° F. 1 bird about vessel throughout day.
4. 17/6/69 Position as in (3). Wind S.W. 35 kts. Air temp. 48° F; Sea 54° F. 1 bird throughout day. This could well be the same bird as in (3) above but there is no certain evidence.

Whilst these Albatrosses are sometimes found washed up on beaches as far north of 36° S, they are not often reported from about the coast. Prior to these observations, during the past thirteen years I have seen only one about the New Zealand coast and that well off the Auckland west coast eight years ago.

I had never before been in the position of (2) above but have been in the other positions on very many occasions.

An interesting comment on the colouration of these birds was provided by one of the crew who reported seeing a "Siamese" Albatross following the ship.

— JOHN JENKINS

**LETTER**

Sir,

Dr. Fleming's note on RATS AND MOA EXTERMINATION is interesting and thought provoking. However, having handled, probably, more bones than most people of Moa, both midden bones and those from swamps, caves and sandhills, I am still of the opinion that the chief cause of Moa extinction was the greatest predator of all, Man. It took him several hundred years to exterminate them. This applies particularly to the larger Moa.

In the South Island, one of the small Moa, *Megalapteryx*, survived at least until late last century, if the bird described by the late Mrs. Alice McKenzie in "Pioneers of Martins' Bay" was a bird of that genus, as I believe it to have been. Before I read her book, I heard Mrs. McKenzie's vivid radio description of the bird.

There is also some evidence that *Anomalopteryx didiformis* survived until comparatively recently, say, at a guess, 200 years ago, and possibly much later. This opinion is based on the finding of

bones of this bird, in good condition, in exposed positions, where if they had been much older, the weathering should have been considerably greater. It is probable that some of the small North Island species survived for some time after the last of their larger brethren had perished. Obviously, I cannot go into all the evidence in a letter.

Aptornis and *Cnemiornis* are very rare in midden deposits — finds of *Cnemiornis* indeed are rare in any case — and one would suppose that these two birds would be easily caught by Man. Present evidence suggests that few of them were present when Man arrived in New Zealand, accompanied by *Rattus exulans*. That the latter was capable of very sharp and intensive gnawing indeed is shown by many midden bones.

At present I know of no evidence that rats had reached New Zealand before Man arrived, and they therefore cannot have played a part in the destruction of the birds which seem to have vanished before the first Polynesians reached these shores.

However, the new evidence presented by Dr. Fleming cannot be ignored and must be considered as a possible factor in the lamentable disappearance of some of our birds.

— RON SCARLETT

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