

Diomedea cauta logged in coastal Cape seas, where it has generally been considered scarce, is attributed to *D. c. salvini* (without supporting description). The observed *D. melanophris* (black-browed mollymawk) fall into two separated populations, one in Cape seas, the other from 133°E. to the Ross Sea, apparently corresponding to the two subspecies *melanophris* and *impavida*, and the "Barendrecht" observers claimed to detect differences between them in the field. "The western population (*melanophris*) have the under side of the wing white with a broad dark margin at the anterior and a narrow margin at the posterior border. Adult eastern birds (*impavida*) have an underwing pattern with little white, both dark margins being distinctly broader." The observations thus point to the validity of *impavida* (breeding Campbell and Macquarie islands, but not Auckland Islands as wrongly recorded in the B.O.U. Check-list and in this paper. The O.S.N.Z. Check-list recognizes *impavida*, which was suppressed by Peters and by Murphy, because Campbell Island breeders and adults in N.Z. seas have darker underwings than Atlantic-Indian ocean birds exemplified by Murphy's flight photograph—published in Alexander's "Birds of the Ocean," pl. 6—and are more intensely pigmented on back and eyebrow. In addition, Campbell Island breeding adults observed by the reviewer on February 14, 1943, have light honey-coloured eyes contrasting with the dark brown eyes of *D. chrysostoma* and other species. Judged by Harrison Matthew's colour notes from South Georgia, the western populations of *D. melanophris* are dark-brown eyed like other albatrosses and this may be another subspecific difference between the races.)

All told, van Oordt and Kruijt have published a worthy successor to the report of Falla (1937), Routh (1949) and Bierman and Voous (1950) on the distribution of birds at sea in this sector of Antarctica.—C. A. Fleming.

The Question of Ten-day Incubation Periods, by M. M. Nice. The Wilson Bulletin, vol. 65, No. 2, June, 1953, pp. 81-93.

Mrs. Nice has investigated reports in ornithological literature that some birds have an incubation period as short as ten, or even nine, days. First she defines incubation period as "the time from the laying of the last egg to its hatching," and finds that use of other definitions is the reason for some short periods recorded.

Audubon first assigned a ten-day incubation period to a bird. Many such assertions have since been made but authenticated periods less than 11 days prove to be rare. The myth that cowbird eggs hatch in ten days was started by a guess and was accepted for 60 years in spite of abundant records of hatching in 11 to 12 (not 10) days.

The silvereye (*Zosterops*) attained world-wide fame for the shortest period of any bird—nine to ten days—because T. H. Potts was reported by Buller as having observed that in one nest "the birds commenced incubation on October 16, the young were hatched on October 25, and left the nest on November 4." The supposed nine-day period was quoted all over the world, and supposed ten-day periods were recorded by other writers on *Zosterops*, including Potts himself, Mrs. A. S. Wilkinson, and Fleming (the last due to faulty calculation from correct data!). Analysing the original data supplied by contemporary New Zealand ornithologists (including observations by Potts, Wilkinson and Fleming) Mrs. Nice finds that in four nests of the New Zealand silvereye carefully recorded between 1870 and 1943, incubation lasted at least 11 days. This bird's fame for the shortest period of any bird thus started in careless observation in the 1880's and the unquestioned acceptance of such blunders "shows that we need greater care in observation and less reliance on the printed word."

The silvereye is about the commonest New Zealand bird. Will the next generation of observers do better than the last three—four sets of observations in 75 years?—C.A.F.

[Fisher in "The Fulmar," has stated that the incubation period of the blackbird ranges from 9 days to 18 days. If this is correct, it would not be surprising if *Zosterops* sometimes had a similar period.—Ed.]