

GIANT PETREL ROBBING BLACK-BACKED GULL

On the afternoon of 17/5/56, while staying on The Brothers in Cook Strait, I witnessed the following incident.

A Black-backed Gull (*L. dominicanus*) was swimming on the sea in the lee of the island with a captured Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*) floating beside it. Although the petrel was apparently dead already, the gull aimed vicious jabs and pecks at it, and then made three attempts to fly off with it. However, the Diving Petrel dropped back to the sea each time. Five minutes later a Giant Petrel (*Macronektes giganteus*) appeared, forced the gull to take flight with its prey again, and, following, compelled it to drop the Diving Petrel. The Giant Petrel then circled back, settled alongside the dead bird and began to devour it.

It is of interest to note that Oliver states that the Black-backed Gull kills birds, and also records a statement of Buller's that the Giant Petrel sometimes feeds upon 'small sea-birds such as prions'.

— G. W. RAMSAY

LETTER

Sir: Mr D. H. Brathwaite in *Notornis* (VII, 2, October 1956: 57) is concerned with the field separation of the Little Stint (*Calidris minutus ruficollis*) and the Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla subminuta*) — perhaps better named the Long-toed Stint. His description tallies with my observations: the olive or greenish legs are diagnostic; the whole foot is longer than the Little Stint's, the middle toe measuring 23 to 26 mm (Little Stint not over 20 mm). But I think that only in exceptional circumstances will he need to distinguish between the two in the field. It is clear from my experience and from the collections in this Museum and elsewhere in S.E. Asia that the two are already separated by ecological preference (cf. Harrison, *Sarawak Museum Journal*, V, 2, 1950: 330). It seems likely that this is a worldwide pattern also.

The Little Stint is a migrant bird of the seashore only, in season abundant on the low tide flats of the coast, in flocks of up to sixty. All the Long-toed Stints obtained in Borneo are from inland areas; these vary from those found on marshy ground near Kuching, within smell of the sea, to a series I obtained (1949) at Bario, 3700ft in the Kelabit uplands of the far interior of Sarawak, and the one specimen shot (1956) by the recent Cambridge Expedition, in the Tambunan plain, at 2000ft inside North Borneo.

Both birds are of course migratory, and so may at times (e.g. crossing a coast) be together, as also in a habitat intermediate between their two tastes. I note that Mr Brathwaite identified both species on the Ahuriri Lagoon (*Notornis* 6, p. 145). He describes the habitat favoured by waders there as a 'limited area of tidal flats, salt marshes and drains'. As he says nothing to the contrary, I presume it was on these flats or marshes that he saw the Little Stint. The Long-toed Stint, however, he records, was 'standing alone at the edge of the pond in the Westshore domain', presumably inland from the tidal, saline regions. If this is so, his observations support my conclusions, which are here offered for what they are worth and for fuller comparative study at your (New Zealand) end of the migratory chain.

Sarawak Museum,
11/12/56.

TOM HARRISON

REVIEWS

Lead Poisoning in New Zealand Waterfowl, B. Wisely and K. H. Miers; New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, Wildlife Publication No. 41, 1956: 11 pages.

Falla in 1936 reported suspected lead poisoning in Knot at Lake Ellesmere. The present paper gives definite evidence of lead poisoning from ingested shot in Black Swan, Grey and Mallard Duck. Cases are reported from both

Islands of New Zealand, involving up to twenty birds in some localities. Most of the work on lead poisoning in waterfowl has been carried out in the United States, and the relevant points of this work are discussed in this paper. The important facts are: the ingestion of a single No. 6 shot was sufficient to cause death in seven of ten wild Mallards, six No. 6 shot always constitute a fatal dose. Recovery from lead poisoning is influenced by diet; soft foods tend to promote recovery, grain feeding aggravates the condition. Birds that recover have a lower egg production, many of the eggs laid are infertile. The symptoms of lead poisoning are described.

The local importance of this paper lies in the implication of grain feeding practices with increased mortality from lead poisoning. This is important in New Zealand in view of the controversy over grain feeding of ponds. Now that interested persons will be able to detect cases of lead poisoning, it may be that the problem is more important here than has been suspected.

W.C.C.

Kiwi Colour Slides. New Zealand Birds — Sets A & B (A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd, Wellington).

With commendable enterprise A. H. and A. W. Reed have published two sets of 35 mm colour slides of New Zealand birds. The slides have been made from photographs taken by K. V. Bigwood, whose name is a guarantee of the quality of the bird portraiture. In New Zealand there are now many naturalists skilfully taking still and moving colour photographs of birds; and the purists among them may find cause to complain that the excellence of Mr Bigwood's originals is not matched by the quality of the colour reproduction, particularly in the first set, in which there are evident the same false tone values which marred the colour portraits in Oliver's recent monumental volume and drew adverse criticism. In this respect New Zealand seems to be lagging behind the high standard now achieved overseas. Each set is accompanied by a commentary, but that which goes with the first set begins with the startling statement 'New Zealand has no native animals'! Aesthetically the second set is much more satisfying. Especially praiseworthy are brilliant studies of Red-fronted Parakeet and Stitchbird.

The publication of these slides will be a stimulus to New Zealanders to examine their birds more closely for their hidden beauties. An exciting start has been made in a new venture in publishing. The issue of further sets, two of which are already promised, is eagerly awaited.

— R.B.S.

NOTICES

PAST VOLUMES OF THE EMU DEPOSITED IN THE LIBRARY

Through the initiative of Mr R. V. Roberts and the co-operation of Dr W. R. B. Oliver, Honorary Secretary for the R.A.O.U. in New Zealand, volumes 4-41 of the *Emu* have been transferred by the Council of the R.A.O.U. to our Library. The O.S.N.Z. is deeply indebted to those who have been instrumental in the transference to our Library of these valuable ornithological volumes. The Library now has a complete set of the *Emu* except for volumes I-III.

The Editor will be away from New Zealand from May to September. In his absence Mr E. G. Turbott has kindly offered to edit *Notornis*. Material for publication should be sent to him at the War Memorial Museum, Auckland.