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**NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE AUCKLAND ISLANDS,
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1989**

by

Peter J. Moore and Peter J. McClelland

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ABSTRACT

Miscellaneous observations of birds were made in the northern islands and harbours of the Auckland Islands from 31 October to 8 December 1989. Forty-seven species were recorded. A Canada goose on Enderby Island and a shining cuckoo on Ewing Island were new records. Ewing Island probably had the most diverse and abundant community of burrowing seabirds in the northern part of the island group. Hybrids between crowned and yellow-crowned parakeets were found on the offshore islands, with the highest proportion on Ewing Island. Red-crowned parakeets not seen on Auckland Island. The Northern giant petrel population may have expanded or changed its distribution, as several colonies were found that were not present in 1972-73. Auckland Island snipe were more widespread than previously reported.

1. INTRODUCTION

The northern harbours and islands of the Auckland Islands were visited during a Department of Conservation expedition from 31 October to 8 December 1989. Our main tasks were to conduct surveys of yellow-eyed penguins, Auckland Island teal and Auckland Island banded dotterel (reported separately). During these surveys some incidental observations of birds were made and are the subject for this report.

2. RESULTS

Forty-seven species were recorded during the expedition. Table 1 summarises the species seen at each locality visited. The following text summarises the miscellaneous observations that were made.

2.1 Ewing Island (2-8, 30 November 1989)

More emphasis was placed on making bird observations on this island, compared with elsewhere, because of the diversity of bird life present and the infrequent visits by biologists in the past.

2.1.1 Seabirds

Important sea birds included the Auckland Island shag, which had a large breeding colony on the south-east cliffs. Nest building, courtship displays and copulation were occurring in mid-November, and 306 nest sites were counted on 30 November. At the cliffs just north of the colony, large numbers of shags were seen gradually arriving in the evening of 4 November; 36 birds were present at 1630hr (NZST), 50 at 1830hr and 137 at 2030hr. There were at least 20 red-billed gulls roosting amongst the shags and others occupied the shag breeding colony itself. Other gulls were scattered around the coast, feeding in rock pools or among kelp on the high tide mark. There was a small red-billed gull colony at the southern end of Boat Bay. Giant petrels were rearing chicks in November; 25 chicks were counted at nests amongst herbs on the south-west point, and there were at least five on the south-east point. Several pairs of skuas were scattered around the coast. Up to 13 turnstones were seen on the eastern coast and five on the south coast.

There was a variety of burrowing seabirds using the island, each with a differing pattern of arrival after dusk and departure before dawn. Sooty shearwaters appeared to be common and were first to arrive at night and last to leave in the morning. The next species to arrive after dark was the white-headed petrel, several of which were seen on the western side of the island, and corpses were found in skua middens. Diving petrels, storm petrels and prions were seen arriving at the island later at night. Subantarctic diving petrels appeared to be the most numerous of the smaller petrels; three species of storm petrel were identified (grey-backed, white-faced and black-bellied); and one of the prions that was captured appeared to be a lesser Fulmar prion.

Table 2. Ewing Island Bird Transects, 8 November 1989

Species	No. of birds counted on transect	
	A	B
Blackbird	6	10
Bellbird	4	3
Hedgesparrow	-	6
Auckland I. tit	4	7
Parakeet	3	2
Silvereye	2	-
Auckland I. pipit	1	-
Auckland I. snipe	2	-

METHOD : Birds were recorded if seen or heard within 10 m either side of the transect.

TRANSECT A : 0830-0910h (NZST), due east across the island from Boat Bay.

TRANSECT B : 1010-1055h (NZST), due west across the island from the northern part of the eastern bay.

2.1.2 Terrestrial Birds

On 8 November, two transects were made across the island to obtain a relative index of abundance/conspicuousness for the bush birds (Table 2). The most numerous encounters were of blackbirds. Blackbirds and bellbirds were found throughout the island and were very vocal and conspicuous. Pipits (including fledglings) were commonly seen on the coast and were very approachable. Approximately 60% of parakeets were hybrids (showing red-and yellow-crowned characteristics); the remainder were red-crowned, except for one sighting of a yellow-crowned parakeet. Parakeets were very conspicuous on the coast and were often seen feeding on the mat plants around rock pools. Several snipe were seen on the *Olearia lyalli* forest floor, and on 8 November a small chick was seen with its parent.

2.2 Enderby Island (9-20 November, 3 December 1989)

2.2.1 Seabirds

Burrowing seabirds did not appear to be as abundant on this island as they were on Ewing Island, although sooty shearwater were commonly found in skua middens. Up to nine pre-breeding Southern royal albatrosses were seen near the summit of the island. There was a scattered colony of giant petrels at the edge of the Southern rata (*Metrosideros umbellata*) forest and coastal scrub on the south coast. On one occasion, 35 giant petrels were seen roosting on the sward above Sandy Bay, and on another occasion 18 birds had gathered on the beach to scavenge a dead Hooker's sea lion (*Phocarctos hookeri*). There were at least seven skua nests scattered over the island, and all had two eggs in mid-November. More than 40 skuas, mostly young birds, gathered at Sandy Bay to scavenge for food amongst the seals or near the huts. Some individuals were seen hunting rabbits on the coastal sward. Usually this was done by keeping the body sleek and close to the ground, while slowly stalking towards the rabbit and by freezing still if the rabbit showed signs of nervousness. Some skuas also hunted rabbits by swooping on them from the air. Red-billed gulls were associated with shag colonies, where they scavenged for food. In one bay, over 30 gulls were counted as they fed amongst the kelp exposed by high tide. There were two large Auckland Island shag colonies on the east coast, either end of East Bay. There were approximately 120 nests at the northern colony and 90 nests at the southern colony on 19 November. Most birds were still nest-building at this time. A lone Canada goose was seen roosting amongst shags adjacent to the northern colony.

2.2.2 Terrestrial Birds

Some of the most conspicuous terrestrial birds were parakeets, with flocks of 10-20 commonly seen on the coastal sward. Red-crowned parakeets predominated over hybrids. Redpolls were very numerous. Snipe were seen by other personnel (B. Rance, H. Campbell pers. comm.) in two different localities; in scrub and fern near the south coast, and near the summit.

2.3 Rose Island (27-29 November 1989)

2.3.1. Seabirds

Sooty shearwater were found in skua middens near the coast. Flocks of 13-20 Antarctic terns were seen fishing offshore, and 54 Cape pigeons were seen offshore on one

occasion. A skua nest with 1-2-day-old chicks was found on 27 November. At least 18 giant petrel chicks were on nests amongst *Poa* tussocks at the south-western end of the island, and 10 chicks were found at the eastern end.

2.3.2 Terrestrial Birds

Bellbirds were very common in the rata forest. Parakeets were not as common as on the other islands. More than 50% were hybrids, the remainder were red-crowned parakeets. Several snipe were seen and heard at the southern end of the island, amongst *Poa* and *Histiopteris*.

2.4 Ocean Island (30 November 1989)

This island was visited for a few hours during the day. Eighteen giant petrel nests were found, mostly at the eastern end of the island. Three red-billed gull nests (with eggs) were found on the rocks of the southern coast. A shining cuckoo was seen amongst *Dracophyllum longifolium* shrubland.

2.5 Northern Harbours of Auckland Island (20 November-10 December 1989)

Apart from recording the presence of bird species at the harbours visited, few incidental observations were made.

In contrast to the offshore islands, all the parakeets on Auckland Island were crowned parakeets. No hybrids were seen. A tui seen at Mathesons Bay was feeding on honeydew on a rata trunk. A falcon was reported on the island (K. Timpson pers. comm.).

3. DISCUSSION

This report provides a small amount of information on bird abundance and distribution on the northern Auckland Islands. Similar information from previous years is scattered through many other expedition reports and papers, illustrating the need for an overview in the near future. A brief review of the published literature showed that Falla (1965) recorded 52 species of birds that were breeding or probably breeding on the Auckland Islands, although one of these species, the Auckland Island merganser, is probably extinct. Bell (1975) recorded another 17 species that were seen during, and prior to, the 1972-73 expedition. These were mainly vagrant species or Arctic migrant waders. Another 5 species were reported at or around the islands during the early 1980s (Cawthorn 1986, Robertson and Jenkins 1986, Pierce 1986, Mayhill and Goulstone 1986). During the expedition, 47 species were recorded, including two new records for the islands, the Canada goose and shining cuckoo (McLelland and Moore, in press). This brings the total number of species to 76 that have been recorded at the islands. Appendix 1 provides a list of species additional to those seen in 1989. The following discussion will relate some of our findings to the available literature.

Because there have been few visits by biologists, there is little detailed information on Ewing Island bird-life. The island probably harbours the most diverse and abundant community of burrowing seabirds in the northern part of the island group because of its lack of mammalian predators and herbivores. Sooty shearwaters appeared to be

common, as noted previously by Taylor (1988). Little is known about the lesser Fulmar prion, although it has been reported previously on Ewing Island (Bell 1975). The Auckland Island Prion (*Pachyptila desolata alter*) is the more numerous prion species at the islands (Soper 1976, Taylor 1988). The Auckland Island shag colony is probably one of the largest colonies of the species in the group, but because of its location on the east coast of Ewing Island, has escaped the notice of most biologists. In 1904, the extensive colony was mistaken for that of yellow-eyed penguins (Wilson 1904). Taylor (1988) noted that several hundred adults were present in February 1988. The giant petrel population may have expanded or changed its nesting distribution since the 1960s. For example, in 1966 they nested on Rose Island (Taylor 1971), but Taylor did not mention Enderby Island; in 1972-73 small numbers were observed nesting on Enderby, Rose and Ocean Islands (Bell 1975). The colonies found in 1989 on Ewing, eastern Rose and eastern Ocean Islands were not present in 1972-73 (B. Bell pers. comm.).

Red-crowned parakeets are not found on the main Auckland Island. Presumably their preference for feeding on the ground makes them vulnerable to cats on Auckland Island, where yellow-crowned parakeets are the predominant parakeet species (Soper 1976). The marked occurrence of hybrids on the offshore islands has been noted (Taylor 1975, Penniket 1986), and Ewing Island, where about 60% of parakeets are hybrids, appears to have the highest proportion of the northern islands. Red-crowned parakeets were very common on Enderby Island, with a lower proportion of hybrids than on Ewing Island, e.g. one-third (Bartle and Paulin 1986), or 10% (Penniket 1986).

Large colonies of Auckland Island shags have been recorded on Enderby Island (Soper 1976, Taylor 1971). The only detailed survey was by Taylor (1988), who counted 475 nests on the east, north and south-west coasts in February 1988. At the northern colony on the east coast he found 136 nests (120, this study), and at the southern colony there were 83 nests (90, this study). The island possibly supports the greatest number of Southern skuas because of the Hooker's sea lion (*Phocarctos hookeri*) and feral rabbit populations, which respectively provide scavenging and prey opportunities (Bell 1975). Skuas banded on Enderby Island during the 1972-73 expedition were found to range to North Harbour and Bay on Auckland Island (Bell 1975). During November we found at least seven nests and saw up to 40 birds at Sandy Bay. Taylor (1988) estimated there were 47 individuals, including 11 pairs, on the island. The island may also be an important centre for the giant petrel population. Thomson (1986) estimated 50+ adults and 30 juveniles were present, although other authors mention that only small numbers nest there (e.g. Bell 1975, Taylor 1988). The 1989 visit was too early to assess the royal albatross population, which is apparently increasing after human depredation last century. A few pairs were breeding during the 1940s, 15 pairs in 1966 (Taylor 1971), 18 pairs in 1972-73 (Robertson 1975) and 33 pairs in 1988 (Taylor 1988).

Before the 1970s snipe were believed only to be present on Ewing and Adams Islands, where they were not affected by mammalian predators. They probably had disappeared from Enderby Island when pigs and dogs were introduced last century (Taylor 1971). In 1972-73 snipe were found on both Disappointment and Enderby Islands (Soper 1976), and Taylor (1988) found them on Ocean Island. The 1989 sightings of snipe on Enderby and Rose Islands, and possible snipe probing sign on Friday Island (A. Cox pers. comm.) indicate that they were previously overlooked on many of the northern islands of the group, or that they have recently recolonised these areas.

The single sighting of a falcon on Auckland Island reflects the decline of this species in the north, possibly in part because of cat predation (Bell 1975). However, they were once common around Port Ross and hunted rabbits and small birds on Enderby Island (Wilson 1904). They are now found mainly on Adams Island (Bell 1975, G. Elliot, K. Walker, R. Buckingham pers. comm.)

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APPENDIX 1: Bird species recorded at the Auckland Islands before 1989, but not seen during this survey

Common Name	Scientific Name	Reference
King penguin	<i>Aptenodytes patagonicus</i>	Bell (1975)
Erect-crested penguin	<i>Eudyptes sclateri</i>	Falla (1965)
Wandering albatross	<i>Diomedea e. exulans</i>	"
Black-browed mollymawk	<i>D. melanophrys</i>	Bell (1975)
Buller's mollymawk	<i>D. bulleri</i>	"
Mottled petrel	<i>Pterodroma inexpectata</i>	"
Auckland I. prion	<i>Pachyptila desolata alter</i>	Falla (1965)
Grey petrel	<i>Procellaria cinerea</i>	Robertson and Jenkins (1986)
White-chinned petrel	<i>P. aequinoctialis steadi</i>	Falla (1965)
Subantarctic little shearwater	<i>Puffinus assimilis elegans</i>	"
South Georgian diving petrel	<i>Pelecanoides georgicus</i>	"
Australasian gannet	<i>Sula bassana serrator</i>	Bell (1975)
Black shag	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo novaehollandiae</i>	Mayhill and Goulstone (1986)
White heron	<i>Egretta alba modesta</i>	Bell (1975)
Chestnut-breasted shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>	Cawthorn (1986)
NZ shoveler	<i>Anas rhynchos variegata</i>	Falla (1965)
Auckland Is. merganser	<i>Mergus australis</i>	"
Australasian harrier	<i>Circus approximans gouldi</i>	"
Auckland Is. rail	<i>Rallus pectoralis muelleri</i>	"
Least golden plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Bell (1975)
Asiatic black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa l. melanuroides</i>	"
Siberian tattler	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	Pierce (1986)
Sharp-tailed sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	Bell (1975)
Curlew sandpiper	<i>C. ferruginea</i>	"
Red-necked stint	<i>C. ruficollis</i>	"
Long-tailed cuckoo	<i>Eudynamis taitensis</i>	"
Skylark	<i>Alauda a. arvensis</i>	Falla (1965)
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs gengleri</i>	"
House sparrow	<i>Passer d. domesticus</i>	"

Table 1. List of birds seen at the Auckland Islands, Nov-Dec 1989.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Locality and Breeding Status				
		1	2	3	4	5
Yellow-eyed penguin	<i>Megadyptes antipodes</i>	b	b	b	*	b
Rockhopper penguin	<i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>					*
Southern royal albatross	<i>Diomedea e. epomophora</i>	*				
White-capped mollymawk	<i>D. c. cauta</i>	o	o	o		o
Light-mantled sooty albatross	<i>Phoebastria palpebrata</i>	b	*	b	*	b
Northern giant petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus halli</i>	b	b	b	b	*
Cape pigeon	<i>Daption c. capense</i>	o	o	o		o
White-headed petrel	<i>Pterodroma lessoni</i>		*			
Lesser Fulmar prion	<i>Pachyptila crassirostris eatoni</i>	*				
Sooty shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	*	*	*		o
Grey-backed storm petrel	<i>Garrodia nereis</i>		*			
White-faced storm petrel	<i>Pelagodroma marina maoriana</i>		*			
Black-bellied storm petrel	<i>Fregatta tropica</i>		*			
Subantarctic diving petrel	<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix exsul</i>	*	*			
Auckland I. shag	<i>Leucocarbo campbelli colensoi</i>	b	b	b	*	*
White-faced heron	<i>Ardea n. novaehollandiae</i>					*
Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	*				
Mallard	<i>Anas p. platyrhynchos</i>	*	*	*	*	
Grey duck	<i>A. s. superciliosa</i>					*
Auckland I. teal	<i>A. a. aucklandica</i>	*	*	*	*	
N.Z. falcon	<i>Falco novaeseelandiae</i>					*
Auckland Is. banded dotterel	<i>Charadrius bicinctus exilis</i>	b	*	*	*	*
Eastern bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica baueri</i>	*				
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria i. interpres</i>	*	*	*	*	*
Auckland Island snipe	<i>Coenocorypha a. aucklandica</i>	*	b	*		
Knot	<i>Calidris c. canutus</i>	*				
Southern skua	<i>Stercorarius skua lonnbergi</i>	b	b	b	b	b
Southern black-backed gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	*	*	b	*	*
Red-billed gull	<i>L. novaehollandiae scopulinus</i>	*	b	*	b	*
Antarctic tern	<i>Sterna vittata bethunei</i>	*	*	*	o	*
White-fronted tern	<i>S. striata</i>	*	*			
Red-crowned parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus n. novaezealandiae</i>	*	*	*		
Yellow-crowned parakeet	<i>C. a. auriceps</i>		*			*
Parakeet hybrid		*	*	*		
Shining cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx l. lucidus</i>					*
Welcome swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica neoxena</i>	*				
Auckland I. pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae aucklandicus</i>	*	b	*	*	*
Hedgesparrow	<i>Prunella modularis occidentalis</i>		*	*	*	*
Auckland I. tit	<i>Petroica macrocephala marrineri</i>	b	b	*		*
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos clarkei</i>	*	*	*		
Blackbird	<i>T. m. merula</i>	*	*	*	*	*
Silvereye	<i>Zosterops l. lateralis</i>		*	*		*
Bellbird	<i>Anthornis m. melanura</i>	*	*	*	b	*
Tui	<i>Prothemadera n. novaeseelandiae</i>	*	*			*
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis c. britannica</i>					*
Redpoll	<i>C. flammea cabaret</i>	*	*	*		*
Starling	<i>Sturnus v. vulgaris</i>	*	*	*	*	*

KEY LOCALITY: 1=Enderby I. 2=Ewing I. 3= Rose I. 4=Ocean I. 5=Auckland I.
SIGHTING: * = species seen b= breeding confirmed o = seen offshore