

Notes on Some Sea-birds Frequenting New South Wales Coastal Waters

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Several species of sea-birds, once thought to be of rare or accidental occurrence in New South Wales coastal waters, are now known to be regular visitors to the temperate waters of the west Tasman at certain periods of the year.

Examples which come readily to mind are the Fleshy-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*), a summer visitor from Lord Howe Island and possibly New Zealand, and the Cape Petrel (*Daption capense*), which forages northwards from sub-antarctic seas during the winter months. The Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), and the Black-browed Albatross (*Diomedea melanophris*), once thought to be completely nomadic when away from their breeding haunts, are now known to winter in thousands along the southern coast of New South Wales.

In the light of evidence now available it seems reasonably certain that at least a few individuals of the Grey-faced or Great-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*), are likely to occur in New South Wales inshore waters, generally between October and April. Most of the beach-washed specimens so far collected from New South Wales have been identified as belonging to the winter-breeding New Zealand form *gouldi* (*Emu*, vol. 57, p. 211).

On December 26, 1958, while watching sea-birds, including numerous Fluttering Shearwaters (*Puffinus gavia*), feeding close to the shore off Windang Island on the south coast of New South Wales, my attention was drawn to two dark-plumaged birds of much heavier build with deep black bills and diffused grey feathering about the face. They were not more than fifty yards away and remained constantly together and seemed reluctant to fly. After our watching them for over an hour, a series of stones cast in their general direction finally put both birds to flight, thus making specific identification certain. The under-wing pattern was a uniform grey, whereas the only other petrel of similar plumage and size, the rare Brown-headed or Providence Petrel (*Pterodroma melanopus*), has a conspicuous white under-wing patch.

By a strange coincidence a dead Grey-faced Petrel was found later in the day on a mainland beach three miles north of Windang Island. Two additional examples were found a few weeks later on Cronulla Beach, just south of Sydney, by Mr. F. Johnston.

Another observation of a bird, obviously of this species, was made some years ago by a group of naturalists when returning to Port Kembla Harbour after visiting the sea-bird rookeries on the nearby Five Islands.

Seven derelict specimens have been collected from Illawarra (south coast) beaches to date. The majority have been deep in moult with bare brood patches and abraded brown primaries and rectrices. Only one was in darker fresh plumage, and was, in all probability, a bird of the year.

K. A. Hindwood has recently summarized fourteen known New South Wales occurrences of *P. macroptera* (*Emu*, vol. 57, pp. 211-214). Since his notes were compiled there have been four additional beach-washed specimens and brief particulars of them are as follows:

1. Coledale Beach (38 miles south of Sydney), March 17, 1957. Gibson/Sefton Coll. no. 234.206.
2. Port Kembla Beach, December 26, 1958. Gibson/Sefton Coll. no. 234.233.
3. North Cronulla Beach, January 10, 1959. Collected by F. Johnston.
4. Cronulla Beach, January 23, 1959. Collected by F. Johnston.

Most 'beach-combing' for derelict sea-birds takes place after gales, cyclones and adverse weather conditions generally, but specimens of the species already mentioned in these notes plus such rarities as the Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*), Buller's Shearwater (*Puffinus bulleri*), Westland Black Petrel (*Procellaria westlandica*), and the Georgian Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides georgicus*), have been found in recent years on Illawarra beaches when the entire Tasman has been relatively calm and free from turbulence for considerable periods. The Westland Black Petrel and the Georgian Diving Petrel represent additions to the known Australian avifauna, whilst our specimen of Buller's Shearwater was found only a week or two after the first Australian recovery of the species on Cronulla Beach.

A stroll along the sea-shore, therefore, even after a prolonged period of fine, calm weather, can be extremely profitable ornithologically.

Another Channel-billed Cuckoo at Armidale.—A Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ*) was picked up at Armidale, New South Wales, with a damaged leg, in October 1958, and a report of this appeared in *The Emu*, vol. 59, p. 65.

Recently (18/5/59) another individual of this species was observed at Armidale. It was flying at about 300 feet on a north-easterly course. The speed was estimated at 40 knots. The wing beat rate was about one per second. The wing motion was regular and not like the typical cuckoo flight. The feet appeared to be thrust back and hard up against the tail.—CLIVE WALLER, Government Aerodrome, Armidale, N.S.W., 19/5/59.