Thick-billed Penguins (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) at Portland, Victoria

By NOEL F. LEARMONTH, Portland, Vic.

In *The Emu*, vol. 38, p. 377, Mr. K. A. Hindwood gives full particulars of the then known appearances of Thick-billed Penguins (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) on the coast of Australia. Among these are three from Victoria—one from Lorne, February 1910 (this is probably the one referred to by Belcher in his *Birds of Geelong*); one mentioned by Stuart Dove (*Ibis*, vol. III, 10th ser. p. 86) from southern Victoria, no date; and one from Warrnambool, July 1938. Hindwood adds—"The three specimens taken in Victoria as mentioned above, are sight records only, and some doubt must arise as to their proper identification".

Since that article was written in 1939 we have something far more definite from Victorian waters—all from Portland in the far south-west. Mr. Warren Hitchcock, Ornithologist at the National Museum, Melbourne, was asked for particulars of any Crested Penguins taken in this State and held by the Museum. Here is his answer—

In reply to your queries on specimens of *pachyrhynchus* and *sclateri*, following are details of all the material in our collection.

E. pachyrhynchus:

Reg. No.		*Sex*	*Locality*	*Date*	*Donor*	*Remarks*
B104	Skull	— imm.	Portland	24.7.33	F. Wood Jones	'Picked up on beach.'
B204	Skin	♂ ad.	Portland	17.4.36	F. Wood Jones	—
B225	Skin	♂ imm.	Portland	29.7.36	D. Fleay	'Donor received specimen alive from Prof. F. Wood Jones on previous day.'

E. sclateri:

B249	Skin	?	Julia Percy Is.	1.8.91	A. Coles	—

This [last] specimen was on exhibition and its original registration number was 58131. It was relaxed to a study skin in June 1949 and re-registered under the above 'B' number. It was, in all probability, purchased from Coles (formerly a Melbourne taxidermist and natural history dealer), on the date shown, which is, therefore, *not* the date of collection. Similarly, the dates given for *pachyrhynchus* are dates of acquisition—no date of collection is shown either in the register or on the labels—but as they were probably received in the flesh, it could be fairly assumed they were collected a few days previously in each case. This certainly applies to B225—see 'Remarks'.

Now I have three more records, all from Portland in 1951. On the morning of February 16, I was asked to

inspect a penguin of unknown species on the Breakwater. On my arrival the bird was far back in a dark cool corner under concrete steps. The weather was very hot with a strong north wind, which evidently had driven the bird to the best retreat available. However, it was caught and brought out into the open where it pecked at anyone within reach and returned to its refuge if not securely held. The bird was moulting, but from notes, etc., I had no hesitation in proclaiming it *Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*. It was finally liberated and returned to its corner, though the alternative —the blue sea—was within one jump of this perch. Fishermen told me that the bird had been under the steps for four days all of which were hot.

That night the weather changed and a southerly gale swept the coast, with big seas for three days following. When I was again able to descend the steps the bird had gone.

On August 19 and 20, Portland Bay was churned up by the heaviest south-east gale since 1923. This was accompanied by nearly three inches of rain in twenty-four hours. The creek emptying into the bay sent down a swirling current of dirty water which met the sea in a proper 'boil up'. Out of this turmoil a penguin was tossed on to the beach in a very exhausted condition and taken to the Town Hall, where the staff tended and fed it. Like a mortuary official I was waiting its death for a skin as it was none other than a Thick-billed Penguin, similar (except that it was not moulting) to the bird seen in February. But after a few days it was liberated in the open sea and swam off.

However, my lust for a skin for checking purposes was gratified, as on August 21 Mr. C. Kurtze brought me a dead penguin he had just found on the beach three miles north-east of Portland. It was another storm victim and another specimen of Thick-billed Penguin. I forwarded it to Mr. Hitchcock. Here are his remarks on the bird—

> Many thanks for yours of August 21, and the specimen—awaited with some excitement—which was delivered yesterday. You were perfectly correct in your diagnosis—*E. pachyrhynchus*. It was made into a skin this morning. Here are measurements, etc., of the specimen:
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> *Sex*: Male (non-breeding).
> *Weight*: 4 lbs. 10 oz. (no fat whatever). Stomach empty.
> *Bill*: Vinaceous-brown.
> *Feet*: Upper surface of tarsus and toes, Coral Pink;
> Under surface of tarsus and toes, Black.
> (*Iris*: Colour indeterminable.)
> Measurements:
> *Exposed culmen*: 50 mm.
> *Maximum width of maxilla*: 24.5 mm.
> *Maximum depth closed bill*: 26 mm.
> *Flipper* (from axilla) : 172 mm.
> *Tail*: 75 mm.
> *Tarsus*: 30 mm.
> *Middle Toe and Claw*: 79 mm.

Portland fishermen tell me they not infrequently see penguins of this size and description when sailing off Lawrence Rocks, at the mouth of Portland Bay, so most probably *E. pachyrhynchus* is not so rare as thought on the west Victorian coast, but is only seen by landsmen when buffetted by heavy weather.

Occurrence of the Snow Petrel at Heard Island

By ALAN GILCHRIST, M.B., B.S., Melbourne

The occurrence of Snow Petrels, *Pagodroma nivea*, at Heard Island (53°6′S, 73°30′E) in August 1948, is of some interest, as a survey of relevant literature, including Falla (1937), Moseley (1879) and Reichenow (1908a and 1908b) reveals no previous record of their appearance at the island.

As Medical Officer of the 1948 A.N.A.R.E. party which included no biologist, I kept a natural history log, and had photographs taken, of biological observations made by members of the party. I had never performed such work previously, and was surprised and gratified by the large number of observations and specimens tendered by fellow members of the party. By my investigating their casual reports and keeping regular records, I found the men were stimulated to provide valuable information which otherwise would have been lost. The incoming biologists of the 1949 A.N.A.R.E. party were pleased to find available a rough picture of the biology of the island on which to plan their year's work. As the Snow Petrel has not been seen again up till the time of writing (March 1952), despite continuous occupation of the A.N.A.R.E. Station, these observations are published.

Observations

On August 2, 1948, at West Bay,* on a clear and sunny afternoon, I observed three all-white petrels swimming immediately outside the first line of breakers. They were so close inshore that they were frequently forced to flutter quickly two to three yards seawards to avoid being caught by the next wave. They were feeding along the margin of a dirty streak of backwash flowing out towards the centre of the bay. The feeding movements —bobbing of the head and rotation of the body by paddling —were rapid, agile and continuous. The wings were usually held folded, except for short periods between 'flutters' when they were held half-extended. Wilson (in Lowe and Kinnear, 1930, 142-147) has described similar behaviour.

* West Bay is the subject of a comprehensive and realistic sub-antarctic exhibit at the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne.