

## On the Specific Names of Three Petrels.

By LEVERETT MILLS LOOMIS, F.A.O.U., Academy of Sciences, San Francisco.

In the preparation of a monograph of the Tubinares, I have had occasion to review the nomenclature of the group; and it has occurred to me that the accompanying notes, relating to South-western Pacific Tubinares, might be of interest to the readers of *The Emu*.

*Procellaria solandri*, Gould, Ann. and Mag. Nat. Hist., Vol. XIII., 1844, p. 363; type in British Museum. There appears to be no valid reason for connecting this species with *Procellaria melanopus*, Gmelin,<sup>1</sup> founded on the Black-toed Petrel of Latham.<sup>2</sup> The dimensions assigned to the Black-toed Petrel (length, thirteen inches; bill an inch and a half long) are dimensions of a much smaller bird than the one Gould named *Procellaria solandri*. It should be borne in mind that Latham measured the commissure, and not the culmen, in taking the length of the bill of Petrels. This fact is revealed by the length of bill he assigned to certain Petrels whose dimensions are now well known. For example, he states that the "bill is two inches long" in the "Fulmar Petrel," and "three-quarters of an inch in length" in the "Fork-tail Petrel."

The type specimen positively determines *solandri*. It is therefore maintained that *solandri* should stand as the specific name of the large, grey-backed Gadfly Petrel, breeding on Lord Howe Island, in the South-western Pacific.

*Procellaria neglecta*, Schlegel, Mus. Pays-Bas, Vol. VI., Procell., 1863, pp. 10, 11; types in Museum of Natural History, Leyden. The specific name *neglecta* is adopted for the dichromatic Gadfly Petrel described by Dr. Schlegel from specimens obtained in the Kermadec Group, South-western Pacific Ocean. Consequently, *phillipii*, G. R. Gray,<sup>3</sup> based on the Norfolk Island Petrel of *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* (1789), is rejected. The description of the Norfolk Island Petrel (*Voyage*, p. 161) and the accompanying plate appear to cover one of the variations of the Neglected Petrel, while the account of the nesting habits appears to indicate a burrowing species, or that the Neglected Petrel was confused by the collector with the Flesh-footed Shearwater or Wedge-tailed Shearwater, the three species having been reported in recent years from the Norfolk Islands. I see no good reason for intruding Solander's Petrel into the discussion, for it is a grey-backed bird, not a brown-backed one. A thorough investigation of the present day Petrel rookeries on the Norfolk Is-

<sup>1</sup>Syst. Nat., Vol. I., pt. II., 1789, p. 562.

<sup>2</sup>Gen. Syn. Birds, Vol. III., pt. II., 1785, p. 408.

<sup>3</sup>Ibis, 1862, p. 246.

lands would probably shed further light on the question. Be this as it may, it is apparent that a questionable eighteenth century description, unsupported by specimens from the type locality, does not afford sufficient evidence to supplant a long-established specific name, supported by type specimens and a description.

*Puffinus chlororhynchus*, Lesson, *Traité d'Orn.*, 1831, p. 613; type in Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. Appended is Latham's description of his Pacific Petrel<sup>4</sup> (*Procellaria pacifica*, Gmelin<sup>5</sup>), which of late has been interpreted as a description of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater.

"Length twenty-two inches; breadth, forty inches. The bill is two inches in length, of a lead-colour, and much hooked at the tip; in the place of a tube the nostrils only appear; they are situated obliquely, of an oval shape, a little elevated, and placed an inch and a quarter from the base: the upper parts of the plumage are black, the under dusky; legs pale on the insteps, where they are marked with some black spots, and a few others on the toes and webs. Inhabits *Euopoa*, and other islands of the *Pacific Ocean*."

The dimensions given in the above description are more nearly applicable to the Flesh-footed Shearwater than to the Wedge-tailed, and the coloration ascribed to the bill applies to certain examples of both species.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, I find no mention of an island bearing the name of Euopoa, either in Captain Cook's *Voyages*, or in Sir Joseph Banks's *Journal*. In the latter, however, occurs the following entry for July 20, 1769:—"At noon to-day we came to anchor at Ulietea, in a bay called by the natives Oapoa, the entrance of which is very near a small islet called Owhattera."<sup>7</sup> Captain Cook<sup>8</sup> charted and described this bay under the name of Oopoa Harbour, in Ulietea. It is obvious that the spelling of Polynesian names by early voyagers is to be taken with some allowance.

Mr. Lionel W. Wigglesworth<sup>9</sup> has identified Euopoa as an island of the Marquesas group. But the island he apparently had in mind, Huapu (variously spelled Ouapoa, Ouapou, Roapoa, Roapoua, Roa Pua, Roua Pua, Uapoa, Upu), was not discovered until 1791.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Gen. Syn. Birds, Vol. III., pt. II., 1785, p. 416.

<sup>5</sup>Syst. Nat., Vol. I., pt. II., 1789, p. 560.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Hull, "Emu," Vol. XXI., 1922, p. 288.

<sup>7</sup>Journ. Sir Joseph Banks, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup>Voy. Round the World in 1768-1771, in Vol. II. of Hawkesworth's *Voyages*, 1773, pl., p. 258.

<sup>9</sup>Aves Polynesiae. Abh. k. Zool. u. Anth. Ethn. Mus. zu Dresden, No. 6, 1891, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Brigham, Index to Is. of Pacific, Mem. B. P. Bishop, Mus., Vol. I., No. 2, 1900, p. 100; Penny Cyc.; et al.

It is evident that the description of the Pacific Petrel is not definite enough for the identification of the Shearwater Latham had before him, and it is idle to read into the description a meaning the words do not convey. I see, therefore, no justification for discarding determined *chlororhynchus* and substituting undetermined *pacifica* as the specific name of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater. In fine, a long-established specific name should not be superseded unless the evidence against it is beyond reasonable doubt. The law of priority is accepted as a means of obtaining stability, not instability, of names.

If a stable nomenclature is to be attained in species and the higher groups, such a nomenclature must be the outcome of investigations by monographers having a profound knowledge of their special subjects. All-around name hunters have failed because the quarry has been beyond the reach of superficial knowledge.

**Spider Webs and Birds.** I was very interested in the note (*Emu*, Vol. XXIII, p. 236) and photographs by Mrs. Imlis Humphrey, of Poopoonah, Q. They brought back to my mind a similar experience which came under my notice when a child in Queensland, and living a few miles from Toowoomba. One afternoon I saw a small bird apparently caught in nothing. From the distance its wings appeared to be folded to its sides, giving it the appearance of having suddenly stopped in the air while falling. I ran along to investigate, and found the bird, a Fly-eater (*Gerygone*), from what I remember, wrapped in a spider web. I cannot say how long it had been there, but it seemed too weak to struggle free. The web was spun between two gum saplings, just off the crown of a rather sharp hill, and, to my mind, in such a position easily to trap a small bird flying quickly downhill. By the time it noticed the web it would be in it. As I watched, a large, black spider, with a greenish tinge, began to descend from a bunch of leaves in the left-hand sapling. The captive commenced to tremble or struggle. I am not sure which now. Anyhow, I know my sympathy for the bird came uppermost, and I seized a stick, smashed the web, freed the bird from the sticky stuff, when it flew away from my hands. The spider retreated to his den. Since then, I have wished my childish sympathy had waited a while to see what the spider would do. Once again I found another web in a similar position. A Leatherhead (*Tropidorhynchus*) made a sharp curve upwards to avoid being entangled in its meshes. I do not suppose that the strands would retain such a large victim; still, it is surprising the strength there is in a cobweb. I have tested the webs of this spider with my fingers, and found them very strong and sticky. I have also run straight into one without seeing it until arrested by the horrid stuff all over my face. It is most disagreeable.—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., "Lyeltya," Eaglehawk Neck (Tas.).