

recondition the wells on the Canning stock route from Wiluna to Hall's Creek. The expenses of sending a collector of specimens of natural history on this expedition were shared equally between the Western Australian and the South Australian Museums, and, as a result, each Museum benefited to the extent of about a hundred bird-skins from an ornithologically little-known region. In January, 1932, he collected in the Mogumber district.

In addition to the distant trips mentioned above, Mr. Lipfert has collected much for the Museum in the more immediate vicinity of Perth and, in 1937, published in *The Emu* "Notes on the Birds of Crawley, Perth, in the Early 'Nineties."

Occurrences of the McCormick Skua on the Coast of New Zealand

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Records of the wanderings of the South Polar Skua, *Catharacta maccormicki* (Saunders), beyond polar seas, are so rare that two recent occurrences on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand are worthy of note.

A sun-dried body with the plumage intact, now in the Canterbury Museum, was picked up on the Rangitikei beach on January 2, 1940, by Major R. A. Wilson. The bird is in adult plumage, not in moult, sex undetermined, and measures: wing, 374 mm.; tail, 153; tarsus, 60; middle toe and claw, 61; culmen 47.

The next find was reported by Mr. C. A. Fleming, who has managed to preserve the skin of a specimen picked up on the Muriwai beach on April 21, 1940. This bird likewise shows no sign of moult, but lacks the yellow neck hackles which are present on the other. Its dimensions are: wing, 392 mm.; tail, 158; tarsus, 70; middle toe, 72; culmen, 48; sex also undetermined.

The inclusion of this species in the New Zealand list has formerly depended on an identification by Buller (*Supplement, Birds of New Zealand*, vol. 1, p. 170, 1905) of a bird obtained at Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island, in 1895, but the evidence of a specimen that is still available casts some doubt on its correctness. The last of several representative collections of New Zealand birds made by Buller was purchased by the Canterbury Museum in 1923 and it contains a Skua skin bearing a label in Buller's handwriting, "*Megalestris maccormicki*, Stewart Island, 1897, male." It is without doubt the bird he recorded, for had there been more than one the fact would have been stated in the *Supplement*. The discrepancy in date may possibly be explained by the fact that most of Buller's labels bear as

date only the year in which a specimen happened to be purchased or finally incorporated in the collection. It is more likely, however, that the year 1897 is actually correct and that "the summer of 1895" is recorded by Buller inaccurately from memory, for he was with Lord Ranfurly on the steamer *Tutanekai*, which was not built till 1896, and could not have been at Stewart Island before the summer of 1896-97. These trivial details are mentioned here only to show that the specimen in the Buller collection in the Canterbury Museum is almost certainly the one recorded, and also as a reminder that Buller's records generally should be checked against specimens if possible, for his published work too often shows a lack of responsible care in identification and in the proper recording of data.

The point about the Paterson Inlet specimen is that it is not *C. maccormicki* but a fully-adult *C. lonnbergi* with a good crop of golden yellow hackles on the nape and pale streaks on the foreneck. Its dimensions, which Buller did not publish, are outside the range of *C. maccormicki*, being wing, 422 mm.; tail, 156; tarsus, 80; toe, 86; culmen, 58. I have remarked elsewhere (*B.A.N.Z. Ant. Res. Ex. Report*, series B, vol. 2, p. 240, 1937), that existing reference collections of Southern Skuas from New Zealand are composed almost entirely of immature birds in dark plumage, and that fact probably caused Buller, and apparently Sharpe, to regard the Paterson Inlet specimen as being *C. maccormicki*.

Concerning Vocal Mimicry.—Mr. N. H. E. McDonald, of Charleville, Qld., may be justified in his claim (*Emu*, vol. xxxix, p. 298) that the Pied Butcher-bird uses vocal mimicry only rarely—though in fact other writers have recorded a good deal of mimicry on the part of the species—but certain additional assertions in the same paragraph are open to doubt. For example, whence came the belief that "most mimics" become "excited and voluble"? Actually, very few display agitation when using mimicry; the customary practice is to produce the borrowed notes in a normal voice or in a whisper-song. And whence came the belief that the call of the Owlet-Nightjar is "most usually on the 'programmes' of nearly all Australian bird-mimics"? If Mr. McDonald has listened to "nearly all" of our mockers (my list at present numbers 36 species) he is remarkably fortunate; and if he has heard many of them imitating a Nightjar he is more fortunate still. Personally, in a fairly considerable experience of vocal mimics I have never heard one imitating a nocturnal species, and I know of only two records on the point—Lyrebirds imitating Boobook Owls. It would be interesting to learn from Mr. McDonald precisely which species he has heard imitating the Owlet-Nightjar.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, 1/6/40.