

## Correspondence

### IS *Procellaria gavia* FORSTER DETERMINABLE?

To the Editor.

Sir,

On page 407 of the last (April) issue of *The Emu* Dr. D. L. Serventy quotes Mr. C. A. Fleming as saying that "Freshly moulted birds have a bloom, at any rate, which fades off [living] individuals later in the season and off skins in a few months. I would not personally call the bloom *blue*." In the *Records of the Auckland Institute and Museum*, vol. 1, no. 5, July 18, 1934, R. A. Falla has an article on the "Distribution and Breeding Habits of Petrels in Northern New Zealand." On page 253, after discussing the Fluttering Petrel, he said that "the first teleoptyle plumage resembles that of the adult, but is darker than that of even a freshly-moulted adult bird, being on the upper parts a glossy *blackish brown*. Even at this stage, however, it could hardly be confused with the blue-black of *Puffinus assimilis*, as has been suggested in discussions on the taxonomy of *Puffinus gavia*." Here we have the considered opinion of a worker who has studied the plumage changes of both *Puffinus assimilis* and *Reinholdia*.

Both the foregoing authors are speaking of the New Zealand bird. Other workers quoted by Serventy are discussing the Australian bird.

As the New Zealand Fluttering Petrel is not "the blue-black of *Puffinus assimilis*" the name *gavia* cannot be applied to it. Whether or not *gavia* belongs to the *Puffinus assimilis* list is doubtful, and so, on the premises put forward, the name *Procellaria gavia* of Forster is indeterminate.

Apparently it has been overlooked that Forster, in *Magazin merk. Reise beschr.*, 1794, mentioned *Procellaria gavia* from Norfolk Island, and that is the type locality of *Puffinus assimilis* Gould, 1838!

Yours, etc.,

Wahroonga, N.S.W.

GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

May 5, 1941.

The foregoing having been referred to Dr. Serventy for comment in this issue, he wrote as follows:

Sir,

Mr. Mathews has not added anything here which is relevant to the argument. To bring together partial quotations from Falla's and Fleming's statements, ignoring the remainder of their remarks, as well as other material evidence, is, to say the least, not a very helpful way of dealing with the problem. This type of argument gets us

nowhere. What would be to the point would be a categorical rebuttal of my remarks, which, I may emphasize, are concurred in by Dr. Falla and Mr. Fleming. I can only refer Mr. Mathews back to my article.

Forster's "mention," in 1794, of *Procellaria gavia* from Norfolk Island, does not affect the issue. Presumably it was a sight record and if he had handled a true *assimilis* from there such an acute observer as he was would not have failed to notice that it was different from the bird he had described as *gavia*. In another place in this issue (page 11), Mr. Hindwood and I refer to the caution which must be used in interpreting the sight records of the early voyagers. Gould himself almost certainly erred in his identification of *Pterodroma leucoptera*, and Forster apparently never realized there were two small white-breasted shearwaters in these seas. He examined one and described it very fully, and what more natural than that he should attribute all similar shearwaters he saw, but did not procure, to that species? The two would be very difficult to distinguish in life, particularly by a transient observer with little previous data to guide him. Even in this century the Fluttering Shearwater has been persistently mistaken for *assimilis* in New South Wales.

Yours, etc.,

Sydney, May 9, 1941.

D. L. SERVENTY.

To the foregoing Mr. Mathews' reply, in conclusion, is: "I have seen Dr. Serventy's remarks and have nothing further to say except that, as the detailed account of the upper surface is the most important part of Forster's description, it should control our judgment, especially as he was such an accurate observer and describer."

## Obituary

HAMILTON STUART DOVE

A dozen years or more ago, when it was suggested that I might "give a hand with *The Emu*," Leach, the then editor, passed me a first batch of contributions to "look over." On top was a single sheet in a writing that I came to know well. "Stuart Dove," he mused, "the most inveterate writer of 'Stray Feathers.'" Later, another commented, jocularly, on that same aspect—"I always imagine Stuart Dove as sitting on a rocky cape peering across Bass Strait for the first migrant from the mainland." Indeed, such matters were his special province, and *The Emu* is full of odd notes and records of migratory visitors and their comings and goings.