

Further Notes on *Pterodroma leucoptera*

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RECORDS FROM NEW SOUTH WALES BEACHES

In our account of the Gould Petrel (*Pterodroma leucoptera*) nesting on Cabbage Tree Island (1), we referred to the virtual absence of accurate reports of that race away from its breeding area. Even records of beach-drifted birds are among the scantiest of any petrel on the Australian list. Accordingly it was rather noteworthy that two specimens from the Cabbage Tree Island colony were collected on Sydney beaches early in 1942. On February 19 one of us (Serventy) found a partly-decomposed bird at Cronulla. Two days later, February 21, another bird, also decomposed, was taken on South Narrabeen beach (by Hindwood). It was certainly a coincidence that the joint authors of a recent paper on the species should find these two birds almost at the same time. Both petrels were adults and had a few seeds of *Pisonia Brunoniana* adhering to the body plumage, indicating that they had been ashore at Cabbage Tree Island during the 1941-42 nesting season. These specimens are now in the Serventy-Whittell collection—nos. 1329 and 1330.

The only published record of a previous occurrence of a beach-taken bird is based on an observation by Tom Iredale of which the exact date is not known; the locality was Manly beach, near Sydney (2, p. 21). Since the publication of our paper Mr. P. A. Gilbert has informed us that he found a decomposed specimen of this species on January 21, 1941, at Garie beach some twenty miles south of Sydney.

THE CABBAGE TREE ISLAND COLONY IN 1918

A reference overlooked by us concerning a previous visit to the island is that by F. C. Morse, who landed there on March 23 (presumably in 1918). The note appeared in the midst of some miscellaneous observations entitled 'Nesting Notes from Moree' (3, p. 70). Neither the island nor the Gould Petrel is mentioned by name, but there is no doubt as to the identity of both. Morse wrote "Up the gullies, under fallen palm leaves, we found some young Petrels, and also some mature birds, caught in the *Pisonia* seeds." This is the latest date we have of a visit to the island during the nesting season, and the presence of young birds on March 23 would indicate that the fledgeling period extends well over two months as eggs commence to hatch about the middle of January. In our previous notes, we stated, on the evidence then available, that "young birds remain in the nest for at

least two months, which seems rather less than the usual time for nestling petrels" (1, p. 5).

THE MURIWAI OCCURRENCE

Mr. Peter Bull has kindly shown us the ms. of his paper giving an account of finding several specimens of *P. leucoptera* at Muriwai beach, near Auckland, on the west coast of New Zealand. We agree with Mr. Bull that his birds were probably derived from a nesting colony other than Cabbage Tree Island. The Muriwai birds are exceedingly close to the New South Wales race in general appearance and, of all the described populations, they undoubtedly come nearest to the Cabbage Tree Island stock. Whether or not either of the birds mentioned by Dr. R. C. Murphy (4, p. 8) is akin to the Muriwai birds must remain a matter of speculation. The fact that the specimen collected by Beck near the Kermadecs had the feet 'whitish or flesh' would suggest that this example, at least, belonged to still another nesting group. In view of the findings of R. A. Falla (5, and unpublished*) and C. A. Fleming (6) on the heterogeneity of the *Pterodroma cookii* assemblage, we must be wary of drawing conclusions as to the affinities of the various *leucoptera* forms until the breeding populations have been thoroughly described and the range of variation recorded.

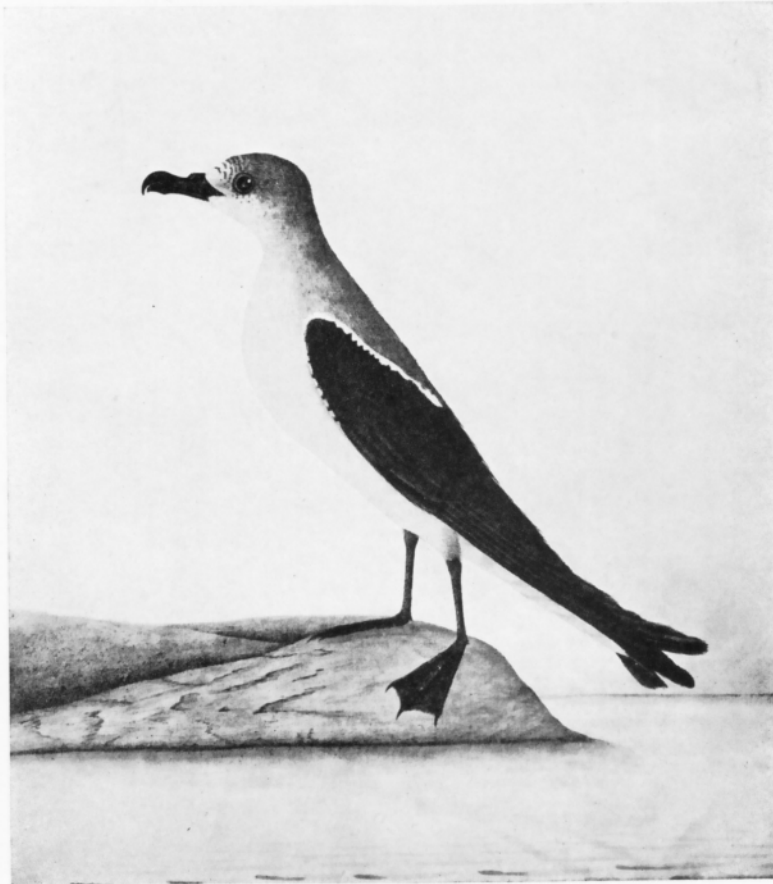
AN EARLY RECORD FROM NORFOLK ISLAND

It is desirable in these notes to consider the record of a petrel from Norfolk Island of a type similar to *Pterodroma leucoptera*. Among a collection of early bird paintings, circa 1792 (7, p. 100), in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, contemporary with the 'Watling' and 'Lambert' series, is a watercolour drawing of a petrel which has been referred to *leucoptera*, and which has also been named as a separate species. On the painting is written 'Bird of Norfolk Island (Natural size).'

Apart from the painting no such bird has been recorded from the island, but there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the drawing, which is one of several in the collection (including the now extinct Norfolk Island Pigeon) of birds from that locality. About ten years ago one of us (Hindwood) sent a photographic copy, together with a description, of the petrel drawing, to Gregory M. Mathews, who reproduced the photograph and published the data in 1936 (8). Mathews considered that the figure was "undoubtedly a *Pterodroma* of the *Cookilaria* group."

Under *Cookilaria leucoptera*, Norfolk Island *Cookilaria*, he describes it as follows:—

* See *The Emu*, vol. XLII, 1942, p. 111.



'Sydney' Painting no. 96, the basis of *Cookilaria hindwoodi*
Whitley, 1938.

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Differs from *leucoptera* Gould, in being dark brown above instead of grey; and the wing is shorter. When the wing is folded there is a white edge round it from where the wing joins the body, as far as the bastard wing; the under surface of the wing is presumably white like the entire under surface of the body from the chin to the long under tail coverts; the lower forehead is white, then as far as the eyes the feathers are scalloped; below the eye a few dark spots only. Total length 300 mm.; culmen 25; wing 200; tarsus 30; the middle toe and claw longer than the tarsus.

Two years later, in 1938, Gilbert P. Whitley proposed the name *Cookilaria hindwoodi* (9, p. 297) for the bird represented in the drawing. Its relationship to the group of small petrels of the subgenus *Cookilaria*, to which *leucoptera* and *cookii* belong, is uncertain. If the coloration is correct, *hindwoodi* differs from all known species of *Cookilaria* in the brown colour of the upper parts. There is nothing in the painting to suggest that it had any close affinity to *leucoptera*, and for the time being it must remain *incertae sedis*.

Norfolk Island has been ornithologically searched on several occasions, but no trace of such a bird has come under notice. The indefatigable Roy Bell, who now resides on the island, collected there for Mathews some thirty years ago and Dr. P. H. Metcalfe, during a residence of about ten years, circa 1880-1890, did not record the species, though he was ever on the alert for 'new' birds. It is not difficult to imagine that the species, assuming it really existed, might have been quickly exterminated, especially if the colony were as vulnerable as the present one of *P. leucoptera* at Cabbage Tree Island. We have records of the devastating efficiency with which the convict settlement at Norfolk Island, and its military guard, 'liquidated' the Bird of Providence (*Pterodroma melanopus*) within a few years of the occupation of the island in 1788 (10).

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