

An Eastern Australian Specimen of the Sooty Albatross

By J. D. GIBSON and A. R. SEFTON, Thirroul, N.S.W.

The remains of a Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria fusca*) found on Corrimall Beach, south of Sydney on August 1, 1959, have been preserved as a study skin (No. 1-253 Gibson/Sefton Collection). Although this species is well known from sight records in southern Australian seas, there appears to be no previous record of a specimen from the eastern coastline of the continent or its adjacent waters.

A brief description of the specimen is as follows. Plumage sooty brown above, slightly paler on the mantle. Underparts uniform dark slate-grey. Face blackish with white or buff feathering on the crown and sides of the neck. The plumage was, in general, very worn with some new secondaries and rectrices still in sheath. Bill black with a violet to purple stripe (sulcus) on each side of the lower mandible. Interior surface of tarsi creamy-white, outer surface pale blue-grey. Toes and webs pale flesh with horn-coloured nails. Stomach empty. Sex male. Collected by A. R. Sefton. Dimensions in millimetres are: culmen 111, wing 523, tail 214+ (centre feathers damaged), tarsus 82, middle toe and claw 124.

Sea birds in general wander farthest in their immature years, and in the present specimen immaturity is indicated by the pale feathering about the head and the violet/purple mandibular sulcus which is yellow or orange in adult birds. Five Sooty Albatrosses, two of which were distinctly immature, were observed (by J.D.G.) when crossing the Great Australian Bight during April 1957.

Two relatively recent observations from the New South Wales coast are to be found in the literature. The first was reported inside Sydney Harbour on December 12, 1944 (Hindwood, K. A., and McGill, A. R., *The Birds of Sydney*, 1958, p. 27) and the other refers to a bird seen by one of the present writers (A.R.S.) off Sandon Point, Bulli, on September 26, 1954 (*The Emu*, vol. 55, p. 47).

The Sooty Albatross breeds on Tristan da Cunha and Gough Islands in the South Atlantic, and on St. Paul and Amsterdam Islands in the western sector of the Indian Ocean (Alexander, W. B., *Birds of the Ocean*, 1954, p. 14). The pelagic range of the species is generally confined to the more temperate southern Atlantic and Indian Oceans eastward to Australia, while its congener, the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (*P. palpebrata*), has a preference for colder sub-Antarctic seas, and is circumpolar in distribution. The two species do mingle, however, in certain sections of their range but *fusca*, being an entirely dusky bird, is then distinguishable from *palpebrata*, which has a light ashy-grey back and underparts. The latter also differs in having a pale blue sulcus.