

N.Z. BIRD NOTES

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INTRODUCTION.

The great amount of space taken up by the short notes prevented the inclusion of any other items in the last number. The Society gratefully acknowledges the following donations:—Messrs. K. H. Hindwood and B. Sladden, £1; Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Fleming, Mr. E. W. Hursthouse and "Bird Lover," 10s; Dr. K. A. Wodzicki, 5s; Mr. J. R. Eyles, 2s 6d; "Tui," 1s 6d. Please remember that subscriptions are due in July, a considerable number for this year have not yet been received, and please contribute to the publication fund if possible. The Society would be grateful also for any books, notes, photographs, etc., dealing with ornithology. A number of members are already availing themselves of the opportunity of borrowing the various publications in the possession of the Society, and we should like to extend the scope of this.

The numbers of members is now about 160, and it is hoped that all will endeavour to enlist additional ones at every opportunity. We regret very much to record the deaths of two members—Mr. W. J. Ferguson, of Invercargill, and Mr. C. V. Thomson, of Stewart Island.

We are indebted to the South Australian Ornithological Association, who have agreed to exchange publications with us, and we now possess "The South Australian Ornithologist," Vol. XVI, Parts 1-8. We are also indebted to Messrs. P. C. Bull and C. A. Fleming for donating separates of their recent papers, and it is very much to be hoped that all who publish, or have published, papers on New Zealand birds, will present copies to the Society, so that we may have as complete a series as possible for reference. Four papers have also been very kindly donated by the British Trust for Ornithology.

Attention is again directed to the Special Investigations, and especially at this season to that of clutch sizes. Please make a special

effort to find out the number and fate of as many eggs as possible belonging to any species.

Will all who have any notes on the White Eye, and especially those who have been ringing any of this species, please communicate with Professor Marples, as it is hoped to bring out shortly a report on this bird.

REVIEWS.

The Emu. Vol. XVII, Part IV. This contains a valuable paper by C. A. Fleming on the White-eye, but this will be reviewed in a later number.

The Emu. Vol. XVIII, Part I. There are three N.Z. papers: "The Kuaka or Diving Petrel, *Pelecanoides urinatrix*," by L. E. Richdale, pp. 24-48. This is a very close and detailed study of the life history of the bird, carried out during an aggregate of 21 weeks of observations spread over several years. Extensive use was made of ringing, weighing and measuring, and it is very gratifying to see measurements, weights, etc., based upon large numbers of observations. Far too much of our information is based upon small numbers. It is impossible to summarise the paper in this space but an important feature is a table of data for estimating the ages of chicks, which should be in the notebook of all who visit small islands. In future, observers who encounter chicks of this species will be able to make reasonably close estimates of their ages instead of making such vague and almost useless records as the only too common "recently hatched" or "well grown chick." In this way relative times of hatching may be arrived at, and on the present data there seems to be a considerable discrepancy between the various breeding grounds. The paper is illustrated with photographs of chicks at different ages.

"Observations on the Distribution of the Wrybill in the North Island, N.Z.," by R. B. Sibson, pp. 49-62. This is an important paper on the winter distribution and behaviour of one of our most interesting species. It breeds on the river beds of Canterbury and winters in the Firth of Thames, North Auckland region. Graphs are given of the numbers observed at different times, and the paper is an excellent example of what can be accomplished by the systematic observation of bird flocks. Behaviour, plumage, and call notes are also dealt with. It is to be hoped that someone will follow with an account of the bird in the South Island, and that members will be encouraged to make systematic studies themselves.

"A Mechanism for Recording Automatically the Nesting Habits of Birds," by B. J. Marples and L. Gurr, pp. 67-71. This paper describes a simple home-made device which recorded on a smoked drum every time a bird entered or left its nest. The records of laying, incubating and feeding obtained for the blackbird, thrush and sparrow are discussed, also the change in weight of blackbird's eggs and young during the period in the nest. Such automatic recording methods could be usefully adapted for many ornithological purposes.

"Whero, Island of Sea Birds," by L. E. Richdale; 16 pages, 7 photos. (Issued by the author, 23 Skibo Street, Dunedin. Price, 2/-.) Two pamphlets by Mr. Richdale have already been reviewed in these pages, and with the third the author states that they are to form the first parts of a volume on wild life in New Zealand to be completed by subsequent publications. Such popularly written but accurate accounts of different birds will form a valuable addition to our bird books, and as they are illustrated with such excellent photographs the full set when bound should form a handsome volume. The present booklet gives a short account of the island, which is 50 yards across and has 17 species of plants and 23 of birds, and of the life on it of the observer. Brief accounts of the life histories of four of the petrels are also given.

B. J. M.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE MAGPIE INVESTIGATION.

In reply to the questionnaire in N.Z. Bird Notes, 15 replies have been received from members. Some exceedingly valuable information has thus been obtained, but the coverage is not sufficiently great to enable a satisfactory report to be produced. Please send in your notes even though it is just a statement that the birds occur or do not occur in your district.

In an attempt to map distribution more definitely than can be done from present information, 1600 students in the various teachers' training colleges have been approached and asked to answer any or all of the questions in the questionnaire.

L. W. McCASKILL,
Training College, Christchurch.

WINTER FEEDING OF BIRDS.

This subject, I venture to suggest, may reveal certain interesting facts worth while recording if what I recorded this last winter is any guide and can be confirmed by other observers.

Not having the Little Blue Penguin as usual to devote attention to, I diverted attention to observing what foods the birds visiting my garden would take during the winter months, and obtained what appear to me to be surprising results.

Below is a table of the food distributed and of the birds that took it:—

Food.	Taken by.
1. Ordinary mixed bird seed	Hedge Sparrow, House Sparrow, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Yellow Hammer.
2. Whole barley - - -	House Sparrow for certain, but not certain which others.
3. Polished rice - - -	House Sparrow, Blackbird. Probably others. Surely something unusual for the Blackbird.
4. Unpolished rice - -	Same as above.
5. Crushed polished rice	House Sparrow, Hedge Sparrow, Finches. Did not notice if Blackbirds took it.

6. Sago - - - House Sparrow, Hedge Sparrow, Finches.
7. White sugar - - - House Sparrow, Silvereyes.
8. Brown sugar - - - Same as above.
9. Bread crumbs - - - All birds, including Hedge Sparrow, though this latter bird did not take very much.
10. Small white millet seed - Readily taken by Blackbirds.

The matter of greatest interest, I venture to think, centres around the Hedge Sparrow, which, according to Oliver, is entirely an insect eater. The records confirm the opinion I have had for some time that the Hedge Sparrows main food is seeds, though it possibly feeds on insects during the breeding season, and though I watched carefully this breeding season I was unable to verify this. May be that it feeds on insects during the summer because of the absence of quantities of seed, in a like manner that the Tui feeds on insects during the winter. You will notice that this bird will eat a variety of food during the winter.

It was amusing to watch the Silvereyes settle among the other birds when only grain was put out, then to examine what the other birds were feeding on, look puzzled, and fly away. When sugar and bread crumbs were on the board they soon found out and made a good meal:

The first birds to leave were the House Sparrow and Blackbird, then the Finches, and lastly the Hedge Sparrow.

All these observations were taken from indoors, and when I was having a cup of tea about 4 p.m., thus the birds could be watched without being disturbed by me..

I am not at all certain if this subject is of any special interest from an ornithological point of view, yet as a study of the winter feeding habits of birds it may be a pleasant diversion from the more serious aspects of ornithology, and I should be interested to know if this has been previously attempted.

—E. W. Hursthouse.

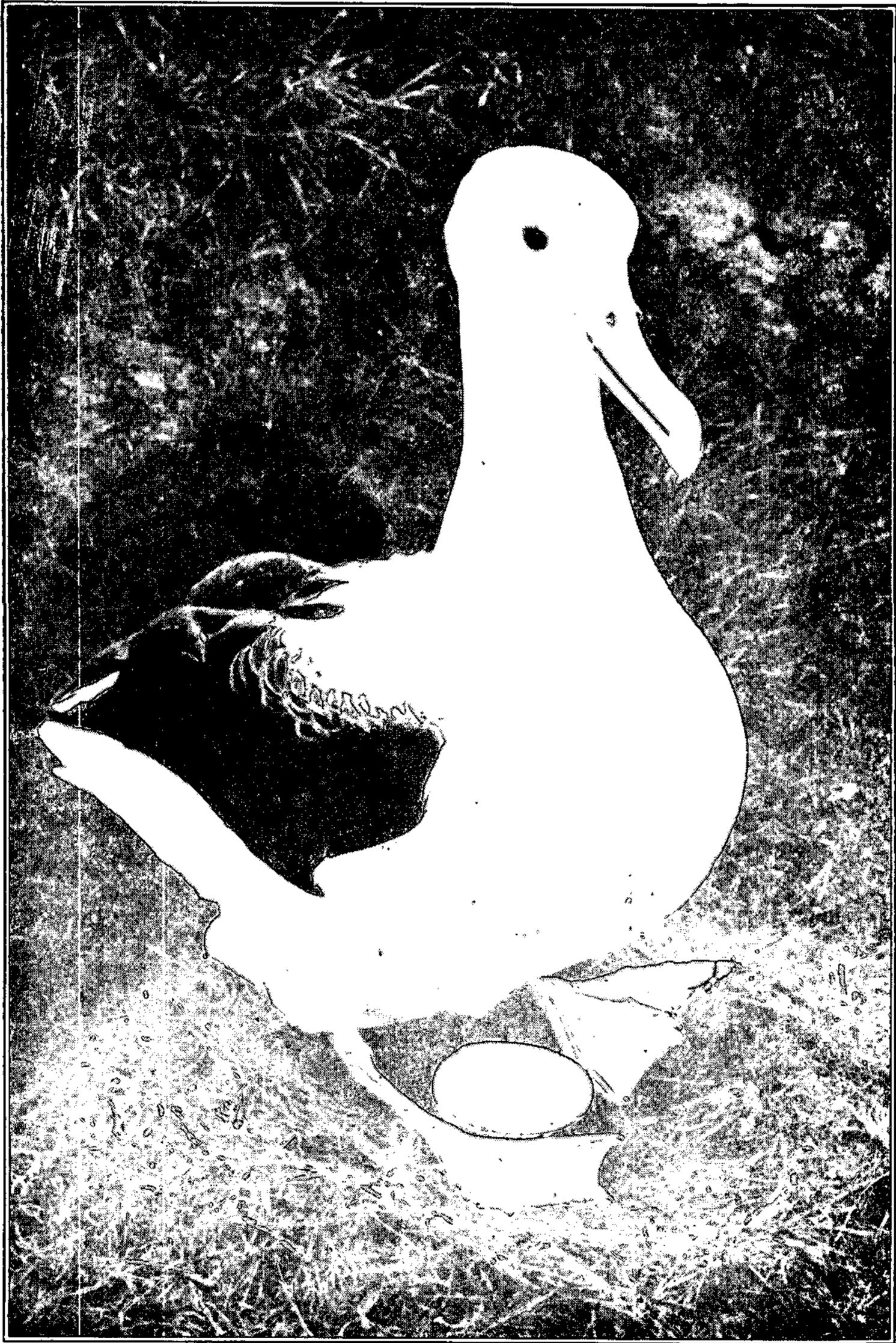
THE ROYAL ALBATROSS.

Diomedea Epomophora Sandfordi.

By L. E. RICHDALE.

Since November, 1936, my study of the sub-species of the Royal Albatross, breeding at Taiaroa Head, has proceeded steadily. The other sub-species, as far as is known, breeds only on the Campbell and Auckland Islands. Both forms, which are readily distinguishable from each other on the wing, may be seen off Taiaroa Head, although I have never known the latter to settle on shore. As far as I can ascertain, from 1919 to 1935 a pair of the smaller sub-species nested each year at Taiaroa Head, but on each occasion some mishap overtook the egg. It was not till definite action was taken at the end of 1937 that the birds received some protection and quickly increased in numbers to the extent of six breeding pairs.

Vandalism and misfortune still continued to take their toll till the 1941-42 season, when it was possible to give the birds absolute protection. That season five pairs each laid an egg, each egg duly hatched,



MALE ALBATROSS WITH EGG.

and each chick succeeded in completing its allotted span ashore. This is a striking testimony of what can be achieved if a sound policy in bird protection is followed.

An account of my observations on these huge petrels appears in *The Emu*, April, 1939, and January and April, 1942. The object of this short review is to place on record a few observations made in 1941-1942 and to keep the members of the O.S.N.Z. informed of breeding results.

Strangely enough, the chick which was hatched first (January 26) was the last to leave (September 30), remaining 247 days ashore. It was this chick which received so much attention, being familiarly referred to as "Jacky," but unfortunately I was forced to point out that it was probably a "lady."

For two weeks prior to his departure "Jacky" frequently had every one on the *qui vive* in the expectation that he was about to fly. The cause of these false alarms was his habit of engaging in little short jumps and practice flights. On September 29, the chick made an exceptionally long flight of 20 yards, reaching a height of six feet from where he crashed on his beak on a gravel road. Soon regaining an upright posture, apparently unhurt, he expressed his feelings by continued vocal efforts to such a degree that the onlookers declared he was "swearing," but I should say the real cause was excitement. I well remember the excited calling of a Skua chick when it made its first little flight of six feet from the ground.

During the final two days "Jacky" had frequently visited the cliff edge, standing there for a considerable time. At this stage it is the custom for chicks to wander about all over the nesting areas, and in these peregrinations may be found several hundred yards from the old nest. While on the cliff edge "Jacky" would lean forward with wings outstretched but always pulled back at the last minute. At 2.30 p.m. on September 30, with a very light easterly blowing, and after one of those series of balancing feats lasting about an hour on the cliff edge, he suddenly leaned forward, opened his wings and soared into the air. At first he dropped considerably and eventually landed out in the sea some 1500 yards away, as measured by a range finder. The height of the take-off would not be more than 100 feet. The observer did not state whether the chick took a short run before leaving or if he flapped his wings during the 1500-yard flight. He must, however, have performed both these operations, especially as there was so little wind at the time. The chick remained on the water washing and exercising his wings at intervals till 6.30 p.m., when he rose off the water to what looked like 30 feet. He quickly lost height, but when nearly on the water, he flapped his wings vigorously, gained more height, and eventually went out of sight heading north-east.

During those four hours the bird was under constant observation through a telescope. I had always considered, judging by the impression gained from previous chicks, that a wind of at least force 3, Beaufort scale, was necessary before the chicks could take off. In this respect "Jacky" has upset my ideas.

The proximity of the last meal ashore to the departure of the chick has always been an interesting topic. Unfortunately, I have never been able to witness that last meal. From a reliable source I have the information that "Jacky" was fed two days before he flew, while another of the five chicks in 1941-42 was seen to be fed at least at 11 a.m. on the day before it left and possibly the day it left, for I was not quite sure within a few hours of the exact departure time of the chick. When the breeding area was visited at 8 a.m. on the day after feeding, the chick was found to have flown, thus departing within the 21 hours after receiving food.

As expected, the 1942-43 season produced only one egg, which duly hatched. Unfortunately, when three months old the chick fell a victim to a ferret which had been taken into the enclosure.

I wish to thank the Council of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union for the use of the accompanying photograph, which has appeared in *The Emu*. At the same time, I should like to draw the attention of members to the work of the Union and to its excellent journal, and to urge all who are seriously interested in birds to become a member of it. Information can be obtained from our secretary.

THE INVASION OF NEW ZEALAND BY SPINE-TAILED SWIFTS IN THE SUMMER OF 1942-43.

By L. W. McCASKILL.

The Spine-tailed Swift, *Hirundapus caudacutus*, Latham, is found in summer in the east coast districts of Australia and in Tasmania. It breeds in June in Japan, Mongolia, Siberia and the Himalayas. Previous records in New Zealand are:

1. Manaia, in Taranaki, March, 1888.—"New Zealand Birds." Oliver.
2. A bird shot at Tokomaru in November, 1930. Mr. R. H. D. Stidolph reports that he has seen the skin.
3. A male bird in the Auckland Museum. Collected by Mr. N. A. Clifton, jun., at Mokau on November 22, 1935.

Following on reports of these swifts having been seen in Westland in December, 1942, an appeal for information was inserted in "N.Z. Bird Notes," vol. I, no. 1. The notes sent in by members and others are summarised below:

1. November 29, 1942.—One adult male was found dead in a tree at Hokitika. (The specimen is now mounted in the Canterbury Museum.)
2. November 30.—Mr. Turbott, of Auckland Museum, was sent a live bird picked up on this date by Mr. R. D. Meredith at a point 27 miles south of Te Awamutu. It was flying at high speed eastwards when it collided with an overhead wire and was picked up stunned. It was placed in an aviary in the Auckland Zoo, but was dead next morning. It was a male in first winter plumage.
3. December 1.—Mr. Turbott received another bird which was found dead by Mr. Adams at Milford. Its gizzard was half filled with insect remains and chitinous fragments, and its plumage, condition

and testes were almost exactly the same as the previous specimen. Length of testes 3.5 mm.

4. December 2.—Harry Holcroft, of Boddytown, near Greymouth, recorded: "For the last two days the sky has been filled from 7 a.m. with hundreds of peculiar birds. They . . . appear to be dark brown in colour with a lighter patch across the small of the back. They have a small square tail, inclined to fan slightly, a round, somewhat thick body, wings long compared with the body and curved like those of swallows. Their flight was strong and swift. They would swoop from the clouds with rapid beating of the wings, then skim over the paddocks in a glide and up into the clouds again."
5. December 5.—Mr. E. L. Kehoe, of Greymouth, recorded: "Just before dusk a flock of 60 to 70 birds, or even more, appeared high overhead and gave a performance of aerobatics, swooping, diving, banking, plain sailing and circling, all the while in compact formation."
6. Early December.—One dead bird was shown to the teacher at Waitara, Taranaki.
7. In December, Mr. D. H. Hine, of Inglewood, Taranaki, found a dead bird and sent tail feathers to the Canterbury Museum.
8. December 10.—Mr. R. H. Traill, during a very hard westerly blow, saw about a dozen birds at the north end of Horse Shoe Bay, Stewart Island. "They would hover for a second or two and then sweep in a curve for about 150 yards and then hover again."
9. December 14.—A dead bird was picked up at Ma Waro, near Cave, South Canterbury.
10. December 16.—At Ferguson's, South Westland, Gordon Ferguson saw a flock of 10 birds flying high. One settled on a white pine tree.
11. December 16.—Mr. T. V. Grimley saw one bird at Spreydon, Christchurch, at 7 p.m., "hovering at a height of 200 ft. and diving after insects."
12. December 16.—Mr. E. F. Stead saw two birds at Riccarton, Christchurch.
13. December 17.—Reported seen at Waimate, South Canterbury.
14. December 18.—One bird seen at Doyleston, near Lake Ellesmere, "in weak condition, unable to fly."
15. December 22.—Mr. J. Weir saw four to six birds flying on the western shore of Lake Taupo, not far from Tokaanu. He heard a report of similar birds having been seen there in 1941.
16. January 17, 1943.—Mrs. F. W. Luxford saw one bird on her lawn at Whitiara, Hamilton. It was exhausted but uninjured and later flew away.
17. January 19.—Miss Lorna McCallum, at St. Martins, Christchurch, saw 15 to 25 birds "hanging close packed on overhanging boughs of trees. They would detach themselves to fly up and dive after insects. When they turned to dive their tails appeared to fork."

Their appearance agreed generally with the mounted specimen in the Canterbury Museum."

18. January 22.—One seen at Ferguson's, South Westland.
19. February 24.—Mr. W. Knight saw a flock of 15 birds at Pararamu. Some birds were seen at intervals up to March 13. "Over the bowling green they flew with long sweeps as if searching for food. They alighted on the green, but did not appear to gather food there. On March 6, pairs were noted mating. One rested on the ground, evidently the female, the male alighting on the female and fluttering with outstretched wings much as a sparrow does. At no time did the birds make any sound."
20. February 28.—Mrs. W. J. Rutherford, Stanmore Bay, Whangaparoa Peninsula, Auckland, saw two birds flying about, and later watched them closely as they fed on insects and spiders on a window.
21. No date.—Mr. C. M. Comber saw two birds just west of Mt. Egmont, on the ranges.

No doubt stragglers of this species have reached New Zealand in greater numbers than the single specimen taken before 1930 would suggest, but clearly the large numbers seen in the summer of 1942-43 were exceptional. Sometimes the appearance of some unusual bird is associated with a storm, as in the case of tropical sea birds which have been carried far up the North African continent by cyclones. The Director of the Meteorological Services, Wellington, very kindly supplied a summary of the situation at the end of November over the Tasman, and states that nothing of exceptional significance occurred. Furthermore the situation over Northern Australia, Queensland and New Guinea was unaffected by even minor disturbances, so we are unable to suggest any reason for the unusual behaviour of the birds. It has been suggested that perhaps the birds were diverted from their course while passing through the Pacific war zone, but this seems unlikely, as according to most accounts, birds are very little affected by gunfire.

To summarise the above reports very briefly. The swifts appeared at the end of November, 1942, in considerable numbers in Westland, and at the same time near Auckland in small numbers. They were seen during the summer in western districts from Stewart Island to North Auckland, and also extended into Canterbury. The latest records are in March, and in the North Island, suggesting the return migration, and mating was noticed on March 6.

CORRECTION.

Members are requested to make two corrections in their copy of N.Z. Bird Notes, No. 2. By an unfortunate oversight the pages were numbered 1 to 8 instead of 9 to 16. It is intended to number the pages consecutively throughout the whole volume, and if possible to issue an index at the end. In the table of contents, "Winter Feeding of Birds," by E. W. Hursthouse appears, but owing to considerations of space had to be withdrawn. It appears in the present number.