

SHORT NOTES

The presence of Pycroft's Petrel (*Pterodroma pycrofti*) and other petrels on Mauitaha Island, New Zealand

Mauitaha or the West Chicken (35°54' S 174°42' E) is the fifth largest (22 ha, maximum height 125 m above sea level) island in the Hen and Chickens group. It has been extensively modified by fire and introduced kiore (*Rattus exulans*) are present (McCallum *et al.* 1984). We spent the day ashore (09:00 - 18:00 hrs) on 9 December 1994 to survey petrels, primarily to determine whether or not Pycroft's Petrel (*Pterodroma pycrofti*), a threatened species (Collar *et al.* 1994), was present. We searched in detail the main plateau and ridge along the top of the island and the higher slopes of the northern face. Only one previous detailed survey of the petrels on the island had been carried out - on 2 January 1982 (McCallum *et al.* 1984).

Burrow densities were so low that we had time to examine nearly every burrow seen. The majority of burrows were empty, not fully formed or collapsed. We found evidence of seven petrel species.

Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*). Four adults were found in burrows, but only one was confirmed as being on an egg: two were on the exposed northern face in burrows under flax (*Phormium tenax*) and two were on the plateau edge - one amongst flax and one under kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*).

Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*). Three adults on eggs were found, two on the northern face under kanuka and one amongst flax at the western end of the island. One of these burrows also contained a poorly developed (all downy and light-weight) Grey-faced Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera gouldi*) chick. Its poor state was probably due to interference from the nesting shearwater pair.

Fluttering Shearwater (*Puffinus gavia*). One large downy chick and one small downy chick (which had been dead about two weeks) were found in burrows amongst flax on the northern face. A few other empty burrows on the northern face had feathers probably of this species.

North Island Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis haurakiensis*). No live birds were found, but the remains (piles of feathers) of two birds were found on the plateau and a few burrows on the plateau had feathers probably of this species.

Common Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix urinatrix*). One chewed sternum was found at the western end of the plateau. A few small empty burrows amongst rocks on the northern face had feathers that may have been from this species.

Pycroft's Petrel. Two adults were found in burrows when they responded to 'war-whoops' (Tennyson & Taylor 1990) but only one of these was incubating an egg. We also found a carcass that had been recently preyed on or scavenged and several feathers from another bird. These records were all under forest and scattered: western end, northern face and central plateau.

Grey-faced Petrel. Sixteen live chicks were found ranging in development from fully downy to nearly down-free. A chick which had been dead about three weeks and an old egg were also found. Nests were on the plateau or high on the northern face, mostly under forest.

Mauitaha has a high diversity of petrels but population sizes are small (probably no more than a few hundred breeding pairs of all petrel species combined nest on the island). Small petrel population sizes are likely to be human-induced as there is much unburrowed habitat. The areas most poorly searched by us were the southern slopes and the thick vegetation on the northern slopes where species such as Fluttering Shearwaters and Common Diving Petrels may be in greater numbers than our sampling suggested. It was the end of the breeding season for Little Shearwaters (pers obs. on nearby Lady Alice Island, 1994) and Common Diving Petrels (Thoresen 1969), so it was less likely that these species would have been ashore.

All the petrel species we found have been previously recorded from the Hen and Chicken Islands group by McCallum *et al.* (1984), who reported Flesh-footed and Sooty Shearwaters and Grey-faced Petrels as common on Mauitaha and found burrows they thought belonged to Common Diving Petrels. They indicated that Flesh-footed Shearwaters were the most common petrel present which contrasts with our findings suggesting that Grey-faced Petrels are far more common. It may be that many Flesh-footed Shearwaters had not laid at the time of our visit and that many Grey-faced Petrel chicks had fledged by the time of McCallum *et al.*'s (1984) observations.

Our observations indicate that a few Diving Petrels attempt to breed on Mauitaha. Pycroft's Petrel and Fluttering Shearwater breeding and presumed breeding of Little Shearwater are new records for the island, although Sir Charles Fleming suspected that Fluttering Shearwaters bred here (Skegg 1964). We did not find penguins in burrows as McCallum *et al.* (1984) did, but we did find one male tuatara (*Sphenodon punctatus*) with a snout-vent length of 208 mm in a burrow at the western end of the plateau, which is a new record for the island (Cree & Butler 1993).

As the island recovers from modification the larger petrels should increase in numbers, but the presence of kiore will probably prevent the numbers of smaller seabirds from recovering.

Other bird species noted during this trip were as recorded by McCallum *et al.* (1984), with the addition of North Island Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis*), Shining Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*) and Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*).

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Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) in New Caledonia

On 22 September 1993 BJB saw a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) on an overhead wire on Route de l'Anse Vata, in a residential area of Nouméa, New Caledonia. The presence of these birds in New Caledonia is not noted in the recent literature (e.g. Hannécart & Létocart 1980, 1983), so BJB mentioned the sighting to GRH of Nouméa. Enquiries by GRH revealed that SS had seen a Red-vented Bulbul in the Faubourg Blanchot area of Nouméa in 1983, and ascertained that an unknown number were released in Nouméa just before 1983. They had been illegally imported and apparently released by their owner to avoid prosecution.

A newspaper article (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 2 October 1987) reported small colonies of bulbuls in Nouméa at Nouville, the cathedral, and around Ouen Toro. There are unconfirmed reports of the birds at Païta and Bourail on the west coast northwest of Nouméa. One day in early December 1994, SS counted a total of 27 bulbuls at several sites in Nouméa. Some birds may have been counted more than once but clearly the birds are establishing. A nest has been recorded at the ORSTOM site at Anse Vata Bay. SS saw a parent feeding two fledglings in the Val Plaisance area in 1993, and a juvenile near the Place des Cocotiers in October 1994.

SS has seen the bulbuls pecking at lychee fruits and mangoes. A large increase in the number of bulbuls could cause substantial damage to fruit and flowers, especially those of agricultural crops. Red-vented Bulbuls might