

SHORT NOTE

Buller's Shearwaters foraging around fishing vessels

Up to three Buller's Shearwaters (*Puffinus bulleri*) were seen by PAL off Kaikoura (42°38' S, 173°40' E) in April-May 1990 and January 1991; also Amanda Freeman (pers. comm.) saw c. 100 in January and February 1991 on the Murnoo Bank and Chatham Rise (42°40' S, 174°30' E to 43°57' S, 178°40' E). At both locations Buller's Shearwaters congregated around fishing boats and surface fed on offal.

Off Kaikoura the shearwaters alighted near congregations of other Procellariiformes and picked up offal less than 1 cm long from the surface. Occasionally they tore off large pieces of fish viscera by flapping their wings downwards to generate a force to tear against. When displaced from a large piece of offal they held their wings out, apparently as a display. They were displaced mostly by Cape Pigeons (*Daption capense*), Flesh-footed Shearwaters (*Puffinus carneipes*) and Sooty Shearwaters (*P. griseus*), mainly to exclude the Buller's Shearwaters from larger pieces of offal. Buller's Shearwaters tended to fly more than the other species, possibly because of being displaced from food. They also swam with their heads submerged but, unlike the other two shearwater species, did not dive.

Buller's Shearwaters typically feed on live prey such as small pelagic fish, cephalopods and euphausiids in addition to scavenging (Jenkins 1974, Marchant & Higgins 1990). Our records are the first published of Buller's Shearwater feeding on offal around fishing vessels in New Zealand waters, although they have been recorded congregating around boats off southeastern Australia (Holmes 1975). The feeding behaviour of scavenging Buller's Shearwaters resembles their behaviour in taking natural prey (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Our observations could signify a developing use of a new food source in relation to the species' increasing numbers and distribution (Jenkins 1988).

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