LEACH'S STORM PETREL Oceanodroma leucorhoa

RARE straggler
20 cm, 45 g. All blackish brown except head darker; clear diagonal grey-brown bar on upperwing from bend of wing to body; winter plumage with a dark central line; forerady. Habitat: Bronds N Pacific and N Atlantic: Migrates to tropics, but a few reach NZ waters.

[Sp 66]

NORTH’S STORM PETREL

GREY-BACKED STORM PETREL

WHITE-FACED STORM PETREL

BLACK-BELLED STORM PETREL

WILSON’S STORM PETREL

OCEANIDAE

STORM PETRELS

The Oceanidae are very small seabirds, ranging from Antarctic waters to the tropics. There are 21 species, of which 3 breed in the New Zealand region, and 1 is a vagrant.

The storm petrels are small, delicate birds with a weak black bill. They have prominent nostrils encased in a single, often upturned tube at the base of the bill. They have 11 primaries, but the 10th (outermost) in minute. The 10th primary is shorter than the 9th, giving the wing a rounded tip. The legs and toes are webbed and used to skip or paddle along the sea surface as the birds look for zooplankton.

The biology of storm petrels and the threats to them are like those of the Procellariidae (see page 184). The main differences are that females are larger than males, they lay the heaviest egg relative to female weight of any birds (typically in the range of 25-29% of female weight for the smaller species), and the egg is regularly unaughtened for one or more days at a time during incubation, which makes the total incubation period highly variable.


66. LEACH’S STORM PETREL

Size: 20 cm, 45 g

Geographical variation: Four subspecies - leucorhoa breeds widely in the North Atlantic and North Pacific, and struggles to New Zealand; three others (hastul, chrysosphe and xcanoroma) breed on the Pacific coast of North America.

Distribution: Breed on small islands in the North Atlantic and North Pacific, mainly between 42 and 68°N, except along the Pacific coast of North America down to northern Mexico. They migrate south to tropical and subtropical waters after breeding, and stay from September to March, with some non-breeders remaining all year. A few have straggled to New Zealand: Muzimbi Beach (August 1922); Matamata (April 1978); Dangerville Beach (August 1978); Rabbit Island, Otago Peninsula (August 1979); Hokianga Harbour (July 1981); Moeraki (May 1982); Cape Kidnappers (March 1983), and Catlins (August 1985). Oceanidae webbed toes are long and are used to skip or paddle along the sea surface as the birds look for zooplankton.

The behaviour of storm petrels and the threats to them are like those of the Procellariidae (see page 184). The main differences are that females are larger than males, they lay the heaviest egg relative to female weight of any birds (typically in the range of 25-29% of female weight for the smaller species), and the egg is regularly unaughtened for one or more days at a time during incubation, which makes the total incubation period highly variable.

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Oceanodroma leucorhoa

Plate 17

Chathams (two prospecting in November 1980) and 90 Mile Beach (October 1998). Behaviour: At Rabbit Island, two birds gave short shocks - "ko-ko-huk" - in flight and on the ground, and a prolonged loud chirring with a rising pitch, interspersed with "kik" notes, was given by a bird in a burrow.

In the hand: Leach's Storm Petrels are similar to Wilson's Storm Petrel, but the other black storm petrel with a white rump known from the region, but have a larger bill: 13.5-14.0-17.5 mm cf. 11. 12.5-13.5 mm. The white rump patch of Leach's Storm Petrel is divided or partially divided by a dark central line of feathers, whereas Wilson's Storm Petrel has a pure white rump.