

SHORT NOTES

WHITE-FACED HERON FLEDGLING WITH A DEFORMED BILL

On 30 October 1980, during routine observations as part of a study of the White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) near Tangimoana, Manawatu, I found a heron nest containing two live young and an infertile egg. Judging by the growth rates of chicks in other nests I estimated these birds to be about 4 weeks old; the fledging period is about 6 weeks (Falla *et al.* 1979, *A new guide to the birds of New Zealand*). One chick appeared to be normal, but the less well-developed chick had a distinctively deformed bill (Fig. 1). As far as I know, this has not previously been recorded for the species in New Zealand. On a second visit to the nest (6 November 1980), both chicks were still present, although the more advanced bird flew away quite strongly as I approached. This bird was not seen on 13 November, when the deformed chick was found dead beneath the nest. Neither parent was seen on any visit, although one or both presumably were attending the nest up to at least 6 November.

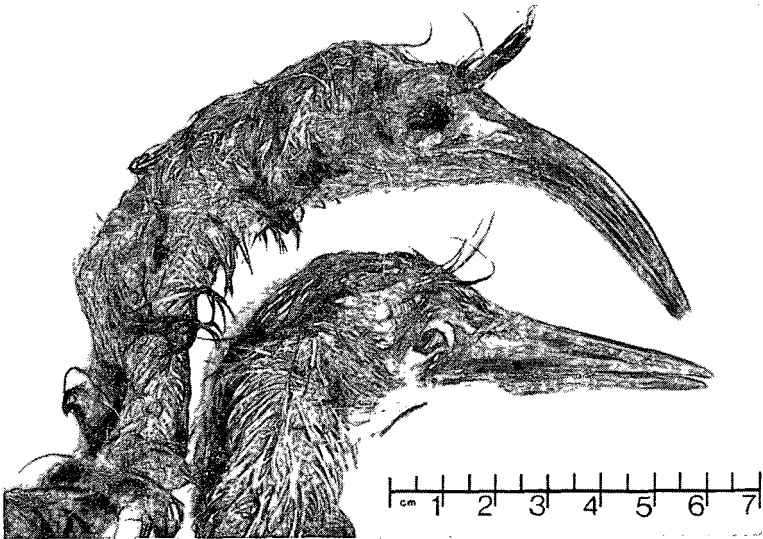


FIGURE 1 — Comparison of a normal White-faced Heron chick, about 3 weeks old, with the deformed chick.

Photo: B. A. Campbell

It is interesting to speculate to what extent (if any), the misshapen bill retarded growth in the deformed chick. Although both chicks appeared similar in size, the plumage of the normal chick was further advanced than that of the deformed chick. From observations of other White-faced Heron nests, siblings from about 2 weeks of age onwards appear to be equally developed. This suggests that the bill deformity did have a detrimental influence upon the chick, perhaps in the success with which food was transferred from parent to young.

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INTEGRITY OF DIAGNOSTIC CHARACTERS FOR HUTTON'S SHEARWATER

Not all the problems in differentiating *Puffinus huttoni* from *P. gavia* in beach-washed specimens arise from their incompleteness or state of decay. Harrow (*Notornis* 23: 269-288), working on the breeding grounds of *P. huttoni*, noted a few to have faint white tips to the axillaries.

During January 1981, Lindsay Davies, Bob Creswell and I examined the diagnostic features of 100 *P. huttoni* at an upper Kowhai colony. Like Harrow, we found several with faintly white-tipped axillaries, but in addition at least one had very obvious white tips. One bird had an aberrant axillary that had one vane with alternate brown and white barring. The bars were 1 mm wide and ran the full length of the vane.

In *P. huttoni*, the lateral under tail-coverts have black or grey markings, sometimes filling the outer vane (Serventy *et al.* 1971, *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*, p. 137). However, three (3%) of the birds examined had all their under tail-coverts pure white, as does *P. gavia*. These birds had the dark under wing-coverts of *P. huttoni* and, being in the *P. huttoni* colony, presumably were *P. huttoni*. Apparently, then, just as measurements alone need not be diagnostic for these two species, no one plumage character, by itself, is sufficient for identification either.

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UNUSUAL WANDERING OF A SPOTTED SHAG

On 8 December 1979 I patrolled Papa Aroha and Hautapu beaches, about 9 kilometres north-west of Coromandel township. A strong westerly wind was blowing, and had been for at least 24 hours.

Just south of Opouri Point I found a Spotted Shag (*Stictocarbo punctatus punctatus*) asleep half-way up a clay bank above the high-tide mark. As I approached the bird I noticed it had a red plastic band