

YELLOW-NOSED MOLLYMAWKS IN THE BAY OF PLENTY

During a conversation with a Bay of Plenty fisherman I learned that an unusual kind of albatross had recently been seen between Mayor Island and Motiti Island; two of them on 12 July 1980 and five on 19 July 1980. As I knew this fisherman was well acquainted with Black-browed (*Diomedea melanophrys*), White-capped (*D. cauta cauta*), Salvin's (*D. cauta salvini*) and Buller's (*D. bulleri*) Mollymawks as well as the Wandering Albatross (*D. exulans*), and as his description fitted the Yellow-nosed Mollymawk (*D. chlororhynchos*), I asked to accompany him on his next weekend fishing trip.

At 6.30 a.m. on 27 July 1980, we sailed out to waters 8-10 km east of Mayor Island. It was fine with a 10 knot south-westerly breeze blowing. Very little bird life was seen until 2.45 p.m., when a fishing boat that had been working 1 km to the north of us came by on its way home and we caught sight of our first albatrosses. Two were following this boat, but as they came abreast of us they wheeled over and alighted beside us.

As the first one came planing in I began to note its salient features: white underwing with fairly straight narrow black edges, absence of grey about the head, and black bill with a yellow top and pinkish red tip (maxillary urguis). The yellow top to the bill was duller than the bright chrome-yellow of Buller's Mollymawk and did not cover such a large area of the culmen. Separating the base of the lower mandible from the gape feathering was a bright yellow line of tissue. Compared to other species of mollymawk this one had a smaller head, and as a result the bill looked disproportionately large. In size the bird resembled a slim slight Black-browed Mollymawk. Without doubt it was a Yellow-nosed Mollymawk.

The first two birds looked identical, but they were joined some 15 minutes later by a bird with a completely black bill, a subadult. Except for the different bill colouring this bird looked indistinguishable from the first two.

Although they had obviously been well fed from the previous boat, they quarrelled, "quarking" and braying wheezily over any scraps that we threw them. They were quite tame but I was unable to hand-feed them as I have done with Black-browed and White-capped Mollymawks.

When we left at about 5 p.m., they followed us for some time, catching up with us, then settling on the water again. They would let us get 500 metres or so ahead before repeating the performance. As there was very little wind they had to flap their wings a good deal to stay airborne.

It appears that occasional sightings of this species have been made during the winter months of the last two years by local fishermen. I was a regular visitor to Mayor Island waters in the winters of 1972,

1973, 1974 and 1975 but did not see any Yellow-nosed Mollymawks during that time. Perhaps this species is going to occur more regularly in the Bay of Plenty.

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UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF ASIATIC WHIMBREL

For a number of seasons we have had opportunities to observe the behaviour of whimbrels, both Asiatic (*Numenius variegatus*) and American (*Numenius hudsonicus*), in the Ashley River estuary, Canterbury. These birds are usually found attached to groups of Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) and are both alert and shy, often being the first birds to move off at the approach of intruders. When put up they frequently emit a single muted rippling call of six or seven notes but are normally silent when feeding or resting on high-tide roosts. Our records show that on several occasions whimbrels have arrived in August, right at winter's end and before the arrival of godwits. In the 1979-80 season, the only Asiatic Whimbrel to stay in the area was a large specimen, probably a female, not distinctly marked but with a definite brownish plumage and rather dark overall. Its behaviour was normal, that is, as described above. Our last sighting of this bird was in late December, and its place was taken by a smaller, greyer and more distinctly barred Asiatic Whimbrel with an unusually aggressive behaviour pattern and different dietary habits.

Although this whimbrel also roosts with godwits, we have noticed that as soon as the falling tide exposes its chosen feeding bank, it starts to strut about, chasing off any godwit approaching the area. Sometimes it flies in sustained pursuit of an intruding godwit, meanwhile calling persistently with series after series of harshly sounded sequences. On one occasion, when a godwit stood its ground and faced the whimbrel, the latter crouched almost cat-like with body flattened and wings outspread, head and bill raised and uttering a different set of calls quite unlike the ripple sequence and pitched more deeply. Again on another occasion, when the whimbrel was forced to concede ground several times at short intervals at the approach of a number of persons, it stalked around at a safe distance uttering its rippling call every few tens of seconds, then flew into the air screaming harshly and much more loudly than we have previously experienced. It flew north for about a mile, circled another site several times, then returned to stand on an elevated shingle bank overlooking its feeding territory. When this was clear, the whimbrel flew across and resumed feeding.

We have observed no interaction, apart from with godwits, between the whimbrel and any other species of bird encountered on its feeding territory, namely Pied Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*),