

### DEFORMED FEET OF SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS AND PIED STILT IN SOUTHLAND SHEEP COUNTRY

In August/September 1977 I spent some time nest-trapping breeding Spur-winged Plovers (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*) to obtain measurements.

On 3 September I had a real field day, thanks in part to Roger Sutton who had told me the whereabouts of four nests in the Lorneville area. Altogether that day I trapped ten birds at ten different sites, all in the Lorneville/Makarewa area. Four of these birds had one or more toes missing. Two birds (one deformed, the other not) had wool fibres wound round toes (one bird on one toe, the other on two toes). The most badly deformed bird had been banded as a chick by Roger Sutton on 8 October 1968, approximately half a mile away from its 1977 nest-site. This bird's left foot was missing altogether. At the tarso-metatarsal joint was a callus approximately 10 mm in diameter on which the bird walked. The bird had originally held two bands on each leg. The lower left leg-band was missing but the other was present, retained by the callus. Both right leg bands were present. Two right toes were deformed, broken and hanging, and one had wool fibres wound tightly around it.

One wonders how much the bands contributed to the retention of wool on this bird. But a further factor may be the area where this bird has presumably spent its nine years of life. It consists mainly of holding paddocks for a nearby freezing works, and is consistently fairly heavily stocked with sheep. Indeed the general Lorneville/Makarewa area has a high sheep population.

On 14 August 1977 Mr A. J. N. Campbell rang me about an unusual bird on his farm at Woodlands. This proved to be a Pied Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), both of whose legs terminated at the tibio-tarsal joint. The bird was walking on its stumps without difficulty, feeding in a damp area. This bird remained about the same area and a nearby pond for approximately two weeks, when it was found dead. Its calloused stumps had wool fibres caught within the callus. The Woodlands area is highly productive farmland with a high sheep carrying capacity.

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### BIOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS FROM BLACK ISLAND, ANTARCTICA

Members of the 1975-76 Victoria University expedition to Antarctica (VUWAE 20) spent two weeks undertaking geological investigations on Black Island and Brown Peninsula, Ross Ice Shelf.

The remains of an Adelie Penguin and several Crabeater Seals were found on Black Island (Fig. 1). While mummified remains of penguins and seals are widespread in the Dry Valleys to the west of McMurdo Sound (for example, Barwick & Balham 1967, *Tuatara* 15 (3): 165-180 and Kohn *et al.* 1971, *Notornis* 18 (1): 52-54), they have not previously been described from Black Island (Pewe *et al.* 1959, *Science*, N.Y. 130: 716). Despite careful search, no mummified remains were found on Brown Peninsula.

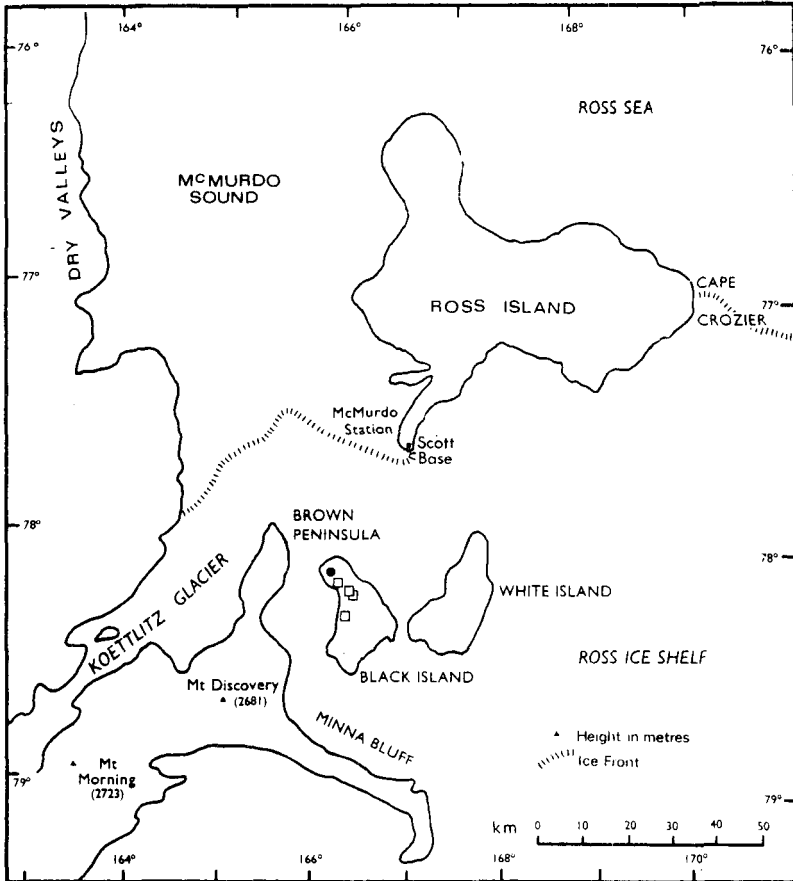


FIGURE 1 — Locality map. On Black Island, solid circle shows position of Adelie Penguin carcass; open squares show seal carcasses.

The almost complete carcasse of a single Adelie Penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) was found in a north-trending valley at the north-western end of Black Island (Fig. 2). The shortest distance from this point to the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf is some 30 km. The age of the carcasse is not known, but the good preservation in an area exposed to strong winds during winter and where active erosion occurs during the mid-summer thaw indicates that it is probably quite recent. Members of VUWAE 19 found fresh penguin tracks in a nearby valley in December 1974.



FIGURE 2 — Almost complete carcasse of Adelie Penguin from northern Black Island. Feathers are coated with mud.

The remains of four seals were also found (Fig. 1). Three are complete or nearly complete mummified Crabeater Seals (*Lobodon carcinophagus*), and one occurs as a small group of disarticulated bones. The southernmost, and most complete carcasse, is some 40 km from the edge of the ice shelf. It lies in a narrow gully, which must protect it from the abrasive effects of wind-blown sand, and is complete except for the fur which is only preserved in a groove on the back (Fig. 3). All of the seal carcasses lie either in or close to north-south trending valleys, and the animals appear to have travelled south along these from the Ross Ice Shelf. The two largest specimens measure 1800 and 1870 mms respectively, and thus represent immature individuals less than one year old (Lindsey 1938, *J. Mammal* 19 (4): 456-461).

None of the carcasses appear to have been attacked by Skua Gulls, which Barwick & Balham (1967) and Kohn *et al.* (1971) reported occasionally happened in the Dry Valleys. Skua do frequent Black



FIGURE 3 — Mummified carcass of Crabeater Seal from southernmost Black Island locality. Carcass measures 1870 mm, and is complete except for fur.

Island, and on 3 December 1977 seven were observed flying north along the west coast.

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#### NEW NESTING SITE FOR LITTLE BLACK SHAG

On 15 April 1977 I noted three nests of Little Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*), two containing chicks, on an old *Macrocarpa* tree overhanging the junction of Orakei Creek and Orakei Basin, in an estuary of the Waitemata Harbour. In the same tree is an established nesting colony of Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*).

I had been absent for twelve weeks prior to finding these nests and was very surprised when I took up my binoculars to bring my shag records up to date.