

in an enclosure of mosquito netting about 3.1 m long, 1.8 m wide and 1.5-2.0 m high. Ferns and other plants up to the height of the enclosure were included within it, but the Scarlet Robin spent much of the time either on the ground or within about 300 mm of the ground. He would perch briefly on small dead twigs or roots, then hop rapidly down and along the ground to snap up tiny insects. Twice RB saw him eat worms — a yellowish one about 20 mm long and about 1.5 mm in diameter, and a greyish one about 40 mm long and 20 mm in diameter. In both cases he picked up the worm from amid surface debris, dropped it wriggling on the ground, then picked it up again and swallowed it. For the larger worm he had to swallow several times before the last of the worm disappeared. BB later saw the bird swallow a third small worm. The robin also made a few flycatching flights, and once he flew up from a perch on a low branch to pluck something from the underside of a leaf.

Fergus Clunie (pers. comm.) has confirmed that the foraging behaviour on and near the ground which we observed within the enclosure is "typical of what I've often seen among wild birds. The occasional short flycatching flights and gleaning underside of the leaf is also typical of this sort of activity — they are almost constantly on the go and if in dense undergrowth keep disappearing and reappearing as they go to the ground then return to another perch." It thus appears that Bahr's comment is misleading, and probably reflects limited observation.

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BILL BECKON & RUTH BECKON, *P.O. Box 1094, Suva, Fiji.*



#### SHAGS IN MID-TASMAN

In between voyages John Jenkins received from John Lampitt, Radio Officer on *Union Rotorua* two letters which describe the occurrence of shags far out of sight of land in the Tasman Sea. The letters were passed to me and I was invited to extract the relevant passages.

(1) *Union Rotorua* towards Melbourne 2 October 1977

I thought you might be interested to hear that we were visited by a squadron of shags in mid-Tasman yesterday. We were in position 37°16'S 157°17'E at 1645 hrs when ten large shags arrived and circled the ship several times, before joining the usual albatrosses and tubenoses

flying over the wake. They appeared to be looking for somewhere to roost, but flew off astern (i.e. eastwards) after about 45 minutes. At about 1600 hrs a lone specimen appeared, flew around astern and up alongside for ten minutes and finally alighted on the water. None has appeared since.

Max Rawlins, the electrician, reckoned that they were a bit bigger than the usual New Zealand shags; and I thought some had a brown tinge. The lone bird, the only one I watched through binoculars, seemed to be of normal size and black.

The wind had been a strong sou'-westerly for several days, with highs over the Tasman and New Zealand; the cold fronts going through well south.

(2) *Union Rotorua* towards Auckland 9 October 1977

We acquired some more shags on the return journey, Melbourne to Auckland. This time three or four joined us just east of Bass Strait. Two remained, or two more joined us, the second day out and stayed until we were nearing the New Zealand coast early this morning. In position about 34°S 155°E one bird alighted on the forepeak and slept there from mid-day 7 Oct until mid-afternoon of the next day. During the morning of 8 Oct, three or four shags were flying around astern and two alighted on the foredeck where they rested for several hours from noon onwards. From their colouring they appeared to be young birds and I made a rough sketch of one from the wheelhouse. The weather was unpleasant. The wind was blowing 30 kts and there was a depression west of the South Island. Our position at noon was 36°49'S 164°18'E.

It looks as if some Australian shags have been blown out into the Tasman lately. Presumably we are going to have a few more illegal immigrants. I hope these notes are of interest.

John Lampitt.

A long drought in central and southern Australia has caused the death of many waterfowl; and the survivors have been heading for the coast. It would appear that the overflow was already reaching New Zealand in the spring of 1977. There is little doubt that the species mentioned in these two letters was *Phalacrocorax carbo*.

On seeing this note Neil Cheshire added another instance. On 4 December 1977 when MV *Tasman Venture* was about 400 miles WSW of Cape Reinga in position 35°15'S 164°36'E, an adult *carbo* flew around the ship several times and came on board for a few minutes. On his many voyages in New Zealand waters he had never before seen a shag of any species come on board.

R. B. SIBSON, 26 *Entrican Avenue, Auckland 5*