

## WHITE PHASE OF THE GIANT PETREL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

By H. T. CONDON

On January 1, 1954, a schoolboy, Ron Gibbs, found the decomposed body of a large white sea-bird at the Murray Mouth, near Goolwa, South Australia. The mummified head was forwarded to the South Australian Museum, where it was identified as that of the white phase of the Giant Petrel or Giant Fulmar (*Macronectes giganteus*). Numerous dark examples of this species are washed ashore each year during the winter months in a starving condition, but no specimens have previously been found in the white phase in South Australia, although such a discovery could have been expected.

From various observations and some records from breeding colonies it would appear that owing to some unknown selective agency, the proportion of all-white birds increases in higher latitudes and the distribution of the two forms is clinal.

According to Murphy (*Oceanic Bds. S. Amer.*, 1, p. 585) white phase birds are white

from the egg, and the birds will mate with normal, dark-colored individuals of the opposite sex. They preponderate in numbers in the zone of pack-ice, but examples have been observed at all latitudes to within a few degrees of the equator.

As shown by Mathews (*Bds. Austr.*, 2, plate 89, 1912) white birds usually (? invariably) have a few dark-tipped feathers scattered all over the body and the iris is dark. In dark phase birds the head and neck seems to become whitish with increasing age, but none in this stage of development has been discovered in South Australia to my knowledge, and in any event could not be confused with an all-white bird.

Serventy (*Emu*, 52, p. 167) lists other Australian records of this phase: Broken Bay, N.S.W., September, 1914; Bunbury, W.A., 1933; Bussellton, W.A., June, 1937; Cronulla, N.S.W., August, 1942.