

## Notes on a Peculiar Petrel Skin.

—By A. M. Morgan, M.B., B.S.—

Mr. Edwin Ashby was good enough to allow me to examine the skin of a young female Petrel which had been picked up on the beach at Port Willunga on 24th April, 1914. In this bird the throat is light grey, reduced to a narrow strip on the throat by the dull black feathers of the neck encroaching on either side; the rest of the under surface grey, gradually becoming darker to the under tail coverts, which are dull black. The under surface of wings is medium grey, the coverts having black shafts; all the upper surface is dull black, the feathers margined with dull brown. Length of skin, 31 cm. (12.25 inches approx.); wing, 19 cm. (7.50 inches approx.); culmen, 3.20 cm. (1.30 inches approx.); tarsus, 4.60 cm. (1.70 inches approx.); middle toe, with claw, 5.20 cm. (2.15 inches approx.). The Petrel which comes nearest in measurements to this bird is *Puffinus gavia*. Hutton and Drummond ("Animals of New Zealand") give the measurements of the latter species as—Wing, 8 inches; tarsus, 1.7 inches. Mathews' measurements are:—Adult Male—Length, 363 mm. (14.30 inches); culmen, 35 mm. (1.30 inches); wing, 213 mm. (8.40 inches); tail, 63 mm. (2.50 inches); tarsus, 42 mm. (1.65 inches). Adult Female—Culmen, 33 mm. (1.25 inches); wing, 209 mm. (8.25 inches). Godman ("Monograph of the Petrels") gives:—Adult Male—Length, 13.5 inches; culmen, 1.35 inches; wing, 8.5 inches; tail, 2.5 inches; tarsus, 1.75 inches; middle toe and claw, 1.9 inches. Adult Female—Length, 13 inches; culmen, 1.4 inches; wing, 9 inches; tail, 2.7 inches; tarsus, 1.7 inches; middle toe and claw, 1.9 inches. Godman also states that the wing measures 7.9 to 9 inches in this species. Buller ("Birds of New Zealand," Vol. II, p. 236, 2nd Edition, 1888) states that the nestling is white underneath, and that the young resemble the adults on leaving the nest; but he had apparently never seen either the nestling or the young bird at that time, and his description was either from hearsay or that of some other Petrel; for in the Supplement (Vol. I, p. 99, 1905) he says that the nesting-place of this bird has at last been discovered, and gives a description of the nestling as being dark slate grey above and pale grey underneath, fading to whitish on the throat, which compares fairly well with Ashby's bird, except that in the latter the under tail coverts are black. Buller gives no description of the young bird in the Supplement. Mathews,

on the strength of some of the measurements (not all, as stated by him) being greater in Godman's female from the Snares than in the male from New Zealand, makes the Snares bird a sub-species under the name *Reinholdi reinholdi huttoni*, also giving as a further difference the encroachment of the dark feathers on the side of the neck upon the white throat, a character noted by Buller in some of his specimens, and which occurs in Ashby's bird. A specimen in the British Museum from the Adelaide Museum is referred by him to this sub-species. There is no specimen at present in our Museum, but it is known that many years ago a dishonest employee sold much material from the Museum to Continental collectors, and this may be one of the specimens so disposed of. *P. gavia* is not, as Mathews states, an accidental visitor to South Australia. I have seen them on several occasions in Backstairs Passage, and once, on Easter Monday, 1915, in large flocks, numbering in all many thousands. Unfortunately no specimen could be procured, but a Petrel with a very dark back and white underparts, which rose and flew with a flapping flight close to the water, to settle again at a short distance, could scarcely have been any other bird. Mr. Ashby's skin must be either a very stunted young *P. tenuirostris*, the nearest breeding-place of which is Althorpe Island, about 100 miles from Port Willunga, or a young *P. gavia* of Mathews' subspecies *huttoni*. That it is a young bird is shown by the fact that a few tufts of down still adhere to the sides of the neck. Against the former theory is the well-known fact that the young of *P. tenuirostris* are almost equal in size to the adults, and that the bird must have been fairly strong to have flown from the Althorpes, its nearest possible known birthplace. Against the latter theory is the dark under surface of the skin and the absence of any known breeding-place of *P. gavia* in South Australia. The first is a serious objection, if Buller's statement in the "Birds of New Zealand" be correct; on the other hand, if Mathews' subspecies be valid, it may well be that the young differ in this respect. As regards a breeding-place, there are many islands in South Australian waters which have never been visited by an ornithologist; for instance, the Pages, two small rocky islands at the south-east end of Backstairs Passage, within 40 miles of Port Willunga, and quite close to where I have so frequently seen the birds.