

An Interesting Ornithological Record for South Australia.

Pterodroma lessoni (White-headed Fulmar, or Petrel).

The only previous record of this species for South Australia appears to be Dr. W. Macgillivray's observation of the bird at sea on 22nd June, 1919, the day before sighting Kangaroo Island from the west. ("The Emu," Vol. XIX, p. 175.) His description accurately fits the species.

On 17th December, 1924, Professor Cleland's brother-in-law, Mr. W. D. Paton, and his wife, on their way to bathe in the morning at Encounter Bay, noticed an unusual bird flutter on the beach. It was picked up alive. Messrs. C. Rumbelow and Jos. Shannon, jun., did not remember having seen its like during their long experience at Encounter Bay. The bird lived some few hours, died a natural death, and was forwarded to Professor Cleland. Dissection showed that it was a female, with a full-sized egg, with firm shell, in the oviduct ready to be laid. The egg was covered with a thin, slightly discoloured caseous film. There seemed to be no abnormality, such as rupture of the oviduct, to prevent its being laid in the ordinary way, though it was certainly astonishing that such a large egg—measuring 71.6 mm. axis and 51.4 mm. diameter—(though normal in size for the species) should be able to pass through the cloacal aperture. It is a reversal of Horace's "*Parturient montes; nascetur ridiculus mus*" (The mountains are in labour; a ridiculous mouse will be brought forth).

The known breeding-places of this species in the Southern Hemisphere are—Auckland Island, about 2,100 miles south-east of Encounter Bay; Antipodes Island, about 2,800 miles south-east of Encounter Bay; Macquarie Island, about 2,040 miles south-east of Encounter Bay; Kerguelen Island, about 4,200 miles west of Encounter Bay.

Dr. A. M. Morgan has suggested that there may be a much nearer breeding-ground—one, perhaps, even in our own waters, e.g., "The Pages." But if there be no breeding-place near, how came a bird to our shores with an egg ready to be laid? It is possible that it was blown by heavy gales from its customary ambit, within easy reach of its nest; that the wind so blew that it carried it far away, and, when the gale died down, left it in the throes of labour within smelling reach of land, but not the land of its home. Can birds that lay such relatively large eggs as,

this lay them at all when on the wing, or even in the water? May not some firm fulcrum be required, as a *point d'appui* for the necessary muscles, similar to the old-fashioned labour-stool of our ancestresses? Our unfortunate victim of circumstances could not, we may suppose, lay her egg whilst flying, could not lay it on the tossing mobile bosom of the ocean, but the labour pains were imperative. She must make land. Land could be detected by the sense of smell. Towards it she flew, and reached it at last, famishing and dead-weary beyond the chance of recovery. Is it to circumstances such as these that we are indebted for this specimen?

The full clutch is one egg. The burrow of this Petrel is externally about as large as that of an ordinary rabbit—the tunnel is short, and the large terminal chamber contains no special nest. The first record of the bird in Australian waters was made by Dr. Solander on 11th April, 1770, in the Tasman Sea, approaching the entrance of Bass Strait. Mr. Edgar R. Waite observed the species nesting on Disappointment Island, Auckland Group, on 28th November, 1907. The breeding season usually takes place from November to January.

The egg referred to has been presented to the South Australian Museum by Professor Cleland; another egg, obtained at Macquarie Island on 18th December, 1912, was presented to that institution by Sir Douglas Mawson.

Strange to say, Master Mark Bonnin found the head and sternum of a bird of this species on the sea-shore at Bosun's Point, Guichen Bay, Robe, on 26th December, 1924, and these have been presented to the South Australian Museum.

The colour notes and other data of the Encounter Bay specimen are as follows:—Iris dark brown; bill black; pharynx flesh-coloured; legs and feet to beyond the first joint flesh-coloured, with black along the outer edge and on the knuckles and a black spot on the inner web near the base; distal half of the feet and the toes black, the flesh colour and the black intermingling at the junction, and a flesh-coloured band extending along the inner side of the middle toe; the small hallux black; length in the flesh to the tip of the beak, $17\frac{1}{4}$ in.; span of outspread wings, $39\frac{1}{2}$ in.; weight, $18\frac{1}{2}$ oz. Nematodes in the stomach.