

P.S.—Since the above was written I have had an opportunity of examining some further specimens of *Phalacrocorax carunculatus* from the White Rocks, Queen Charlotte Sound, the only locality in New Zealand, so far as we are aware, in which this species is to be found. Captain Fairchild informs me that there is still a small colony of these birds, numbering from fifteen to twenty, breeding on the rocks. On the occasion of his visit last week he found the young hatched out, but still occupying the nests. Four of these, of different sizes, clothed in thick down, he brought over with him in the "Hinemoa," and I have sent them up to the Papaitonga Lake, where I trust they will thrive and ultimately breed. Two old birds, both females, were shot by the crew and the skins preserved. I had an opportunity of examining one of these. The pad of orange caruncles on the brow, on each side of the head, is very prominent, and as it is entirely absent in some examples I take it to be a feature peculiar to the breeding-season. There is no appearance whatever of a crest, or even an elongation of the coronal feathers. The white alar bar is very conspicuous; so is the dorsal double patch of white. The naked space around and in front of the eyes is entirely dark-blue; and the feet are flesh-coloured.

*Nestling*.—Covered with sooty down. Fore part of head, face, and throat, perfectly bare; the skin, which is jet-black, presenting a granulated surface, and having the appearance of kid-leather. Upper mandible brownish-black; the under mandible, except at the tip, as well as the skin at its base, in a straight line from the angle of the mouth, bluish-white; the black colouring of the skin beyond, however, being continued, in a tapering streak, to a point within the rami. Under each eye there is a minute round spot of white. Legs and feet dark-grey, the webs lighter.—W.L.B. Wellington, 25th September, 1894.

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ART. VIII.—*Note on Cestrelata neglecta; with an Exhibition of Specimens.*

By Sir WALTER L. BULLER, K.C.M.G., D.Sc., F.R.S.

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 5th September, 1894.]

WHEN I had the privilege of placing before you on the 25th July last a budget of ornithological notes I took occasion to refer to Professor Hutton's supposed new species of Petrel from the Kermadec Islands, to which he had given the name

of *Estrelata leucophrys*, and, following Mr. Salvin, I then stated my belief that, instead of being a distinct species, it was only a form of *Æ. neglecta*. We have not had to wait long for confirmation of this view. I have the pleasure of exhibiting to-night a pair of birds kindly lent to me for that purpose by Mr. Bethune, the second engineer of the "Hinemoa." The male bird is in the plumage of Professor Hutton's *Estrelata leucophrys*, whilst the female is in the ordinary plumage of *Estrelata neglecta*. They were taken by Mr. Bethune himself from their breeding-burrow on Sunday Island. Indeed, Mr. Bethune assures me that on every occasion he can remember—and he has collected many of these birds in the breeding-season—he has found the two kinds mated and breeding together. From this it might be inferred that the difference of plumage is sexual. As against this view, however, I have to exhibit a specimen in an intermediate state of plumage, the sides of the head and neck being very prettily rayed with dusky grey; also an example with a still whiter head than Mr. Bethune's male bird presents. All this goes to prove the correctness of Mr. Salvin's contention as to the variability of this species in regard to plumage. It is perfectly clear, therefore, that *Estrelata leucophrys* will not stand as a species.

At the same time that I submitted my specimens of *Æ. neglecta* to Mr. Salvin (as stated in my former paper, page 123) I showed him also a pair in entirely dark plumage, which seemed to me to be distinct, and which, in that case, I proposed to dedicate to Captain Fairchild, who has done so much to increase our knowledge of the birds inhabiting the outlying islands. Mr. Salvin expressed a strong belief that these were referable to the same species in a dark phase of plumage, and said that nothing would satisfy him to the contrary short of finding the dark-coloured birds nesting together apart from the lighter-coloured birds, and breeding true. I felt bound to defer to the opinion of a naturalist who has made the Petrel family his special study, so I abstained from recording this supposed new form. The two specimens which I exhibit to-night seem to prove that in this case also Mr. Salvin was right in referring the bird to *Estrelata neglecta*. In one of them the entire plumage is brownish-grey, darker on the upper surface, changing to brownish-black on the wings and tail; the primaries, secondaries, and tail-feathers being white in their basal portion, with white shafts, darkening towards the tip. In the other specimen the under surface is much lighter, whilst on the throat there are indications of a change to the pale-grey characteristic of ordinary specimens of *Æ. neglecta*. I think, therefore, we may pretty safely assume that this is the young state of that species.

In Mr. Bethune's two specimens now exhibited the wing measures, from the flexure, exactly 11.75in.; in my intermediate example it measures 12in., and in the more matured one only 10.5in. In the two entirely dark birds the wing, as in the first-named, measures 11.75in. The dark birds have brownish-black legs and feet, whereas in all the others the tarsi are yellowish, and the toes "sandalled" with black; but this difference is no doubt due to the immaturity of the former.

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ART. IX.—*Some Curiosities of Bird-life.*

By Sir WALTER L. BULLER, K.C.M.G., D.Sc., F.R.S.

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 19th September, 1894.]

PURSUANT to the title of my paper, I shall exhibit to you this evening some remarkable "freaks of nature," or curiosities of bird-life. One of them, as I shall presently show, is a pure albino Kiwi, of the small species known to us as *Apteryx oweni*, the ordinary plumage of which is of a speckled or dappled-grey colour. But before proceeding to the specimens I wish to say a word or two on the subject of albinism.

The inherent tendency to albinism is one of the distinguishing features of the New Zealand avifauna. Albinism in the human subject is due to the absence of the minute particles of colouring-matter in the epidermis or outer cuticle, the presence of which, in more or less abundance, gives colour to the skin. In many species of quadrupeds, birds, and reptiles, albinism, due to a precisely similar cause, often exhibits itself, the skin, hair, feathers, and also the hard tissues—even the horny sheaths and scaly coverings—presenting an abnormal whiteness. Sometimes, as in the case of white rats, mice, and rabbits, this is accompanied by an abnormal condition of the eyes, which become blood-red. The whiteness of plumage, the purity of which is regulated by the entire or only partial absence of the colouring pigment in the feathers, is thus easily accounted for; but I have been unable to discover any sufficient reason for the frequency of this condition of plumage among the birds of New Zealand. It is certainly not the result of disease, or of a low state of vitality, any more than albinism in the human subject can be taken to indicate an enfeebled condition of mind or body. May it not, then, be in some way dependent on climatal conditions? It is significant that in tropical India the tendency is in an