

SHORT NOTE

Petrels prospecting in the Hunua Ranges

In July 1989, I found a recently dug burrow on a small spur leading off the main ridge just below Mangatangi Trig (NZMS 1 : N 48, 697 270, 479 m asl) at the southern end of the Hunua Range. This block of bush, commonly known as the Vining Block, is administered by DoC. The entire area has probably been selectively logged for kauri (*Agathis australis*) and logged again later for podocarps and hardwoods. Extensive searches revealed no sign of rabbits and, from its position, size and general appearance, it seems most likely that it was a petrel burrow. This search did reveal a rat-eaten egg 100 m away on another spur leading off the main ridge. The fragments of this egg were too small for measurements to be taken but in my opinion it would have been similar in size to that of a large petrel (*Pterodroma* sp.).

My conclusion from these two discoveries is that petrels had been attempting to breed in the area. The most likely species are Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*), which is known to have nested inland in the past, and Grey-faced Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*) which, however, usually nests on the coast or on offshore islands.

On a second search in December 1989, the burrow was found to be empty and three more burrows found showed no sign of recent use. However, just below Mangatangi Trig, on the main track, several streaky white bird droppings were found about a stump. These droppings were similar to those seen on petrel islands (pers. obs.), and I am satisfied they were made by a petrel. Because the terrain is steep and vegetation tangled, a petrel may have to travel a long way from its burrow to a suitable take-off point near the summit. The chance of finding a single burrow in this terrain is slim. In April 1992, another check of these burrows found no evidence that they had been recently used. The first burrow found had been collapsed by people using a walking track that had recently been opened up along this spur.

Because the present breeding of Black Petrel is confined to Great and Little Barrier Islands, and because of this species' past distribution (Imber 1987, *Notornis* 34: 19-39), this area may be worth visiting in October when birds first come ashore to look for suitable breeding sites. Predator control may be impractical but, if Black Petrels are found, their attempts to breed should be monitored.

I thank M.J. Imber for useful criticism of this note.

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