

ART. IX.—*Notice of the Capture of a Specimen of the Shy Albatross (Diomedea cauta) near Auckland.*

By T. F. CHEESEMAN, F.L.S.

[Read before the Auckland Institute, 2nd July, 1888.]

So far as I am aware, only two instances are on record of this rare bird being obtained in New Zealand. Some time in 1876 a specimen was captured in Blueskin Bay, Otago, and came into the possession of Professor Hutton, who was at that time in charge of the Otago Museum. Professor Hutton identified it as the Shy Albatross, or *Diomedea cauta*; and I believe the specimen still exists in the collections of the Museum. In July, 1887, another example came ashore near the pilot-station, at the entrance to Wellington Harbour. It was secured by some fishermen, and ultimately passed into the hands of Dr. (now Sir Walter) Buller. In the tenth volume of the "Transactions" an account will be found of the circumstance, and a full description of the bird.*

About six weeks ago Mr. D. Bate, of Brighton, Parnell, informed me that he had an albatross differing in plumage from any of the stuffed examples in the Museum. On calling to see it, I found that it was undoubtedly a male, in full plumage, of the Shy Albatross. Mr. Bate informed me that a friend of his, while shooting curlew by the side of the Manukau Harbour, near Penrose, observed the bird in a grass-paddock. Albatrosses are unable to take flight from a level piece of ground, so that there was no difficulty in approaching it; in fact, it could do little more than waddle about in a circle. Concluding that it was injured, an attempt was made to seize it by the neck. This was evidently done in a most incautious manner, for I am informed that the bird retaliated by seizing its assailant by the lower part of the nose, inflicting a severe tear. However, it was at length captured and despatched. Mr. Bate has kindly presented the specimen to the Museum, so that I am able to exhibit it to you this evening.

The Shy Albatross is easily distinguished from all the other species by the beautiful pearl-grey feathers of the face and neck, and by a narrow yellow line at the base of the bill. This latter character can only be observed in living specimens, although conspicuous enough in them; the membrane soon losing its colour after death. Very little is known of its habits. Unlike the other species it is not at all bold, and seldom approaches ships. Nothing is known of its breeding-places, nest, or eggs. Mr. Gould, the author of the "Birds of Aus-

* "Trans. N.Z. Inst.," vol. x., art. xxv., p. 217.

tralia," conjectures that it may breed on the Mewstone and some other small islands to the south of Tasmania, from the fact that adult birds are commonly seen in the neighbourhood during the spring months; but up to the present time this supposition has not been verified. It will be interesting to ascertain whether the few specimens caught off our shores have come from a breeding-station to the south of New Zealand, or have wandered across from Tasmania.

ART. X.—*The Habits and Home of the Wandering Albatross*
(*Diomedea exulans*).

By A. REISCHEK, F.L.S.

[Read before the Auckland Institute, 2nd July, 1888.]

THIS noble bird may justly be called the king among the sea-birds. Many times during my sea-voyages have I admired its flight and easy sailing over the waves, as it followed our vessel, hundreds of miles from the nearest land. Its power of flight surpasses that of most birds, and is easily accounted for by the unusual development of the muscles of the breast and wings, the latter being equal to, if not stronger than, those of the eagle. It is worthy of remark that the quills of the wing are spread or brought close together according as the bird is rising or falling in its flight. The steering is done not with the tail alone, but also with the broad webbed feet. These, when a straight course is being followed, are stretched out, and nearly concealed under the tail; but when a quick turn is required their position is altered, and the webs are spread in such a manner as to greatly assist the bird in turning. When there is little wind and the ocean is calm, albatrosses have great difficulty in rising from the water; when there is a swell they run along the water and rise with a wave. When alighting, on nearing the surface they bend the head back, curve the wings upwards, beating the air with numerous laboured strokes, then, straightening their feet, they let themselves fall. They are fast swimmers, but cannot dive. Their food, which consists chiefly of some of the lower forms of marine life found floating on the surface of the ocean, they scoop up with their bill in the same manner as the ducks.

I had long been anxious to visit their breeding-haunts, but had no opportunity of doing this until January, 1888, when I was afforded the privilege of accompanying the Government steamer "Stella" on her yearly cruise among the islands to the south of New Zealand. After visiting Stewart Island and the Snares, the steamer's course was directed towards the