

A BANDED MANX SHEARWATER IN AUSTRALIA.

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During the past few decades there have been many important records for Australia concerning beach-washed sea-birds. In some instances the remains have been very decomposed and identity has proved difficult to determine. Such a problem almost certainly would have arisen when "the feathers and bones of a sea-bird" was picked up near Venus Bay (33° 10'S, 134° 28'E) in South Australia in 1961. Identity in this case might have been impossible, except for the fact that the bird had a band on its leg which revealed it to be a Manx Shearwater (Puffinus puffinus), a species with a scattered breeding range in western Europe.

The only recorded details I can trace in respect to this specimen have been briefly given by Robert Spencer (British Birds, vol.55, No.2. February 1962, pp.86-87). No actual date is given for recovery, nor was the name of the finder mentioned, but word was received per letter, dated November 22, 1961. The bird bore a B.T.O. band, number 205-7768, which proved that it was ringed as a chick at Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, on September 9, 1960. This is the first known definite record of P.puffinus in Australia. The Fluttering Shearwater, (P.gavia), which breeds on many offshore islands in New Zealand and occurs around the coast of southern Australia, often in large-sized flocks, is closely allied and some taxonomists regard the two as conspecific. Dr.D.L.Serventy, however, when reviewing (The Emu, vol.53, p.191) Dr.R.C.Murphy's article entitled "The Manx Shearwater, Puffinus puffinus, as a Species of World-wide Distribution" (Amer.Mus.Nov. No.1586, 1952), casts doubt on the wisdom of treating all related forms as conspecific and emphasizes, among other characters, that leg colour is a most useful character in petrel taxonomics, and that gavia quite lacks the pink leg coloration of nominate puffinus.

Whatever the taxonomic status, the fact remains that the Manx Shearwater has reached Australia and must be added to the Australian Checklist. Whether the bird came here by way of the southern Indian Ocean or south Pacific Ocean can only be conjectured, although Spencer assumes it travelled through the south Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the "easier, though longer, route". Approximately 14 months elapsed from the time the bird was banded as a nestling in England and when it was washed up in South Australia. Spencer further states that it is the first known occurrence of a British-ringed bird in Australia. What route the bird took in reaching Australia certainly was a long one, and the leg-band that it carried not only proved its identity, but added another remarkable entry into our knowledge of the wanderings of banded sea-birds.