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THE GIBSON CODE

One of the first co-operative studies in New South Wales was that of the Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* off the coast at Bellambi and Malabar. Once started, it soon became clear that a standard method for recording plumage characteristics was necessary, and a scheme was developed by Doug Gibson. This was designed to enable a numerical score to be given based on the similarity of the plumage to a series of numbered drawings depicting the plumage changes suspected to occur with age. It was also apparent that such a scheme must give similar data when used by different observers. Fortunately, at this critical moment a sick Wandering Albatross appeared in Sydney harbour. A meeting was arranged at short notice and held in the evening in Arthur Gwynn's home, attended by Doug Gibson, Allen Sefton, Clive Champion, Bill Lane, myself and the albatross. Doug explained his plan and at intervals we retired individually to the verandah to make our plumage scores, after which we compared notes and discussed our disagreements. From these Doug developed his scheme which became known as the "Gibson Code". The albatross recovered within two days from its unique experience and was last seen flying through Sydney Heads to the Tasman Sea.

P. Jouventin, J. Martinez and J. P. Roux have just published the latest modification to the "Gibson Code" in *Ibis* 131: 171-182. This accommodates the plumage changes of the newest of the great albatrosses, the Amsterdam Island Albatross *Diomedea amsterdamensis*. This species breeds on Amsterdam Island (37°50'S., 77°35'E.) mid-way between southern Africa and Australia. It commences to breed in a dark plumage with a dark cap on the head, a plumage similar to the immature stages of the Wandering Albatross from which it can be readily distinguished. The Amsterdam Island Albatross has a distinct dark line on the cutting edge of the upper mandible. Its breeding biology is similar to those of the other great albatrosses but whereas the Wandering and Royal Albatrosses breed during December and January, the Amsterdam Island Albatross breeds in February and March. The breeding population is estimated at only 65 birds including 21 breeding pairs which, as the authors comment, makes this albatross probably one of the rarest of seabirds.

Durno Murray