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Notes on a Collection of Birds from Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island

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This is a report on a small collection of birds from the Tristan da Cunha group and Gough Island in the southern Atlantic Ocean made by Mr. N. SCHEER, Officer in Charge of the Weather Station at Tristan da Cunha in the years 1958—1960. The collection consists of 13 specimens from Tristan, 23 from Nightingale Island and 7 from Inaccessible Island, as well as 7 from Gough Island. A total of 22 species is represented. Field records by Mr. SCHEER have been added to the report; local names of most of the species, as noticed by Mr. SCHEER, have been given in quotation marks.

Considering the recent publications on the birds of these islands (BROEKHUYSEN & MACNAE, 1949; HAGEN, 1952; RAND, 1955; ELLIOTT, 1957) the collection contributes hardly any new facts to the knowledge of this interesting insular fauna. Still it contains members of any of the known species of land birds, including one specimen of the remarkable Inaccessible Island Flightless Rail (*Atlantisia rogersi*) and two of the rare Grosbeak Bunting from Nightingale Island (*Nesospiza wilkinsi winkinsi*); only the Grosbeak Bunting from Inaccessible Island (*N. w. dunnei*) is lacking in the collection. Both the most abundant bird species in the islands (Great Shearwater, *Puffinus gravis*: probably at least two million breeding pairs, according to ROWAN, Ibis, 94, 1952, p. 97-121), and the scarcest (Grosbeak Bunting, *Nesospiza wilkinsi*: probably less than 100 breeding pairs, according to ELLIOTT, 1957) are represented in the collection by a few specimens.

It is of interest to note that the Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) is represented by two specimens, but unfortunately Mr. SCHEER did not succeed in getting specimens of the Peduncled Puffin (*Adamastor cinereus*), which is known for its elusive habits on the nesting grounds.

The specimens of the Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*), the Southern Black-

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backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) and the American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryula martinica*) add interesting dates to the records of the periodic occurrence of these species in these islands.

In the following list of the species collected I have followed the sequence of ELLIOTT (1957).

In addition to the usual symbols for males (♂) and females (♀) I have made use of a third symbol (o) for specimens without known sex.

LITERATURE ON THE ISLANDS

BROEKHUYSEN, G. J., & W. MACNAE

1949 Observations on the birds of Tristan da Cunha Islands and Gough Island in February and early March, 1948. *Ardea*, 37, pp. 97—113.

ELLIOTT, H. F. I.

1957 A contribution to the ornithology of the Tristan da Cunha group. *Ibis*, 99, pp. 545—586.

HAGEN, Y.

1952 Birds of Tristan da Cunha. Results Norwegian Scient. Expedition Tristan da Cunha 1937-1938. 20. Oslo, Norske Vidensk.-Akad.

RAND, A. L.

1955 The origin of the land birds of Tristan da Cunha. *Fieldiana: Zoology*, 37, pp. 139—163.

LIST OF SPECIES

Fregetta grallaria melanoleuca SALVADORI

White-bellied Storm Petrel, "Black Skip-jack".

Four specimens. o, February 1958, and ♂ and ♀, 17 september 1959, Nightingale Island; ♂, 2 May 1959, Inaccessible Island.

Wing ♂ 164, 175, ♀ 179.5, o 161; tail ♂ 76, 84, ♀ 85.5, o 74; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 15.5, ♀ 15, o 15; tarsus ♂ 38, 41, ♀ 39.5, o 42; middle toe and claw ♂ 22, 26, ♀ 22.5, o 26 mm.

Iris, bill, and legs black.

The subspecific differentiation and the local individual variation are unsatisfactorily known. The measurements agree with those given by MURPHY (*Am. Mus. Nov.*, 1596, 1952, pp. 5-9) for birds from the Atlantic Ocean. They seem to be larger than those from the Pacific Ocean.

The specimens of 17 September were caught in a nesting burrow in the ground.

Pelagodroma marina marina (LATHAM)

White-faced Storm Petrel; "White-faced Skipjack".

One specimen. ♂, 18 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Wing 159, tail 74, bill (exposed culmen) 16, tarsus 42 mm.

Iris grey; bill and legs black (in the dried skin the webs are yellowish).

Upper parts dark earthen brown; rump and upper tail-coverts light grey, the feathers being margined and finely barred with narrow white lines.

There are large bluish grey patches on the sides of the breast. The white frontal band is interrupted by grey feathers which on the forehead almost reach the base of the bill. The specimen agrees with the remarks by MURPHY and IRVING (Am. Mus. Nov., 1506, 1951, pp. 5-7) on other specimens of the race *marina*.

The bird was taken out of a nesting burrow. Previous records of birds taken in nesting burrows in the Tristan group (all on Nightingale Island) date from 17 October 1873 and 13 September 1951.

Puffinus assimilis elegans GIGLIOLI & SALVADORI

Tristan Little Shearwater; "Whistler".

Two specimens. ♂, April 1958; ♂, 3 May 1959, Inaccessible Island.

Wing ♂ 195, ♀ 187, tail ♂ 80. ♀ 67.5; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 25.5, ♀ 27; tarsus ♂ 41.5, ♀ 43 mm.

Bill blue-grey; legs black or dark greyish brown (in the dried skins the webs show patches of yellowish).

Below the eye (on the cheeks and ear-coverts) the feathers are mottled with dark grey, causing the eyes to be situated within the black of the upper side of the head. In this respect the birds differ from those of the race *tunneyi* from West-Australia in which the dividing line between black and white runs above or through the eyes (see: Brit. Birds, 51, 1958, pl. 66).

The specimens were taken out of their nesting burrows in soft soil.

Puffinus gravis O'REILLY

Great Shearwater; "Petrel".

Three specimens. ♂, ♀, September 1959, Tristan. ♀, Nightingale Island.

Wing ♂ 322, ♀ 330, ♀ 343; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 46, ♀ 48, ♀ 48 mm.

The September birds were taken out of one nesting burrow; but there were no eggs. According to SCHEER the "petrels" arrived in 1959 on September 16th. They were in enormous numbers and started digging out their nesting burrows. A few days later they had all disappeared, not to return before 3-4 weeks later towards the end of October to start egg-laying.

Procellaria aequinoctialis conspicillata GOULD

Spectacled Cape Hen; "Ring-eye".

One specimen. ♀, 3 May 1959, Inaccessible Island.

Wing 364; bill (exposed culmen) 49 mm.

The specimen has numerous irregular patches of white on head and throat; the chin is black. Iris and legs black.

The specimen was taken out of a long, wet nesting burrow in a colony containing about 150-200 breeding pairs of "ring-eyes". These birds are reported to start egg-laying at the end of October; at the date of collecting (May) the young birds were just starting to leave their nests. This colony has been apparently also visited by HAGEN (1952) and certainly by ROWAN,

ELLIOTT and ROWAN (Ibis, 93, 1951, pp. 169-174) in November 1949 and May 1950.

Pterodroma macroptera macroptera (SMITH)

Long-winged Petrel; "Black Haglet".

One specimen. o, February 1958, Tristan.

Wing 309; tail 134; bill (exposed culmen) 36; tarsus 47 mm.

Rather scarce; breeding places according to SCHEER are „Anchorstock" and „Sandy Point". Nests are in holes in the ground. Egg-laying season according to SCHEER is June.

Pterodroma incerta (SCHLEGEL)

Atlantic Petrel; "White-breasted Black Haglet".

Two specimens. ♂, ♀, 27 June 1959, Settlement, Tristan.

Wing ♂ 314, ♀ 308; tail ♂ 135.5, ♀ 131.5; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 36.5, ♀ 37.5; tarsus ♂ 47, ♀ 44 mm.

Pterodroma mollis mollis (GOULD)

Soft-plumaged Petrel.

One specimen. ♂, 17 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Wing 257; tail 115; bill (exposed culmen) 29; tarsus 36 mm.

Upper parts very dark, dusky grey. The specimen has a closed, narrow, finely speckled, light greyish breast band.

Taken out of a nesting burrow.

Daption capensis (LINNAEUS)

Cape Pigeon; "Cape Horn Pigeon".

Two specimens. ♀, 28 June 1959; ♂, 2 October 1959, Tristan.

Wing ♂ 256, ♀ 258; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 28.5, ♀ 30.5; greatest width of bill ♂ 14, ♀ 12.5 mm.

Both specimens were taken at sea, off Settlement.

The Cape Pigeon is stated by ELLIOTT (1957, p. 568) to be "a fairly regular winter visitor"; the species having been observed in May and June. The specimen from October therefore extends the period of the wintering of these birds considerably.

Pachyptila vittata vittata (GMELIN)

Broad-billed Whale-bird; "Night-bird".

Three specimens. o, February 1958; ♂, ♀, 17 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Wing ♂ 208.5, ♂ 213, o 209; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 35, ♀ 34, o 33; greatest width of bill ♂ 20.5, ♀ 21, o 22 mm.

Eyes light blue; bill black; legs "light blue".

These birds are strongly attracted by the light of electric lamps and were therefore easily caught at night. They were numerous in Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands, but in Tristan SCHEER saw it only once, on the western side of the island.

Pelecanoides urinatrix dacunhae NICOLL

Diving Petrel; "Flying Pinnamin".

Three specimens. ♂, 2 ♀, 17 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Wing ♂ 119, ♀ 121, 121.5; tail ♂ 44, ♀ 40.5, 40.5; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 16, ♀ 15, 15; greatest width of lower mandible ♂ 6, ♀ 5.5, 6 mm.

Iris brownish black; bill black; legs grey.

Atlantisia rogersi LOWE

Flightless Rail; "Island Cock".

One specimen. Adult, April 1958, Inaccessible Island.

Wing 56; tail 29; bill (exposed culmen) 20; tarsus 25.5; middle toe and claw 33 mm.

Irish reddish.

Upper parts umber brown; under parts dark bluish grey, lower abdomen and flanks minutely barred with white or buffish brown.

Caught among high tussock-grass. SCHEER was impressed by the ingeniously woven, roofed nests, which he found among the tussock-grass.

Porphyrionis nesiotis comeri ALLEN

Gough Island Gallinule; "Gough Island Cock".

Three specimens. 2 ♂ ad., 1 ♀ ad., 26 February 1960, Gough Island.

Wing ♂ 141.5, 144.5, ♀ 142; bill (measured from nostril) ♂ 16.5, 16, ♀ 14.5; bill (measured from base of frontal shield) ♂ 46.5, 47.5, ♀ 42.5; tarsus ♂ 52, 52, ♀ 50; middle toe and claw ♂ 68.5, 69, ♀ 63 mm.

On the flanks white streaks are very inconspicuous; only a few narrow, tear-shaped white shaft-spots are present. The outer web of the outermost primary barely shows a narrow margin of white in the two males, but in the female specimen it has a white edge of about half a millimetre width.

ELLIOTT (1957) expresses some doubts about the validity of the characters which were thought to distinguish the Tristan race (*nesiotis*) from the Gough Island race (*comeri*), only the "more pronounced white streaks on the flanks and a rather brownish-black tone of the plumage" (p. 579) in Tristan birds remaining as possible differences between the extinct Tristan form and the still flourishing Gough Island birds. Still, when the Gough Island specimens are compared with the coloured plate of the adult Tristan Gallinule in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society (London), 1861, plate xxx, even these differences seem to be very slight and one may doubt if they have existed at all.

Porphyryla martinica (LINNAEUS)

American Purple Gallinule; "Guttersnake".

One specimen. Immature, August 1958, Tristan.

Wing 175.5; bill (measured from nostril) 15; bill (measured from base of frontal shield) 40.5; tarsus 64 mm.

Caught in a chicken-run. According to SCHEER a regular visitor to Tristan, usually from March to July, when even four or five birds have been found in the gardens around the Settlement. They are rather tame and often fall a victim to marauding cats.

Larus dominicanus LICHTENSTEIN

Southern Black-backed Gull; "Kelp Gull".

One specimen. ♀ imm., 2 October 1959, Big Beach, Tristan.

Wing 420; tail 61.5; bill (exposed culmen) 49; dept of bill at base 16.5; tarsus 61.5 mm.

Iris dark brown; bill brown-black; legs light brown.

Almost indistinguishable from first-winter *fuscus*, but bill more robust, particularly the lower mandible deeper and more hooked and the angle of the gonys more protruding.

The species has been only rarely recorded from the Tristan group as a winter visitor; it was observed at Tristan by ELLIOTT (1957, p. 574) from 23 May till 11 September 1952.

Stercorarius skua hamiltoni (HAGEN)

Tristan Skua; "Sea-hen".

One specimen. ♀, 10 May 1959, Tristan.

Nothing can be added to the complicate subspecific taxonomy of this species than to give the measurements of our single specimen: wing 392; tail 142; bill (exposed culmen) 56; tarsus 77 mm. Bill very heavy. Iris, bill and legs black.

Sterna vittata tristanensis MURPHY

Tristan Tern; "King Bird".

Two specimens. Adult, 1958, Nightingale Island. Juvenile, 26 June 1959, Tristan.

In the skin of the adult bird the colour of the bill is bright red; the legs and feet are light red. Colour and colour pattern agree with those described by MURPHY (Am. Mus. Nov., 977, 1938, p. 9). Wing 260; tail 151+; bill (exposed culmen) 36.5; tarsus 20.5; middle toe and claw 24 mm.

The juvenile bird has the crown and upper parts strongly barred and spotted with dark brown. It has fine, dusky spots on the throat, the sides of the neck, and the upper breast. As a whole the colour pattern more strongly reminds that of a juvenile *Sterna sandvicensis* rather than that of either *S. paradisaea* or *S. hirundo* (cf. MURPHY, l.c., p. 14, figure). The specimen is in a full-grown juvenile plumage, probably several months old. Iris and bill blackish; legs dark grey, but with traces of red. Wing 256.5; tail 126.5; bill (exposed culmen) 35.5; tarsus 20.5; middle toe and claw 26.5 mm.

The species visits the islands in the breeding time only. On Tristan the only known nesting places are on the rocks of the „Hardies“, two almost inaccessible islets on the W.N.W.-side. The egg-laying season is in December.

According to SCHEER small fish known as "soldiers" (*Sebastichthys capensis* and *Bovichthys diacanthus*) from the rocky shores of the islands form an important part of the species' diet.

Anous stolidus stolidus (LINNAEUS)

Brown Noddy; "Woodpigeon".

Two specimens. Immature, February 1958; ♂, 18 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Wing ♂ 266; tail ♂ 145; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 41.5; tarsus ♂ 25.5 mm.

Iris, bill, and legs black.

The species visits the islands in the breeding season only. ELLIOTT (1957, p. 577) mentions as dates of the spring arrival of this species 1 and 15 September, respectively. SCHEER (*in litt.*) mentions that the egg-laying season is November and December. Our immature specimen from February is full-grown.

Nesocichla eremita eremita (GOULD)

Tristan Thrush; "Starchy".

Two specimens, ♂, ♀, 17 May 1959, Tristan.

Iris black; bill blackish grey; legs and feet dark brown, with frontal side of the legs lighter.

These specimens formed a pair. They were collected at the "edge of potatoe fields around the Settlement". According to SCHEER these birds occurred only on the mountain slope near the Settlement at about 2000 ft. SCHEER found them very tame; this experience is at variance with that by ELLIOTT (1957), who found them "rather shy" (p. 580).

Nesocichla eremita gordonii STENHOUSE

Inaccessible Island Thrush; "Starchy".

One specimen. ♂, 3 May 1959, Inaccessible Island.

Iris dark brown; bill brown; legs and feet brown.

Collected among the tussock-grass on the island plateau. Tame.

Nesocichla eremita procax ELLIOTT

Nightingale Island Thrush; "Starchy".

Three specimens. ♂, February 1958; ♂, ♀, 16 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Iris dark brown; bill dark brown; legs and feet brown.

The two specimens from September formed a pair. They were collected among the tussock-grass. The larger size and wilder habits of these birds were noticed by SCHEER in the field.

Compared with each other the specimens from Tristan Island (*eremita*) are lightest, both above and below; sides of the head more golden buff with

still lighter rufous, contrasting with the darker crown and neck. The under parts are moderately spotted with dark brown.

The birds from Nightingale Island (*procax*) are darkest, being dark earthen brown on the upper parts, with still darker centres of the feathers. The sides of the head are dark earthen brown like the rest of the head and the neck. The under parts are heavily marked with sharply defined dark brown streaks.

The birds from Inaccessible Island (*gordoni*) are intermediate in coloration, though tending towards Nightingale Island birds in the colour of the upper parts. The sides of the head are dark rufous contrasting with the darker crown and neck.

The measurements of these birds have been listed below (in mm). They have been compared with average measurements computed by ELLIOTT (1957, p. 582) from various sources.

Nesocichla eremita — MALES

	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Bill (exposed culmen)
Tristan I.	106	85	38	23
ELLIOTT, 1957	106.0	83.3	37.0	21.8
Inaccessible I.	117	82	43	22
ELLIOTT, 1957	112.1	84.0	37.8	22.3
Nightingale I.	111	87	40	21
<i>idem</i> ; un-sexed	116	90.5	42	23.5
ELLIOTT, 1957	114.9	88.4	38.5	23.8

Nesocichla eremita — FEMALES

	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Bill (exposed culmen)
Tristan I.	106	86.5	37.5	22
ELLIOTT, 1957	103.3	82.8	37.3	23.0
Nightingale I.	108	81	40	23
ELLIOTT, 1957	113.1	85.9	38.6	23.8

The differences in coloration and size between the three insular populations are clear, but slight.

Nesospiza acunhae acunhae CABANIS

Tristan Bunting; "Canary".

One specimen. ♂ ad., 3 May 1959, Inaccessible Island.

Iris black; bill greyish green; legs dark brown.

The specimen is in adult, almost unstriped plumage. Under parts of a slightly brighter yellow than in the birds from Nightingale Island. Bill thicker than in the Nightingale Island specimens.

Nesospiza acunhae questii LOWE

Nightingale Island Bunting; "Small Canary".

Three specimens. o imm., February 1958: ♂, ♀ ad., 16 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Iris brown; bill greyish blue; legs and feet brown.

The two specimens from September formed a pair. Upper parts slightly brighter green than in the Inaccessible Island specimen. Bill thinner. According to ELLIOTT (1957) the buntings from this island should be chiefly insectivorous, rather than being predominantly seed-eaters as reported for the Inaccessible Island Buntings.

The measurements of these birds have been listed below. They have been compared with the average measurements given by HAGEN (1952).

Nesospiza acunhae — MALES

	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Bill (exposed culmen)	Height of Bill
Inaccessible I.	85	73.5	27.5	14.5	8.5
HAGEN, 1952	85.1	70.4	25.9	15.4	9.0
Nightingale I.	78.5	68	24	15	8
<i>idem</i> ; un-sexed	79.5	68.5	25	13.5	7.5
HAGEN, 1952	79.3	69.0	24.9	14.2	7.9

Nesospiza acunhae — FEMALES

	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Bill (exposed culmen)	Height of Bill
Nightingale I.	79	67	24	13.5	8

The differences between the insular populations are most strongly marked in body-size. The largest birds (from Inaccessible Island) have a slightly heavier bill.

Nesospiza wilkinsi wilkinsi LOWE

Nightingale Island Grosbeak Bunting; "Big Canary", "Big-beaked Canary".

Two specimens. o imm., February 1958; ♂ ad., 16 September 1959, Nightingale Island.

Wing ♂ 99.5, imm. 100.5; tail ♂ 82, imm. 84; tarsus ♂ 30, imm. 30; bill (exposed culmen) ♂ 19, imm. 18; height of bill ♂ 15, imm. 15 mm.

Iris brown; bill greyish blue; legs and feet brown.

Compared with *Nesospiza acunhae* not only the bill in this species is very heavy, but the legs, toes and claws are considerably stronger as well. According to ELLIOTT (1957) the total population on Nightingale Island numbers not more than 30 pairs, the species being almost restricted to the woods of *Phyllica*, from the seeds of which these birds are said to be mainly dependent. SCHEER collected his specimens among the tussock-grass, however. The population on Inaccessible Island (*dunnei*) is reported to be more scattered over the island, but seems to be of a comparable perilously small size (ELLIOTT, 1957).

Rowettia goughensis (W. EAGLE CLARKE)

Gough Island Bunting.

Four specimens. ♀ imm., February 1960; 2 imm., 1 ad., 1960, Gough Island.

Wing ad. 106, imm. 100, 102, 104.5; tail ad. 92, imm. 83, 83, 85; tarsus ad. 32, imm. 31, 31.5, 32.5; bill (exposed culmen) ad. 17, imm. 17, 17, 17.5 mm.

A good photograph of the profusely streaked immature plumage ("*Nesospiza jessiae*" W. EAGLE CLARKE) can be found in BROEKHUYSEN & MACNAE (1949, fig. 16). A photograph of study skins is given by HOLGERSEN (Scient. Results Norwegian Antarctic Expeditions 1927-1928 et sqq., 23, 1945, p. 73, fig. 20).