A NEWLY DISCOVERED COLONY OF SOUTHERN GIANT PETRELS *MACRONECTES GIGANTEUS* ON ISLA GRAN ROBREDO, CHUBUT PROVINCE, ARGENTINA

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Isla Gran Robredo (45 08S, 66 03W), Chubut, Argentina, is located north of the Golfo San Jorge, 12 km offshore (Fig. 1). It is a rocky island of approximately 0.1 km^2 and with a maximum elevation of 40 m above sea level; there is no vegetation and deep crevices are present throughout the island. According to local information, a colony of Southern Giant Petrels *Macronectes giganteus* existed on this island. To confirm its existence, we visited the island on 8 February 1989, locating the colony on the northern and higher sector of the island. Birds were at an advanced stage of the breeding cycle. The colony was filmed and photographed.

Because chicks showed signs of disturbance at our approach, we estimated the number of nests from outside the limits of the colony. The population was estimated in 450 ± 50 nests spread out over an area of about 2 800 m^2. Most nests had one chick, covered with greyish-white down (Figs. 2 & 3). The chicks were approximately 30-40 days old, indicating that the incubation period had started in late October or early November. This information agrees with the estimated laying date for Isla Arce (Punta 1989). We found only three unoccupied peripheral nests and two dead chicks.

Together with the Southern Giant Petrel colony at Isla Arca, described by Humphrey & Livezey (1983) and Punta (1989), this colony is the northernmost breeding location of the species in Argentina. Interestingly, these are the two most oceanic islands of Chubut Province (Fig. 3). These colonies seem to correspond to the third taxon proposed by Hunter (1987) for many reasons: a) the species which breed on them are covered from their head to their neck with plumage that varies from light to very dark grey, b) in no case does the tip of their bills show a bright green or a dark red colouring, but horn-coloured, c) no white phase birds were noticed, either during the breeding season or after it, or in the surrounding areas. There are no records of white-phase Southern Giant Petrels in Chubut Province, d) the laying period seems to be between the ones quoted by Hunter (1984) for Northern Giant Petrels *M. halli* and Southern Giant Petrels at Bird Island, South Georgia, e) both colonies are located on high and exposed sites. These features do not fit patterns quoted for the distinction of the two species of giant petrels (Burger 1978, Hunter 1987).

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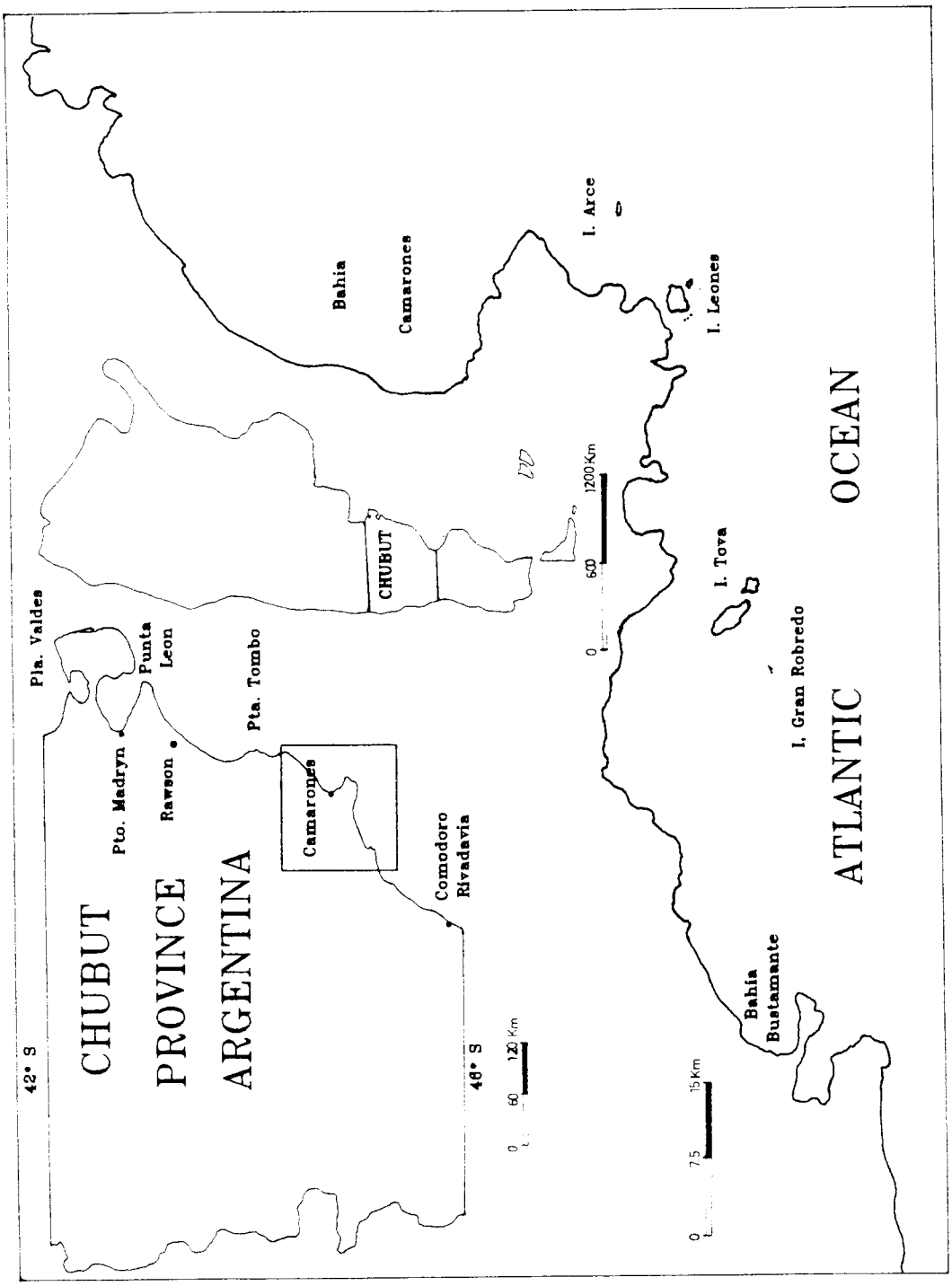

Figure 1

Location of Isla Gran Robredo

Macronectes at South Georgia (Aves: Procellariiformes). *J. Zool* 203: 441-460.

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Figure 2

Partial view of Southern Giant Petrel colony

Figure 3

30-40 days old Southern Giant Petrel chick