

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir,

Impact of human activities on seabirds, and their nomenclature

Two points in recent numbers of Cormorant deserve some comment. In the first place, I observe that Dr M.A. Connor (Cormorant 3: 24) thought it worth summarising my recent review on the effect of pollution on seabirds (in "Marine Pollution", ed. E.D. Johnston, Academic Press, 1976: 403-502). It may be worth pointing out that since I wrote, the occurrence of chlorinated hydrocarbons in the wildlife of New Zealand has been reported by J.W. Lock, S.R.B. Solly & V. Shanks (New Zealand J. Sci. 19: 43-55, 1976). They find that the levels are generally rather low and are highest inland and in marine animals, so that it seems unlikely adverse effects are to be expected in the seabirds of the Southern Ocean yet, though they bear watching, and it would be useful to have a record of the levels and proportions of different compounds in South Africa. Much the same applies to artefacts such as nylon line and plastic, which are measured most easily by merely counting debris on the beach.

However, it seems to me that it might be better to give attention first to the rapidly accelerating impact of human fishing activities on seabirds, which have received much less attention recently than pollution. In the northern hemisphere the first result has been to provide much more food for seabirds at the sea surface, since about a tenth of the mass of the fish caught is lost immediately in the form of vomited stomach contents, spilt fish, and discarded uncommercial species and offal. The immediate result of the provision of this bonanza at a time when the birds began to be protected has been a sustained increase in many of the more aerial species such as the gulls and especially the Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, which in a century has progressed from a local rarity to one of our commonest and most widespread species. The same process is evidently in operation now in the southern hemisphere, and yet there is extraordinarily little published information about what is happening, and it deserves more attention.

The situation with commercial fisheries moreover deserves particular scrutiny because while in the early stages of development they are very wasteful and provide more food rather than less for birds, this cannot be expected to continue. In the first place there is apparently a growing tendency for especially factory ships to retain offal for conversion into fishmeal so that it is no longer available to birds. Secondly, fishing is now becoming so efficient and intense that it has begun to reduce the number of fish in the sea. In the early stages this is again not necessarily inimical to birds, since if the large fish

are removed there may be more small ones left. The results of the further development of industrial fishing for the small fish are likely to be disastrous. The sudden explosion of the Anchoveta *Engraulis ringens* fishery off Peru in the late 1960's was accompanied by the collapse of the greatest seabird community in the world (J.B. Nelson, "The *Sulidae* - Gannets and Boobies", Oxford University Press, 1978: 606-609), and there are signs of a general decline of the fish-eating auks which do not take much offal in Europe. The rest of us are watching South Africa rather anxiously as well. There is a need for records of the state of birds as well as fish populations against which to measure future changes.

In the circumstances it is particularly welcome to see the Southern African Seabird Group bring our knowledge of their long-neglected seabirds up to date, starting with the first basic working tool, a check-list (*Cormorant* 4: 10-17). It should however be realised that while the status reported for the birds is beginning to agree at last with what is known of them elsewhere, some of the rest of us may have difficulty in recognising the names. This may be partly because hyphens have been ruthlessly eliminated from everything except the expression "up-to-date" and the rejected White-eyed Gull (was this why it was rejected?), resulting in words up to 13 letters long, but there is also some debatable taxonomy. The fact that Bonaparte's name *Bulweria* (1843) antedates his *Pterodroma* (1856) by thirteen years so that if it is regarded as a gadfly petrel they all ought to be called *Bulweria* is not usually considered debatable, though the combination is not always considered wise (*Ibis* 107: 401-405; 117: 535).

7 October 1978

W.R.P. Bourne
Dept. Zoology
Tillydrone Avenue
University of Aberdeen
Aberdeen AB9 2TN
Scotland

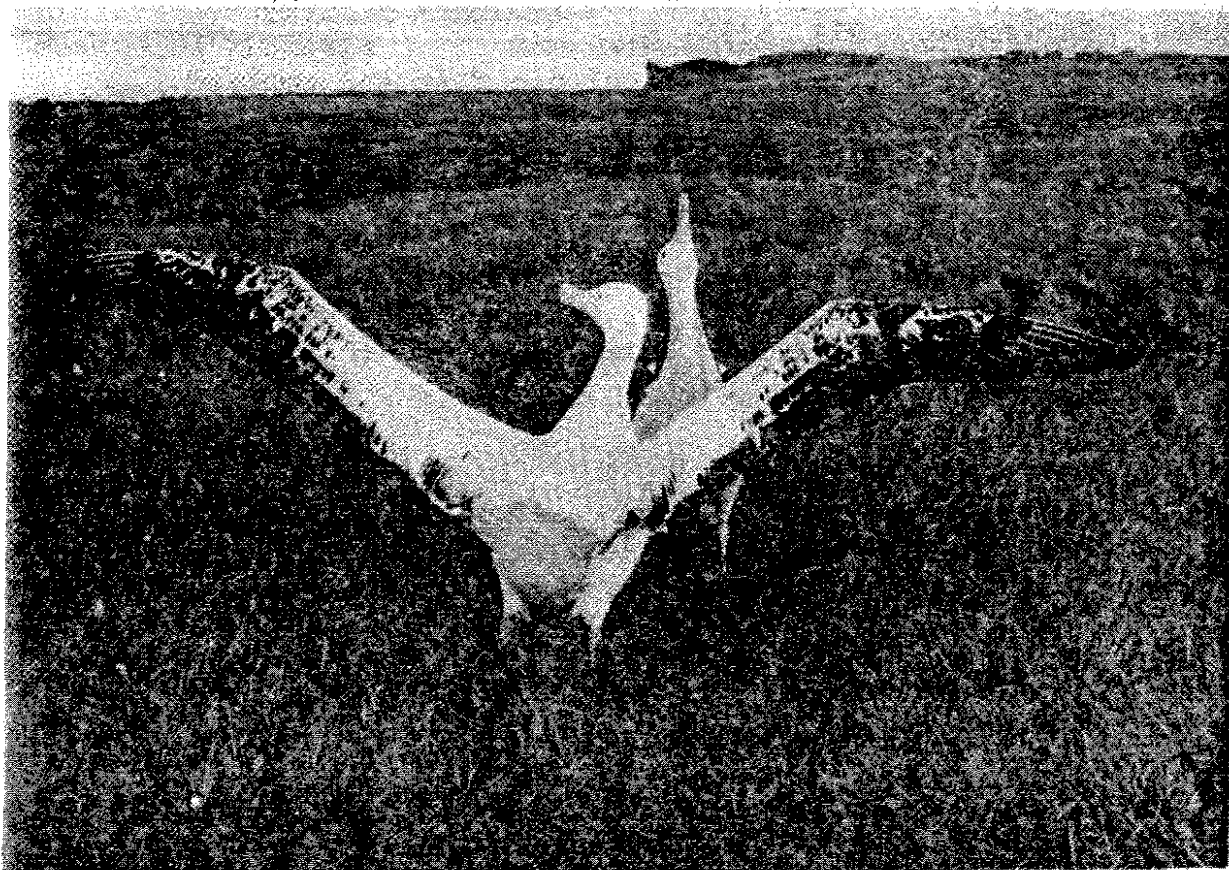
Dear Sir,

Thank you for extending to me the opportunity to comment on the last paragraph of Dr Bourne's letter. I do not like hyphens (nor does Fowler in his Modern English Usage) and applaud the modern tendency to eliminate them by running the words together in terms of the teutonic basis of our language. The hyphen survived in White-eyed Gull because 'whiteeyed' still looks clumsy to me, perhaps wrongly. As for the rejection of the White-eyed Gull from our list, my colleague, Mr J.C. Sinclair, will deal with it in a paper to be completed on his return from Marion Island in the middle of 1979. I agree with his views but do not wish to anticipate his expression of them.

It is indeed a howler to synonymise *Bulweria* and *Pterodroma* under the latter and junior name and I am obliged to Dr Bourne for pointing it out. Personally, I believe this lumping to be cladistically correct but it may be premature to do it in our current list.

7 November 1978

R.K. Brooke
FitzPatrick Institute
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7700



Courtship display of the Wandering Albatross
on Marion Island

Photographed by A. Berruti