Interbreeding of Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses

ROTHSCHILD (The avifauna of Laysan and the neighboring islands, p. 292, 1893) recorded a single specimen of albatross which he regarded as a cross between Diomedea nigripes and D. immutabilis. In May, 1945, on Midway Island, I noted a nigripes and an immutabilis feeding the same partly fledged young. Because of this, I made a particular search for further evidence of interbreeding when I again visited Midway in December, 1946.

On Eastern Island of Midway on December 30, 1946, an apparent hybrid was observed for 40 minutes, and kodachrome pictures were made. This bird was nigripes in color except for white underparts on the body extending forward to the anterior part of the breast. Its behavior, however, was like that of immutabilis; the head was carried high in walking—not extended forward and low as is customary for nigripes. It was standing in a mixed group on a sand dune near the beach.

In two different places on the beach of Sand Island, Midway, a nigripes and an immutabilis were present at a single nest isolated from the rest of a nigripes colony. In both instances, the Laysan Albatross was incubating an egg, and the Black-footed Albatross was resting alongside. A subsequent visit to one of the nests revealed a nigripes incubating the egg and an immutabilis standing near-by.

Still another mixed pair was observed, on the beach on December 31, rubbing the bills together and stroking the feathers of the neck. Occasionally one or the other would execute some movements of the dance typical of its species, but the couple never did perform at the same time. No nest was present here.

It seems likely that interbreeding of these species is more frequent than is usually believed. This may not be surprising in view of the similarity in size, structure, and habits, and the overlap of nesting colonies on crowded islands.

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The Poisoning of Bufo marinus by the Flowers of the Strychnine Tree

ON MAY 9, 1947, a paralyzed toad, Bufo marinus, was picked up beneath a large strychnine tree, Strychnos nux-vomica, growing on the grounds of the Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry. This toad would become convulsed, with the fore and hind legs stiffly extended in a muscular spasm, whenever it attempted to move or was touched. Any stimulus above or along the spine was especially effective in causing such a spasm.

The animal was anesthetized by an injection of sodium pentobarbital and the stomach dissected out. On opening the stomach, the following material was found: one snail, two ants, two cockroaches, one small beetle, one small unidentified leaf, and ten flowers of Strychnos nux-vomica.

It would appear probable, judging both from the symptoms and the presence of Strychnos nux-vomica flowers in the stomach, that the toad was suffering from strychnine poisoning. Arnold reports the fatal poisoning of Bufo marinus in this fashion and speculates on the reason for the ingestion of the Strychnos flowers by the toad (Arnold, Harry L., Poisonous plants of Hawaii, 71 p., 24 pl. Tongg, Honolulu, 1944).

It is possible that such ingestion by the toad reported here was adventurous while feeding upon insects, since the area beneath the strychnine tree was thickly carpeted with blossoms fallen from it.—Vernon E. Brock, Director, Division of Fish and Game, Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry, Honolulu, Hawaii.