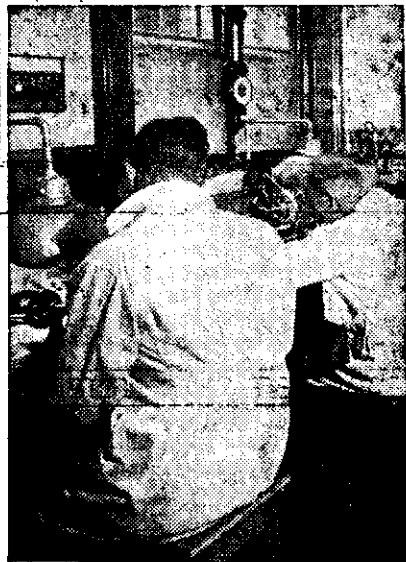


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TAKEN on Campbell Island, at a range of about two feet, this unusual photograph shows a grey-headed mollymawk feeding its chick

### Wild Life in Sub-antarctic

## MORE ABOUT MOLLYMAWKs

Written for "The Listener"  
by J. H. SORENSEN

THE "albatross with white eye-brows" taken during Cook's first voyage in the South Indian Ocean was undoubtedly a sooty albatross. The description, however, might be applied to most, if not all, the mollymawks for they, too, have a narrow band of white feathers in the region of the eye. The mollymawks generally have white or light grey plumage on their heads and, in consequence, the "eyebrows" do not show up as they do against the darker plumage of the sooty albatross.

What does show up on some of the species is the presence of a patch of darker plumage just above the eye. This gives the birds the appearance of wearing a heavy frown. "Quizzical" and "sneering" are other terms I have heard applied, but frowning seems more appropriate. Only from a point of view of appearance, however, for of all sea-birds, the mollymawks and their larger relatives the albatrosses proper are the most friendly and confiding towards human beings. Perhaps, as has been claimed, they are merely stupid; but I prefer to think of them as being quiet and fearless through their lack of contact with the worst sides of human nature. Their trustfulness, the natural way they behaved when studied quietly, led me to admire and respect these beautiful birds.

Several very large breeding colonies exist at the northern end of Campbell Island and here the black-browed and grey-headed mollymawks live and breed during the season. The black-browed bird has a head almost wholly white and the beak is pinkish yellow. The grey-headed bird is obviously named for it has the whole of the head and neck soft dove-grey in shade. The beak is mainly black with the top yellow, as is also the lower half of the lower mandible.

It seems rather strange that these two different species should associate in the same colonies. Sometimes a colony is almost wholly composed of one of the species; but somewhere about the area, on the edges or even in the middle, will be found a small group of the others.

### Northern Occurrences

Although a typically southern bird, the black-browed mollymawk has been found in the northern hemisphere. Because many of the records date back to the days of sail, one has to be wary of attributing all of these records to the flight of the birds. All albatrosses are

captured without much difficulty on a hook trailed behind a slow-moving ship, and not all the birds so captured found their way into the cook's pot. Some we know were taken aboard and liberated far to the north of their usual range. In 1878 a black-browed mollymawk, now in an English museum, was shot near Spitzbergen in latitude 80 degrees north. This bird, despite its antarctic affinities, had therefore strayed far closer to the north than the south pole.

Far more remarkable and, indeed, almost like a fairy tale, is the thoroughly substantiated story told by Murphy in his great work *The Oceanic Birds of South America*. It concerns another black-browed mollymawk which lived among the gannets on an island of the Faeroes group, between the Shetland Islands and Iceland, for 34 years. It was constantly seen amongst the gannets on their November emigration and returned with them in February. By the inhabitants of the region it was called the "King of the Gannets." Finally it was shot and is now preserved in the museum at Copenhagen. Just how it reached such a northern latitude, remained there and failed to make south again, is rather remarkable. The length of time it was there provides us with an interesting clue to the great age members of the albatross group must reach. As Murphy

(continued on next page)