


# Editorial

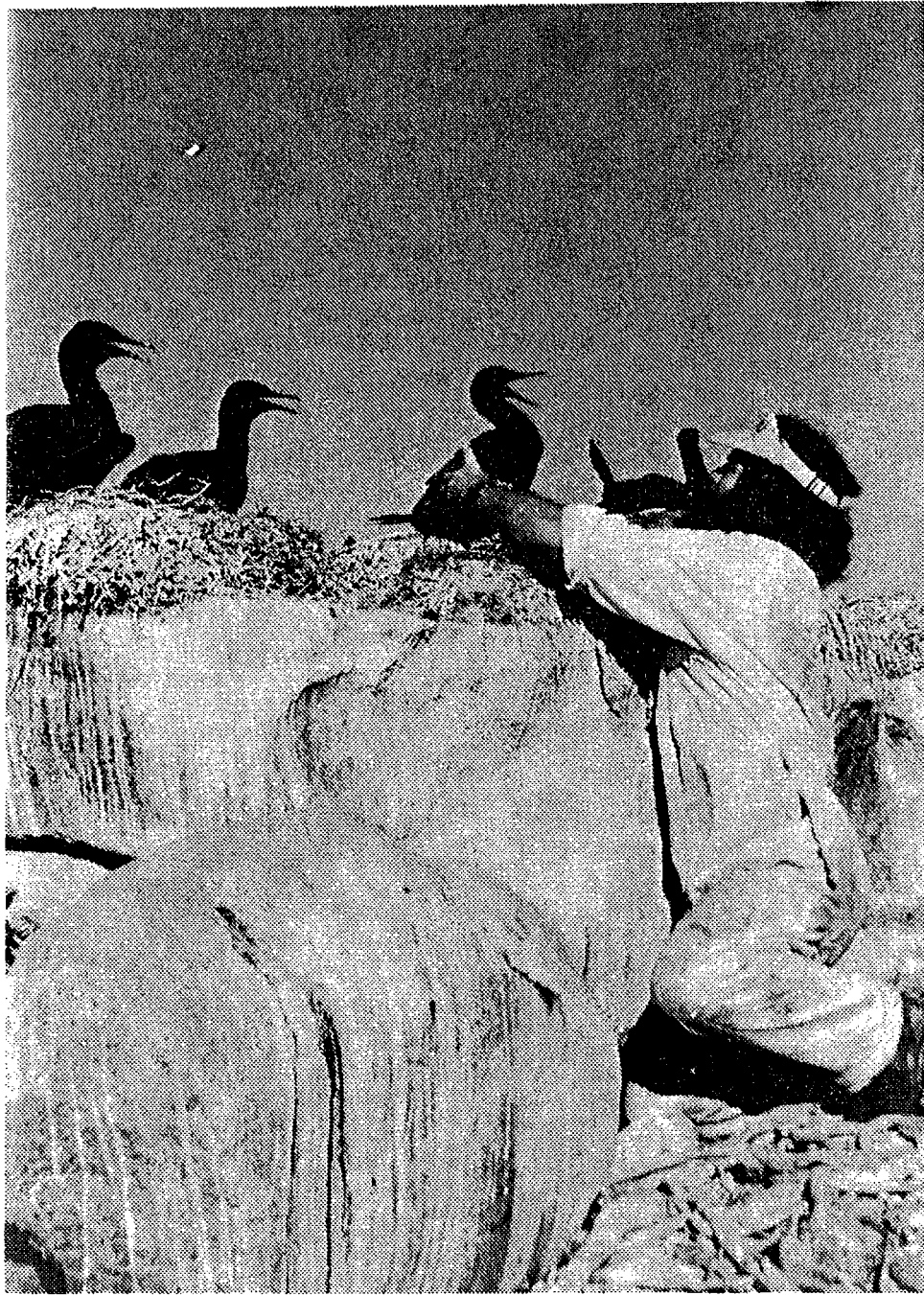
## GRASSHOLM TO GOUGH

Your editor has done some travelling in 1982. After attending the 18th International Ornithological Congress in Moscow in August, I spent nearly a week on Skomer Island, Dyfed, Wales, at the kind invitation of Dr Chris Perrins of the Edward Grey Institute, Oxford. From there, on 2 September, a beautiful sunny day, we sailed (in a renovated lifeboat) 12 km westwards to the island of Grassholm. Grassholm is a small (approximately 9 ha) island most well known for its large gannetry of some 15 500 pairs. North Atlantic Gannets *Sula bassana* had large downy chicks during our visit and were much in evidence wheeling over the island and covering half of it with a noisy white carpet of breeding birds. It was hot enough for the gannet chicks to be gular fluttering with drooped wings and raised head and open bill. The chicks and adults were orientated so that their bodies shaded their feet. These are all thermoregulatory patterns I have observed in the closely related Cape Gannet *Sula capensis*. Atlantic Puffins *Fratercula antarctica* once bred on Grassholm but apparently no longer do so. R.M. Lockley in his book "Letters from Skokholm" quotes an estimated 250 000 pairs of puffins as being present in 1890! But now only the remnants of their collapsed burrows exist. During my visit I recorded 13 species of birds on the island, 'dipping out' on a single Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* which of course was the bird I had most wanted to see. Grassholm is a nature reserve owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and since landing is not very easy, its birds are well protected. On the return journey to Skomer we saw numbers of Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* and Common Guillemots *Uria aalge*. To a southern hemispherist, auks on the surface of the sea are fascinating : they look like penguins!

One month after returning to Cape Town I again set sail, this time on the M.V. *S.A. Agulhas* to Gough Island in the southern Atlantic. Like Grassholm, Gough is also a British possession, but there the similarity ends. Gough is cold, wet, unspoilt and absolutely beautiful. Our task was to undertake a complete island count of Wandering Albatross chicks on the uplands of Gough. With some helicopter support and after a few days in tents, rained and fogged in, we accomplished this task and returned on foot to the Meteorological Base which is run by South Africa. From there we set up nearby monitoring colonies of Yellow nosed and Sooty Albatrosses and Rockhopper Penguins, staking out nests and ringing breeding adults.

In 1982 I got married, bought a house, started a new job at the 'Fitztitute', travelled to England, Scotland, Wales and bird-watched in the parks of Moscow. I also twitched two of the world's best seabird islands : Grassholm and Gough.

John Cooper 



Editor of *The Cormorant* with  
African Seabird Group logo birds at Dassen Island

Photographed by *H.A. van der Heyde*