

Guest Editorial

SHOULD MARINE ORNITHOLOGISTS HAVE BIRDS?

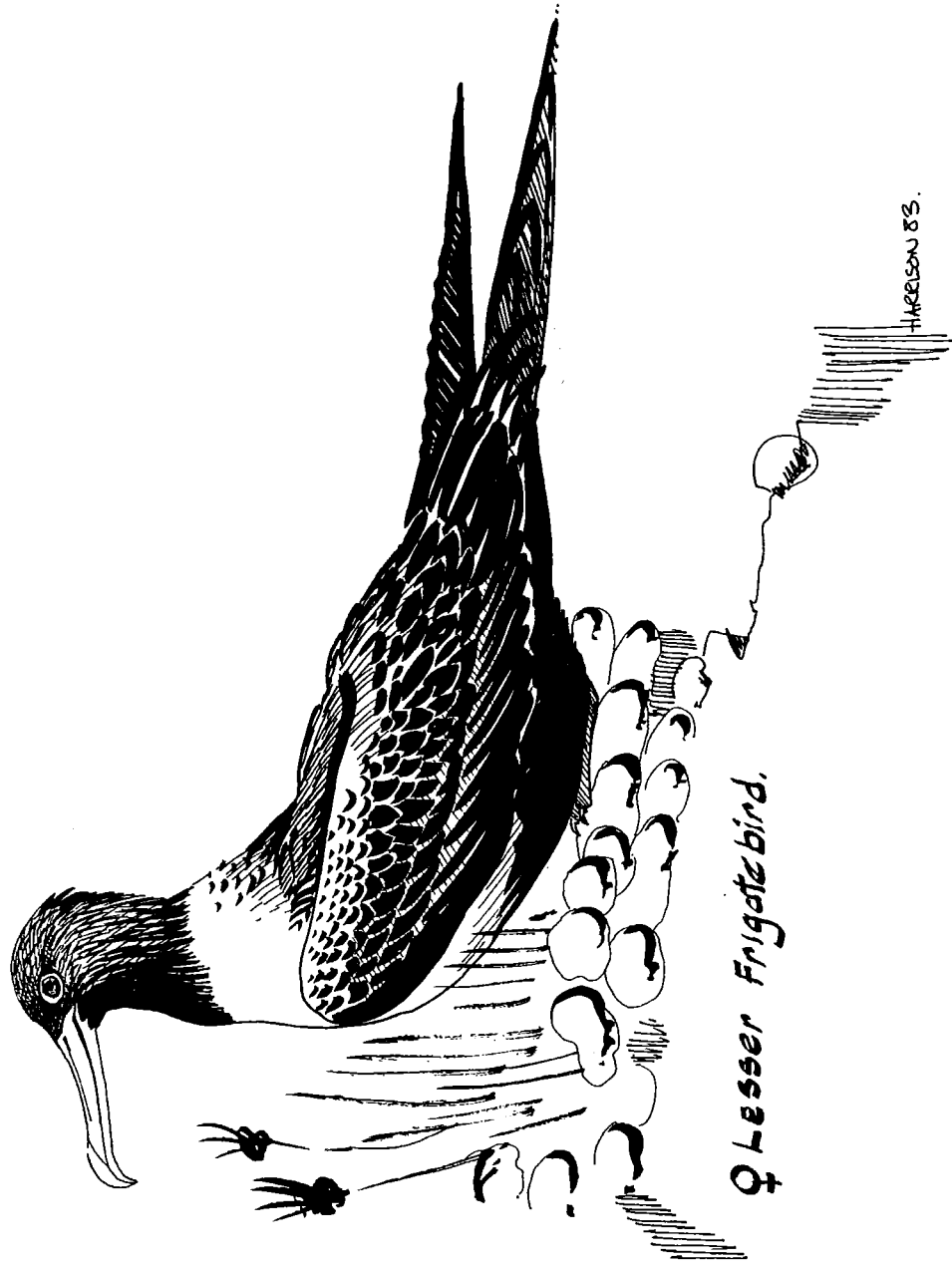
Should marine ornithologists have beards? An interesting question. Statistics from the FitzPatrick Institute show that out of ten marine ornithologists, only two don't have beards. One of these two grows a beard when down on Marion Island and promptly shaves it off on his return. The other . . . well, the reason for lack of beard should become clear later.

Why have a beard at all? The usual reply to this question is that shaving is a nuisance, particularly in the field. There may be more subtle reasons, such as shielding from cold, very relevant when studying certain seabirds. But a serious problem arises in the far south when beards can become lumps of ice. Beards may also be useful sources of spare food; chewing thoughtfully on last night's stew while tramping across the wilds of Gough Island. And of course there is always the matter of 'image'. How much more manly it is to have a thick bushy beard poking out from a balaclava, perched above a warm, woolly jumper, when holding one's binoculars into a howling gale, trying to spot a Salvin's Prion at 500 m. Of course some grow better beards than others . . . !

But what about those marine ornithologists who can't grow beards, however hard they may try? Women's inability to grow beards certainly has a biological basis. It may also have something to do with our inability to use toilets without doors on.

So, should marine ornithologists have beards, rather in the manner of a trade mark? Well, if they should it does leave us women out in the cold (in a manner of speaking). But, come to think of it, most of the female marine ornithologists I know have long hair. Our answer to beards?

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♀ Lesser Frigatebird.