

OSNZ/Birding Wanganui field trip to Manawatu Estuary, 21st June 2008

On Saturday morning, five of us from Wanganui—Jocelyn and Ian Bell, Paul Gibson, Bill Greenwood, and myself—visited the Manawatu Estuary on an OSNZ Wanganui Branch field trip. The day was perfect for bird watching and photography, with a cloudless sky and almost no wind. Despite the sound and fury of the 2nd round of the North Island Winter Enduro Series of jet ski races taking place on the estuary at the time, we saw the following species and minimum numbers:

Black Shag	6
Little Black Shag	up to 7 hunting communally in the bay opposite Darwick Rd.
Little Pied Shag	1 on the small pond at the corner of Palmer Rd and Wylies Rd.
White-faced Heron	15, most of them concentrated along the shoreline of the upper estuary, 1 bird every 20 m or so.
Cattle Egret	5 accompanying cattle on the outskirts of Foxton Beach township, near the Palmer Road turnoff, in mid morning. Only 1 bird at the same site in the mid afternoon; it appeared to have an injured leg. At the same time, there were 5 Cattle Egrets on the shore of the upper estuary, above the Manawatu Marine Boating Club.
Royal Spoonbill	16
Canada Goose	about 10 birds on the small pond at the corner of Palmer Rd and Wylies Rd. They were quite tame, and so may not have been truly wild.
Mallard	scattered throughout the estuary, with 50+ birds upstream beyond the boating club.
Grey Teal	about 80 birds upstream of the boating club.
Australasian Shoveller	8
Pied Oystercatcher	6
Pied Stilt	82 at the high tide roost opposite Darwick Rd; others scatter elsewhere along the estuary.
Wrybill	33 roosting together on the beach off Pinewood Road. One of these birds had a metal ring.
Masked Plover	17
Bar-tailed Godwit	6 at the high tide roost, at high tide; later, 5 birds were seen feeding at the upper end of the estuary at a time when there were still 3 birds loafing at the high tide roost. One of these latter birds was colour-banded, B-white flag-B on the right leg, but the full band combination was not seen. It may have been YR-B[W]B, a bird that Paul Gibson has seen and photographed twice over the past couple of months, and which Phil Battley is monitoring.
Black-backed Gull	334, most of them feeding in the middle of the river, or roosting on the southern bank of the estuary.
Red-billed Gull	33 counted together on the beach off Pinewood Rd, but other individuals and small groups elsewhere along the estuary.

Black-billed Gull	2, mingling with the Red-billed Gulls.
Caspian Tern	37 overall, 35 of which were roosting on the beach off Pinewood Rd, including one colour-banded bird --YM; another bird had bright orange lesions on both legs (and feet).
White-fronted Tern	up to 51 roosting with Caspian Terns and Red-billed Gulls on the beach off Pinewood Rd.

On the way to Foxton Beach, we checked the farm on the Whangaehu Beach Road where Cattle Egrets have been recorded during the past few winters. No birds were seen. (A similar check in late April also failed to locate any birds.) There were also no Cattle Egrets along Wylies Rd, near Foxton airstrip, a place where they have been recorded a number of times recently. Those seen near Foxton Beach are probably the same birds, as the distance between the two sites is just about 2 km.

On the way back to Wanganui, Paul, Bill and I visited the Koitiata lagoon, adjacent to the mouth of the Turakina River. We counted 1 Wrybill, 46 Banded Dotterel, 12 Black-fronted Dotterel, 20 Pied Stilt, and 1 Caspian Tern. More stilts and dotterels (probably both species) were seen against the light at the north-western end of the lagoon, but were not counted. The lagoon has changed substantially since last year, holding much less water than previously. At the same time, the Turakina River has extended its mouth south-eastwards, with some of the intervening dunes having been removed. Drainage from the lagoon to the river may have increased, not helped by the lower-than-average rainfall in the region.

Incidentally, following up an email earlier this year about the occurrence of black-backed Australian Magpies in Wanganui district, I counted the number of white-backed and black-backed birds seen between Wanganui and Foxton Beach (via Himatangi Beach Rd and Wylie's Rd). A total of 57 magpies were categorised, 53 white-backed and 4 black-backed, a ratio of just over 13:1. Two of the black-backed birds were seen east of Kaitoki. The other two were seen south of Sanson. It would be interesting to extend the survey, recording the numbers of white- and black-backed birds seen, together with the locations of the black-backed birds.

Addendum

White Heron	Duncan Watson (duncanw@inthelight.co.nz) reported photographing a White Heron on the estuary above the Boating Club
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