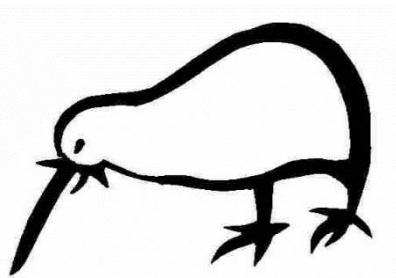


# Apteryx

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*All photos by authors unless stated otherwise*

## Editor's comments

*Welcome to the Far North Regional Newsletter.*

*I have temporarily picked up the baton from our long-standing editor Detlef Davies who did a wonderful job for over 14 years putting out over 35 newsletters in that time. That is more than a sterling effort! Our sincere thanks to Detlef.*

*With the annual conference being hosted in our regional in June, it seemed appropriate to also welcome readers from other areas and share some of what is happen up here in the Far North.*

*Our RR gives an overview of past meetings; we have highlights from the regional recorder and members, concentrating on our Far North sightings; we look at our beach patrol results and provide some handy hints for identification of dead and decaying birds; there are some notes on interesting bird books and provoking insights into Myna behaviour in our region. We also have a light hearted article of when it is **not** all about the birds and another when it is!*

*I have added some ideas of what could be in the next newsletter and hope our members and readers will have more stories and ideas to share. Any contributions will be most welcome.*

*Tansy*

## Recent meetings and events – Les Feasey

**23 March 2018** Nine present. Dayna Davies gave a lovely 10-minute presentation exhibiting all the enthusiasm of a young person with boundless energy and a desire to change the world for a better place. Dayna talked about several projects. She has embarked on building a computer application for competitive birders to find birds on trails and predefined routes and see how many birds they can find on those routes. She is project managing the building a new gannet colony in the Tutukaka area and helping with surveying Grey-faced petrel nests in the same area.

Ian Wilson's presentation on Puketi Forest was a story of 14 years of trials and persistence to establish a Kokako colony in a pest free zone in the centre of Puketi Forest. Ian recounted the history of Puketi Forest. This included the kauri logging, a group of determined neighbours, success, failure, translocations and then finally success again, plus hundreds of hours planting, trapping, monitoring birds, knowing each Kokako by name, its mate and breeding success. Ian's graphs showed the concurrent expansion of other native species as the pest free zone produced rewards.



**23 February 2018** Sixteen present. Tansy Bliss shared her experiences from five years on the Chatham Islands, and showed us some beautiful photos of the rare birds she worked with on the off-shore island nature reserves. Challenges included getting to and landing on the islands in rough seas and having to wear special platforms when walking on the Islands so as not to collapse the numerous burrows of seabirds nesting below ground. Over 280 Black Robin were all uniquely colour banded and had to be accounted for during bi annual censuses on Mangere and Rangatira Islands, a process that could take several weeks.

**26 January 2018** Thirteen present. Darren Markin presented photos from his Tutukaka Pelagic, 5 days on Tiritiri Matangi, and birding at Waipu, and Mangawhai.

On the Tutukaka Pelagic, Darren got some excellent photos of Grey Noddy, Cook's Petrel, New Zealand Storm Petrel, Fairy Prion, Buller's Shearwater and Black Petrel. However, the Tiritiri Matangi photos stole the show with Spotless Crane, Little Spotted Kiwi, night time shots of Blue Penguin, Takahe family shots, Kokako and Whitehead. All are top quality images, so look out for them on NZBirdsOnline.org.nz in case they get an airing there. Darren's visit to Waipu/Mangawhai Heads produced some Fairy Tern classics. One photo showed 5 Fairy Tern together and Darren explained he couldn't get the other two in the photo! Since there are only 40 Fairy Tern in the world, 10% of the world's population were present.

CJ Ralph summarised 30 years of census data from the Ipipiri Islands. His extensive knowledge of the bird populations and trends produced some surprises and encouragement. New species continue to be introduced to the Islands and as the forest habitats slowly recover, new opportunities arise. He also made a plea for participation in the census in Dec 2018, and hopes to develop the census into a long-term project ideal for young birders to be involved in. Further details of his census information and project can be obtained by contacting CJ Ralph directly or through the RR.

Kevin Matthews made a presentation "30 Years of Far North Birding". Kevin has lived in the Kaitia area all his life and has been a keen birder since the age of five. His observations covered the changing political climate, the expanding human population, the current ecological crisis and the effects of conservation initiatives undertaken by the Department of Conservation and community groups are having on reversing some of the past trends. It made fascinating listening and generated much discussion.

**24 November 2017** Nineteen present. David Lawrie, OSNZ President, honoured us with a visit. David made a presentation on Manukau Harbour changes over the last 30 years. Kevin Matthews made a brief presentation on Far North Barn Owls. After the talk, kiwi were heard calling in the adjacent forest.

**27 October 2017** Eleven present. Heather O'Brien shared her experiences on the Galapagos Islands, beautiful photos from an interesting trip.

**25 August 2017** Far North Birds AGM. Thirteen present. Officers all re-elected. Science Fair results reported Issac Chambers winning the bird prize with a study "Acoustic Monitoring of Kiwi Calls". He used neural network software, an impressive effort for a 15 year old.

**28 July 2017** Eight people present. Parengarenga and Kowhai surveys completed and reported. Beach patrol reports. Social Media discussed.

**30 June 2017** Ten members present. Far North Birds approved holding the 2018 Conference and AGM at Waitangi. Most of the discussion was planning field trips for the Conference.



## A sad but honourable end for a visiting penguin – Tansy Bliss

Just after Christmas 2017, some visitors saw a large penguin languishing in a rock pool near the Herekino harbour. They thought this was a bit odd and after completing their walk and finding the penguin still in the pool, decided to carry it back to their car. After seeking advice from the DOCHOT line, they took it to the DOC office in Kaitaia. Sadly the penguin died on arrival, and was promptly put in the freezer for identification and preservation. Using a crested penguin id chart, it's identify was confirmed as an immature Fiordland Crested penguin, noting the lack of bare skin at the bill base and the crest meeting the upper plate of the bill. The bird was totally out of range and probably caught in some bad weather while exploring the waters of its home range of Fiordland.



The deceased penguin was in perfect condition and an uncommon specimen, so the National Museum Te Papa was very happy to receive this bird for its collection and displays once all the relevant paperwork was completed. We hope that it will have a place in educating anyone visiting the museum and illustrating what extraordinary wildlife lives and moves around our coastline.

## Swallows on 90 Mile Beach – Isabella Godbert

Over the last 2 years we have been doing a beach patrol on 90 Mile Beach about every 2 months. We count dead birds and also all the live birds, driving about 35 kms on average.

In May 2016 we counted 1429 Welcome Swallows – they were amazing to see flying so fast and at the top of the beach and over the sand dunes. They were mainly in the first 20kms, so were in a sort of block.

The rest of the year we see very few Swallows sometimes none. However, in August 2016 we counted two hundred and in August 2017, eighty.

A wonderful experience and a puzzle.



*Photo: Les Feasey*

## Bitterns in unexpected places

**Punakitere loop** between Kaikohe and Rawene, April 2081: Les Feasey was alerted to a Bittern hiding in some thick vegetation by a Harrier repeatedly going down to worry at something out of sight. Patience and a camera at the ready produced a great sighting and photo.

**Diggers Valley Road/Orowhana** intersection, Feb 2018: Gary Little reports an Australasian Bittern in the middle of the road. “We stopped and observed it from about six metres for about 5 minutes before it flew casually away. It was sunny and at 1pm on a gravel back country road”

**Godinovich Road** Awanui, Jan 2018: spotted by Tansy Bliss two mornings in a row while cycling to work around 6.30am..



*Photo: Les Feasey*



## Dead birds!

Scanning the beaches for dead birds is an interesting way to spend a windy afternoon, or an early morning after a storm has blown through. Identification of those beach wrecked bodies can be challenging when they have been around a while and their best features have gone. However, there are clues in the size and shape of the bill, in delicate underwing feathers, wing length and overall body shape and size and if that doesn't help, today's photographic mobile phones usually mean we can get expert advice when needed. Some examples are shown below including an exciting "beach" find of a Kermadec Petrel, which turned into a Mottled Petrel after investigation and confirmation of those key features!

Bird	Key features	Bird	Key Features
	<b>Buller's Shearwater</b> Bill size and shape Broad W on back and wing		<b>Fluttering Shearwater</b> Clean white underparts and underwing with dusky brown edges Size of bird. Note very similar to Hutton's Shearwater
	<b>Sooty Shearwater</b> Silver underwing All dark plumage		Bill size and shape
	<b>Fairy prion</b> Distinctive blue grey plumage Dark W across wings and back, deep dark tip to tail Bill length and width		<b>Common Diving Petrel</b> Overall small size, short stubby bill,
	<b>Pied Shag</b> Size and shape Heavy webbed feet Black trouser leg/thigh		<b>Mottled Petrel</b> Bill width and length Underwing pattern (darker feathers on the leading edge of the underwing) Mottled chest plumage

In the Far North a dedicated group of 3 or 4 hardy souls, patrol 90 mile beach every few months and others chip in with records from their local patches. Isabella Godbert has the unenviable job of getting all the records together and these are presented below. If more than one patrol/incidental find happened in the same month, the records and distances patrolled have been added together. Of note is the high number (78) of Blue penguins found beach wrecked in 2018 up to 14<sup>th</sup> April.

<b>MONTHS in 2017</b>	<b>APRIL</b>	<b>JULY</b>	<b>AUGUST</b>	<b>OCT</b>	<b>NOV</b>	<b>DEC</b>	<b>DEC</b>
<b>DISTANCE (KMS)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>?</b>
<b>Beaches</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>Tokerau, Maitai</b>	<b>90 mile</b>
Whitecapped Mollymawk							1
Buller's Shearwater				2		1	1
Sooty Shearwater				1		1	1
Fluttering Shearwater	1		1				2
Little Shearwater						1	
Common diving petrel					1	5	
Fairy Prion		1		2		1	
Mottled Petrel							1
White headed Petrel							1
Little Blue penguin	1					7	
Australasian gannet			1	2			
Black Shag						1	
Pied Shag						1	
Arctic Skua						1	
Long tailed Skua	1						
Black backed Gull	1					1	
Caspian tern			1				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Months in 2018</b>	<b>JAN</b>	<b>JAN</b>	<b>FEB</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>APRIL</b>	<b>APRIL</b>
<b>DISTANCE</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Beaches</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>Tokerau</b>	<b>Tokerau</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>	<b>Tokerau</b>	<b>Tokerau</b>	<b>90 Mile</b>
Flesh footed shearwater		1					
Buller's shearwater		1	5	1			
Sooty shearwater			1				
Fluttering shearwater		51	5	4	3	2	
Little shearwater							
Diving petrel		2	1				
Fairy prion		1					
Thin billed prion		1					
Antarctic Prion							6
Mottled petrel				1			
White headed petrel		1					
Grey-faced petrel		2					
White faced storm petrel		3					
Blue penguin		16	3	9	29	20	1
Australasian gannet		3	3	2	2	1	
Black Shag			1				
Pied shag		2	1		1		
Black backed gull				3	1		
Red Billed Gull			1		1	3	
White fronted tern		1					
Caspian Tern				1			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>7</b>

## A new look at Buller – Tansy Bliss

A rather prized copy of the 1967 edition of “Buller’s Birds of New Zealand” sits on my bookshelf and I reread the passages about the birds I encounter when I want more colourful text than in my trusty Heather & Robertson 2006 field guide. Keen to know more about the man who put together such a comprehensive and early account of New Zealand birds I was delighted to find a copy of “Buller a reluctant conservationist” by Ross Galbreath in the library on Raoul Island where I was based for four months last year.

The social history of New Zealand in the early to late 1800’s is well described through Buller’s early life as the son of a Wesleyan Missionary and then his constant struggle to gain recognition within the British scientific community and denounce his New Zealand birth. His ambitious undertaking to produce the first and second edition of A History of New Zealand Birds illustrated by J. G. Keulemans was no easy feat, but it did give him the distinctions and honorary degrees he longed for.

What was particularly enlightening, was Buller’s work legal work with Maori land claims, raising questions about



whether he fair and respectful, or ruthless and manipulative, working for his own gain. Equally his influence on the first reserves set up to protect native species; did he help or hinder these causes? Did his obsession with collecting species he deemed “doomed” help them along the way to extinction or secure precious skins in perpetuity for the nation? His collection and export of one of the last living laughing owls seemed questionable for a conservationist, as did his selling a fake specimen of the same to Rothschild who was not fooled and publicly humiliated Buller.

I personally was left with an uncomfortable feeling about a man I had previously revered and wondered what choices he really had in a period of such vigorous colonization when it was considered that conquering a nation included replacing indigenous species and people with “stronger races”.

Figure 1. Walter Lawry Buller, 1905. Lithograph by Walter A. Cox. Alexander Turnbull Library A-087-012.

## Interesting sightings in the Far North

*Rather than record everything that was seen since the last newsletter I have chosen a few recent highlights in locations which are easily accessible and should encourage everyone to get out and keep their eyes open!*

April 2018: Karikari beach – New Zealand Dotterel (22), Banded Dotterel (20), Ruddy Turnstone (11)

March 2018: 4 Cirl Buntings along Church Road, a couple of Kms from Kaitaia including one adult male. This one needs verification, so worth taking a look and checking that rump colour.

March 2018: Tokerau Beach - Fluttering Shearwaters (thousand +)

March 2018: Unahi Wharf - Royal Spoonbill (81 March count) (450 April count)

Jan – Feb 2018: Lake Waiporohita - NZ Dab chicks with young

Dec 2017-April 2018: Dick Ulrich Road Tokerau Beach:Wrybill (3 in Dec and up to 21 in April)

Dec 2017: Karikari beach - 2 Pectoral Sandpipers, 3 Sharptailed Sandpipers

Dec 2017: Cable Bay - 2 reef herons in flight



# Predator- Free New Zealand: The Indian Myna –The Dominant Bird in the Far North

Lois Wagener

When the Government announced the Predator-Free New Zealand plan last year we, the ornithological enthusiasts of the nation, 'leapt for joy'. We could see hope for the helpless, defenceless feathered co-inhabitants of our nation.

The Government has made a substantial commitment to the project. It already funds predation control with a substantial input of \$70 million each year; it has added an additional \$28 million over the next 4 years and \$7 million each year thereafter. The government has seen the immense work achieved by communities throughout the nation and has risen to the challenge to support and provide financial, scientific and technical expertise to advance the goals of dedicated organisations which have been faithful to the vision of protecting our indigenous flora and fauna.

The task is huge and each locality has particular pests that destroy our native bird populations. Each year a staggering 25 million birds fall prey to introduced predators. Without intervention New Zealand would be devoid of the dawn chorus, which on the mainland consists predominantly of introduced avian species. Most of these species are an asset to our New Zealand grassland and urban environment. Most do not survive in our New Zealand native forests and thereby do not compete significantly with our indigenous birds.

Over the last 26 years, living on the environmental fragile Aupouri Peninsular in the Far North of New Zealand there has been a substantial, but often un-noticed change in the dominant birds inhabiting the Peninsular.

The Indian Myna, was introduced into New Zealand in 1948 to control cattle tick. We very seldom see Mynas on cattle, feeding on ticks. The stock can be carrying a baggage of ticks, especially in warm wet weather and Mynas are busy foraging on insects in the grass, among the cattle. The purpose for which the Myna was introduced has been a total failure. The farming fraternity are very grateful to science for the development of modern drenches.

Mynas increased substantially in the late 1960s on the Aupouri Peninsular. The first Myna roost on the historic Wagener-Subritzky farm at Houhora Heads was in 1966. They were noted for their raucous, harsh call that seemed to dominate the early morning chorus.

They continued to increase and in 1997, while the writer was working in the garden at the historic Wagener-Subritzky homestead the first indication of the Myna becoming a threat to our indigenous birds was observed. A pair of Kingfishers had nested in a hole, high in a Phoenix Palm tree. A pair of Mynas was investigating the various holes in the same tree. The Kingfishers became extremely agitated. At this juncture I left the garden for some hours and on return I was aware the kingfishers were still in a very distressed state. On investigation, three naked chicks were found at the foot of the tree. Two were dead but the third one, although cold was still alive. This was hand reared.

Over the years Myna predation has increased dramatically. Last year two pair of starlings nested in two boxes in our garden. The starlings produced three clutches of eggs in the season; a total of six (6) clutches. The chicks hatched and although the Starling parents were constantly hassled by the Mynas the chicks grew until they could come to the entrance hole of the box when the strongest chick would approach to receive food first. This resulted in the Mynas pulling the chicks from the nest and in four cases decapitating the chicks. None of the 23 chicks were eaten by the Mynas. It is a display of dominance which is played out by the Mynas calling from the highest tree.

Only one Starling chick was reared by the end of the season. It was foraging with a parent for three days around our property. The chick was not seen on the fourth day and after a search was found dead with a hole in the back of its skull. A Myna was suspected of the death.

In the 2017-18 the starlings again nested in the boxes. The Mynas showed no aggression towards the adult starlings as they flew in and out of the nesting boxes. However as soon as the chicks left the nest they were attacked by 2 or in one case 4 adult Mynas. The young starlings had no chance of surviving the onslaught.



Photo: Les Feasey

Mynas were observed last September taking eggs from a Thrush nest, and a second incident pulling the downy chicks from another Thrush nest. They also destroyed three Sparrow nests and killed two Sparrow nestlings after they had left the nest. These were found with a puncture hole in the skull.

In 2015 Tui nested on our property and reared three chicks. The Mynas hassled the adult Tui constantly. This is the first time Tui has been known to breed in the Houhora- Pukenui area.

The Mynas produce multiple broods each season. 2015 saw an increase in the winter flocks of Mynas. They 'ganged up' on the pair of Tui and as a consequence we have not had Tui breeding in or around our area.

During this season (2017-18) Mynas were observed attacking a pair of Rosella nesting in a hole high in a Phoenix Palm. The Mynas were also nesting in a palm next to the one occupied by the Rosellas. On November 14th, a young girl brought me a dead Rosella. It was fresh and had a hole in the skull. Although the actual killing was not observed it was found near the nesting site.



In early January a pair of sparrows was nesting under the flashing of our house. All was well until the chicks hatched and the parents began the feeding activity. On January 11<sup>th</sup> my young nephew came to tell me there was a sick bird on the lawn. The male Sparrow had its eye hanging out and a hole in the skull above the eye. I disposed of the Sparrow. Once again, no one saw the actual attack that caused the fatal injury, but the Mynas had been consistent in their attack.



Blackbirds are common in our large garden and Myna and Blackbird co- habit the garden avoiding conflict; that is until the breeding season. Myna were observed investigating a blackbird nest in a shrub along the fence line. No incidents of injured birds were found from this nest. However, in December an immature female was found dead on our lawn with the characteristic hole in the skull.

Visitors to the Far North frequently make comment of the "huge numbers of Mynas seen on the roads up here."

Mynas are intelligent birds and once one is shot they become very suspicious and gun-shy. Several different traps are available, but they are high maintenance and require feeding the decoy bird.

Detlef and Carol Davies from Kerikeri used "Bird Paste" over winter several years ago with huge success. They reported catching 700 Myna in the winter season. The writer and a friend tried the same paste but with no success. The key appears to be to locate their winter roosting site and pre-bait for a period and then apply the paste on an appropriately cold night. Locating the roosting site where large numbers congregate is paramount.

Whatever can be done is imperative. There are reports from several of the Pacific Islands of the total population of indigenous birds having disappeared since the introduction of the Myna to those Islands. The Far North is a fragile ecosystem and the Myna is a dominant species that has not been observed feeding on any of the species it has killed. It is evident that this species needs to be controlled and finally exterminated from our locality.

Interestingly, the Myna is not on the Predator-Free New Zealand targeted species list. It is a threat to many birds, and could well take vulnerable species, such as the chicks of Reef Heron or New Zealand Dotterel as it has done with Kingfishers - which are a far less vulnerable species.

The writer hopes the observations presented and data discussed in this article will promote discussion and consideration of methods to control this dominant avian species and strategies will be set in place so conservationists and keen ornithologists whether amateur or professional can co-operate in a program that will, at the very least, halt the increase in the population of Myna in the Far North of New Zealand. It would be hoped the species would be radically reduced in number - even exterminated.



## Migration knowledge pre E7– Tansy Bliss

A 1966 edition of “Last of the Curlews” by Fred Bodsworth was given to me by Annette Harvey a Wellington Birds New Zealand member and tells the sad story of the Eskimo Curlew that is now presumed extinct due to their lack of fear of man. It maps how they went from flocks that darkened

the skies to a lone male who lost his mate to a bullet on the Canadian prairie. The story is also one of migration which is beautifully described in intricate detail.



*body feathers tightly against the skin. The migration had begun..... down the length of two continents ... a long grim gantlet of storm, foe and death.”*

There are lovely descriptions and illustrations of the other shore birds encountered on the migration route, the mechanics of flight and how they used flight formation to get them through. *“The curlew veered eastward and the double rank of plovers behind followed his deflecting air trail... the snow clung to their feathers, packed into the air slots between the flight feathers. Wings that a few minutes before has responded deftly to the gentle rhythmic flexing of the breast muscles were now heavy and stiff and they beat the air futilely like lifeless paddles, driving air downward in a waste of energy instead of deflecting it rearwards for the horizontal airflow essential at flight.”*



The Eskimo curlew is now classified as functionally extinct by Birds International, BirdLife International (2018) Species factsheet: *Numenius borealis*. <http://www.birdlife.org>. This story helps us understand how a bird so numerous can be destroyed unintentionally through lack of understanding and man’s love of hunting. It also gives an amazing early insight into migration, bird flight and the interactions between the species on the fly way. A very good but sobering read.



## Suggestions for the next Newsletter scheduled for August/September

- Garden bird observations
- Sightings that made “your” day
- Conference highlights
- More on dead birds
- Winter visitors

## A fishing pelagic Dunedin way – Les Feasey

We left at 5:30am. I was up at 4:30am to get there, clothes laid out and the car loaded the night before. I arrived at the dock on time and didn't find Byron, the skipper, so I asked at the warehouse and they said he was inside. I hadn't met him before so when he came out I didn't recognise him.

I asked "Are you Byron?".

He said "The boat's over there with the lights on.".

That was our introduction. So, I went "over there". Fortunately, the crewman was there, and he introduced himself as Richard and took my camera backpack and swung down to the boat. I passed him the beer I'd bought for them and my lunch backpack. I got on board and got out of the way as they got the boat under way.

We started out of the channel at Port Chalmers. The channel's pretty narrow and after we got to chatting a bit, Byron volunteered that his other boat had run aground recently and cost \$50,000 to fix. A cargo steamer's wake had pushed the boat too far to the side of the channel.

The sky was starting to lighten when we arrived in the open ocean about 7:30am. Albatross, shearwater and petrel followed the boat almost as soon as we were out there, and they followed us the whole way. Once I counted 150 Albatross and Mollymawk behind the boat, mostly Shy Mollymawk and Buller's Mollymawk, with some Southern Royal Albatross and the occasional Wandering Albatross. There were also the usual collection of petrels and shearwater, smaller birds that joined in the fray when there was food to be had. The birds mostly fought for the food and not with each other, which I thought was pretty civilised of them, although the bigger birds were treated with respect by the smaller ones.



Fishing for Ling and Blue Cod was not something I'd seen before. I watched the operation with interest. Richard threw a grappling hook over a line between two buoys and hauled it aboard. The line was fed over a pulley onto a winch and when the buoys were clear of the winch, they were thrown astern, and the winch, with Byron in attendance, wound in the line - up to 400 metres. The line would obediently coil into a neat pile on the deck. When the trap emerged from the ocean it was swung on board onto a rack, trap door facing inwards. Richard opened the door, hooked the fish out of the trap, replaced the bait container with a fresh one, and readied the trap to be released when Byron gave the word and they were over the GPS location. The trap dropped into the ocean and that was the signal for Byron to head towards the next trap, with the line snaking out as he pulled away. Each trap's location was marked by a GPS location on the sounder and he'd evidently done the same routine daily for years, so he knew where the traps were supposed to be. The buoys flipped over the stern. Richard was already dressing the Ling Cod that had come up in the trap. Cut the throats. Slice the stomachs open. Pull out the guts and throw it overboard to the evident delight of the following birds. Cut off the head and put it in one container. Put the fish in a separate container and cover it with ice. By then, Byron had arrived at the next trap and the process was repeated. The Ling were shipped overnight to Melbourne. The Blue Cod were New Zealand favourites and were sold locally. The Ling heads were shipped overnight to Singapore along with the occasional Octopus and Eel.

After we'd fed our fish guts to a fair share of Shy Mollymawk and Buller's Mollymawk and a smattering of Southern Royal Albatross, Cape Petrel, Black Petrel, Northern/Southern Giant Petrel, Royal Albatross, Fairy Prion, Sooty Shearwater, Hutton's Shearwater, Spotted Shag, Otago Shag, Black-billed Gull, Black-backed Gulls, I was looking for other species. A Salvins' Albatross or Light-mantled Sooty Albatross was on my list but suddenly a Black-bellied Storm Petrel turned up. Very exciting!



However, later when noting my prime bird on eBird, a program for recording bird observations with the date, time, weather, location and species seen, I got into quite an email discussion with Russ, one of the auditors for the site. Black-bellied Storm Petrel was an unusual sighting and easily confused with Wilson's Storm Petrel. Finally, the photos I had taken convinced him and I could claim my lifer - the Black-bellied Storm petrel.

Getting a Lifer is a big deal. It means you have seen a species you have never seen in your life before. Getting a Lifer usually means standing on your head and then doing somersaults, jumping up to the Horizontal Bar and doing a Grand Circle then dismounting at the foot of the judge 15 metres away. People

talk about seeing a Lifer with awe. So seeing a Black-bellied Storm Petrel was a big deal to me. Russ knew this. So I to work to convince him. A better photo did the trick.

A second lifer that slipped through without a murmur was the White-chinned Petrel. Well, I'd never seen one. There were lots of them around the boat all day, so I took a lot of photos, white chin very much in evidence. It's so common down in the Dunedin area that it didn't raise an eyebrow. I was really excited to see one.

However, a species that I thought was really common down there provoked much discussion. Apparently, during nesting, the Westland Petrel go north from Westland to Cook Strait, then around the coast as far south as Christchurch. They hadn't been reported as far south as Dunedin on their sojourn away from the nest to gather food for their nesting young. Not knowing this I reported Westland Petrel on this trip and got a lot of static. There are three large black petrels (LBP). The Westland Petrel, the White-chinned Petrel and the Black Petrel (also called the Parkinson's Petrel). I did a careful review of the all the photos but I'm still not sure. The Westland Petrel wasn't a Lifer, but from a bird research standpoint, it matters to me if Westland Petrels go as far south as Dunedin to gather food for their young or not. I'm really interested - curious would be a better word. We're discovering amazing things about birds.

Fishing trips can produce big surprises. This trip produced a pod of Dusky Dolphins. I'd never seen them before though they are common on Whale Watching tours out of Kaikoura. They very obligingly came close to the boat so the photos of dolphins jumping out of the water were pretty good, but the birds that were following the boat kept getting in the way. So, I went with the flow and ended up with some interesting shots.



Back at the dock, with the unloading finished, we had a beer. Byron kindly offered me some blue cod that he then prepared - took him about a minute a fish - and I shared it with my hosts at the BnB that night. It was a fun day. I know most

of us can tell similar stories of our birding adventures, pelagics, hikes up mountain trails, sudden weather changes, scary people, kind acts, great photos, incredible coincidences, stunning beauty and great friends. So, this is not one man's story about a pelagic, but about the sum of all of our experiences that weave the fabric of our lives. Go well, my friends.



## Closer to home

*Detlef Davies reports on a very successful late season pelagic from Whangaroa Harbour in a matter of fact way*

Went on a day pelagic out of Whangaroa Harbour with Chris Seaton & his family & friends from UK, leaving 7 am, returning at 5.30. Thick fog in the harbour at first, clearing once we approached Stephenson Island. Then quite calm & sunny with westerly breeze for most of day but turned rough with strong wind for whole return journey. A very successful day produced:

**Gulls, Pied Shags & White-fronted Terns** in harbour

**Fluttering Shearwater** – c.40 in inshore waters

**Australasian Gannet** – 4

**Cape Barren Goose** – just one high on headland on

Stephenson Island – also a **Harrier** mobbed by

**Magpies & Welcome Swallows.**

**Buller's Shearwater** – c.40 estimated, throughout day

**Common Diving Petrel** - 5

**Black (Parkinson's) Petrel** – c.90, a few started following the boat early on and remained close by for most of day, sometimes aggressive at the berley

**Little Shearwater** – 1

**Flesh-footed Shearwater** – c.6

**Fairy Prion** – c.15, often on our fish oil slicks

**New Zealand Storm Petrel** – one early on, then the most frequent bird on the fish oil, sometimes 5 together, estimated c.20

**Wilson's Storm Petrel** – often with the NZSPs, c.10 (Not a single White-faced Storm Petrel)

**Cook's Petrel** – an imm spent a long time feeding on the fish oil, strange unfamiliar plumage, dark brown upperparts with white edges to primaries resembling Kermadec Petrel. Also a few adults.

**GOULD'S PETREL** – one flew closely past the boat but too fast for any photos to be obtained. The mostly black head extending to collar and sides of breast was very distinctive. Rarest bird of the day.

**White-capped Albatross** – an adult flew close past the boat & this or another returned later

**Wandering Albatross** – a juvenile with mainly dappled brown plumage in flight around the boat giving great views

**Black-browed Albatross** – Imm with almost all dark underwings, just narrow pale stripe down centre. The only albatross to settle on the water and feed with the Black Petrels, pterodromas and storm petrels.

**Albatross sp** – at least 3 more distant birds on the rough return journey, probably White-capped or Black-browed.

**Grey-faced Petrel** – 6 estimated from midday onwards

**Pycroft's Petrel** – one identified from photos later, likely to have been more

**Black-winged Petrel** – 1 distant one on return journey.

**Little Penguin** – 5 between Stephenson Island & the harbour on return.

**Caspian Tern** – 1 in harbour



*New Zealand Storm Petrel*



*– Cook's Petrel –*



*Wilson's Storm Petrel*



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