

Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 11/2017 November 2017

Marsh Crakes at Sinclair Wetlands



The pair of Marsh Crakes that are in residence in the enclosed pond, and viewed by our counting team on October 7th, indeed did have a nest as 4 chicks were first seen by Glen Riley, manager at the wetlands, on 26th October. Assuming that they started laying eggs on 4th October (1 per day for 6 days) then incubation was 17 days (literature says between 16 and 20

days). Sue Galloway and Mary Thompson and some visitors to the wetlands saw them again on Sunday 29th October. Most of the time the chicks were hidden in clumps of reeds but then one by one they would scamper rapidly across to another clump. The chance of being caught by predator is reduced by this behaviour. They were like little balls of black fluff. The parent birds would come out onto the open muddy areas foraging for food for them and would take it back to the chicks – we watched from about 1.30 to 2.30pm and then they disappeared for the rest of the day in the vegetation in the middle of the pond.

We saw them again for 30 minutes or so next morning. Since then two chicks accompanying a single adult on foraging sprees have been seen and photographed by Nick Beckwith on 7th and 9th November and reported on eBird by visitors (hope this wont attract too many twitchers) on the 8th and 9th Nov. (Hopefully the other two chicks were with the other adult somewhere in the vegetation). The chicks in these photos by Nick are 14 days old. I think these are the first photos in NZ, if not Australasia, of age-documented chicks. The ones on NZBirdsOnline which are labelled as about 1 week old are clearly much older as they have distinct feathers, whereas the birds at Sinclair wetlands still are covered in black down by 2 weeks of age - Nick reports the first signs of feathers just appearing under the down. We are hoping that we can document the various stages of development.



Mary Thompson

Makarora Braided River Bird Survey 2017



Female wrybill in alternate plumage (Makarora River 2017).

An update braided river bird walkover survey was undertaken during October 2017 with subsequent nest monitoring during November 2017. Nesting colonies of black-billed gull and black-fronted tern were identified. Evidence of breeding (eggs, chicks observed) wrybill, banded dotterel and South Island pied oystercatcher was recorded. Nesting colonies of Southern black-backed gull were also recorded within close proximity to breeding braided river birds. A natural native predator of braided river birds.

Rising river levels early November caused flash flooding resulting in the loss of black-billed gull nests, eggs and chicks and the loss of black-fronted tern nests and eggs. Both colonies have now re-established alternative nesting sites.

Survey results indicates that the Makarora River remains an important site for indigenous braided river birds, maintaining a diverse and complete

braided river avifauna. Following this survey work ten invasive mammal predator traps have been deployed within the braided river environment. This survey and ongoing monitoring efforts intend to guide future conservation management to help protect, restore and safeguard Makarora braided river birds.



Black-billed gull nesting colony before flood event (Makarora River Oct 2017).



Black-billed gull chicks and unhatched egg (Makarora River November 2017).

Rachel Hufton

Ornithological snippets

Sam Scheibel, who is crewing on the Monarch, reported 4 **Black or Westland Petrels** about 1km offshore from Taiaroa Head on 5th November, with one of these or another in the area on 16th. There are no previous eBird records of Black Petrel from Otago waters, but apparently they have been seen previously from the Monarch. Photos are shown below, and opinions on the identity are welcome.



Sam also saw a **Reef Heron** at Taiaroa Head on 24th October, again from the Monarch. Meanwhile, the Otago Daily Times is the place to keep up to date with **White Herons**, with a piece on (& photo) on one at Andersons Bay Lagoon over the last few weeks:

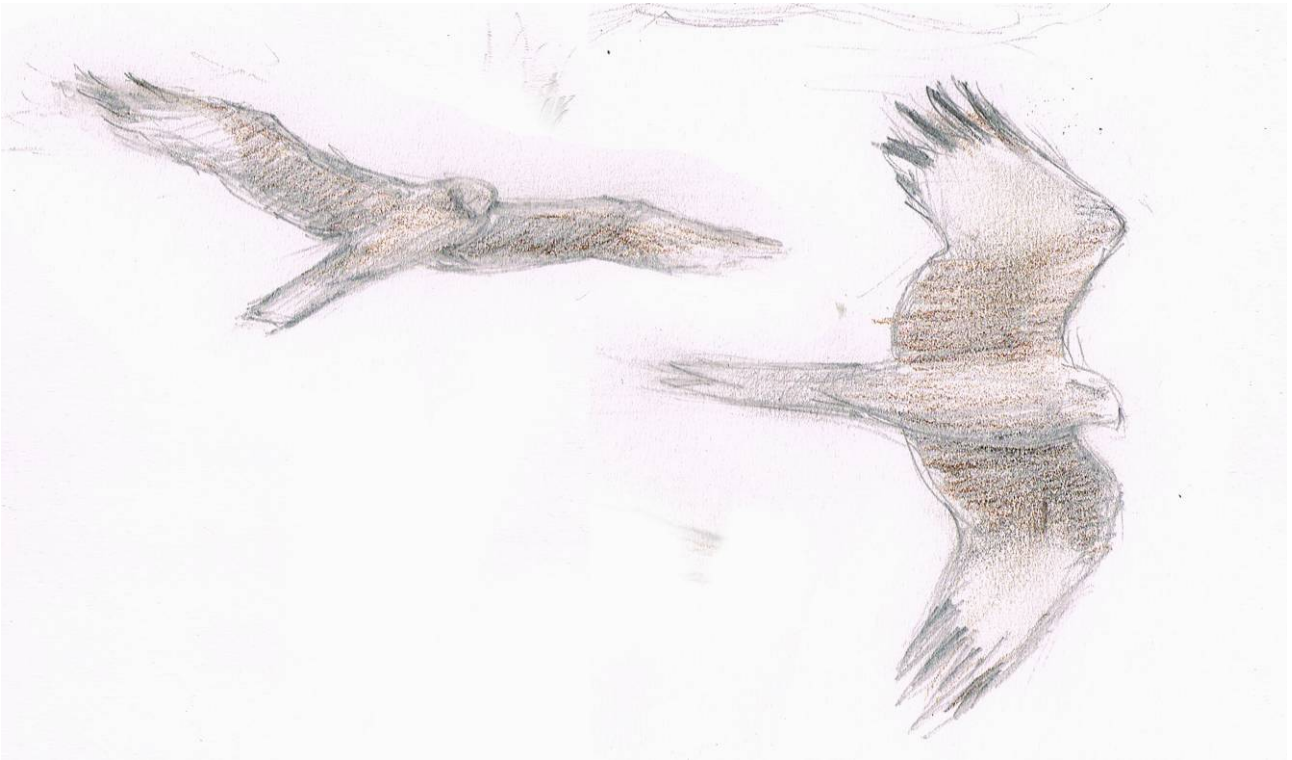
<https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/andersons-bay-shallows-attract-heron>
Derek Onley reports another has been present at Hawksbury Lagoon for several weeks along with a **Scaup**.

The first **Red Knot** sighting in Otago for almost 3 years was of 4 birds seen by Bruce McKinlay at Aramoana on 5th November; this was also the location of the previous record. Ken George counted 1650 **Bar-tailed Godwit** at Hooper's Inlet on 25th October, while Patrick Crowe came across a single bird on the bank of the Dart River on 10th November. An unseasonal **Brown Skua** was being hassled by the gulls at Nugget Point on 12th November.

Finally, in the passerine department, Marion Proudfoot reports good numbers of **Yellowhead** along the Siberia Stream near Makarora, and Bruce McKinlay made a notable count of 90 **Common Redpoll** on Tomahawk playing fields on 21st October.

Any reports to richard@pcconnect.co.nz

Richard Schofield



Here are a couple of quick sketches of a bird that flew past us when we were having a well earned cup of tea on our place a few kilometres up the hill above Waitati. My binoculars and camera, that I always carry around for moments like these, were of course, 30-40m away in the greenhouse and the bird didn't hang around but cruised by about 60m away and disappeared down the hill to the north. Harrier sized, it had somewhat longer looking wings and tail and although I didn't get to see the plumage well, it definitely had paler patches on the outer underwing and the under-tail appeared paler as well. Most noticeable thing about it however was the flight. The wings were held almost horizontal, the outer wing drooping a little. A couple of slow flaps, slower than a harrier, were followed by a swaying glide into a nor-west breeze. It didn't of course spread its tail but surely there was a hint of a fork. My fellow tea drinkers were not birders, (though Rosemary claims there was no way she could avoid knowing a few things about birds after putting up with me for years) and after I'd exhaustively explained how the bird looked different and flew unlike a harrier, I wouldn't say that they were exactly objective observers.

So here I am, a single observer squinting through smudged glasses at a fleeting flyby raptor, 60 metres or so away without binoculars and no supporting photos, having to convince the Rare Birds Committee (or whatever they call themselves these days) that it wasn't a harrier.

Derek Onley

Notices and Business

Weekend Field Trip to Lake Ellesmere/Te Waihora with Canterbury Birds NZ, 16 - 18 February 2018.



The Canterbury Branch of Birds NZ has invited us and Southland members to join them at Lake Ellesmere for a great day of birding under their guidance. The plan is that we will travel up on Friday 16th Feb and stay two nights at Ashburton; on the Saturday we will meet up with members from Canterbury at Lake Ellesmere and they will guide us to the best birding spots. Then travel back home on Sunday.

Lake Ellesmere is a hotspot for migratory waders - Bar-tailed Godwits, Red Knots, and Red-Necked Stints are usually all present in good numbers along with our own Pied Stilts, Wrybill (although weather affects numbers in February) and Banded Dotterels. Fewer in number but normally present in summer are Curlew, Sharp-tailed and Pectoral Sandpipers plus Pacific Golden Plover. The good thing about Ellesmere is there are often surprises to be found. Currently there is a Sanderling; last season there was a Cox's Sandpiper plus a Marsh Sandpiper and a Black-Tailed Godwit. Gull-billed terns are another possibility, as is a Black Stilt. The trick is in finding the birds since the area is large and it can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. The good news is that with the all-new count for the area will have been done the week before our trip so the Canterbury Birds NZ members should have a really good idea of the best areas to search.

This is a great opportunity to see the birds of Lake Ellesmere, our first weekend away for some time, and one where our members from outside Dunedin can participate as well, so I hope a goodly number of us can put this date firmly in our diaries and come along.

Accommodation has been booked in Ashburton at Coronation Holiday Park in Motel units with twin share rooms at a cost between \$45 and \$50 per night, depending on numbers. If you would prefer your own private rooms, then you could make your own booking of studio chalets (0800101965).

We will travel up by carpool on Friday - those that are able may want to leave early in the day and make a leisurely trip of it, visiting various birding sites on the way to Ashburton; others will have a fairly easy drive up to Ashburton after work. On the Saturday it is about a 1h drive from Ashburton to Ellesmere.

At this stage we have accommodation for 15 people. With so many tourists, getting accommodation is quite hard so we may have to cap numbers at this if we can't book more units. I will allocate spaces on first confirmed, first in.

Please indicate if you are likely to be coming, even confirm now if you can so your accommodation is assured, or final definite confirmation essential by mid January. Let Mary know maryt@actrix.co.nz 4640787.

EBird News November 2017

Reporting of sensitive species?

Although one of the purposes of eBird is the dissemination of information to the birding community, enabling users to find out about rare and interesting birds in the region (especially via the rare bird alerts), there are times when caution should be observed before submitting such records. One such situation is when a bird is on private land, and another is when a scarce species is breeding, and susceptible to disturbance.

Although reviewers can keep such records hidden, at least temporarily, this will not stop a rare bird alert from going out. So in these cases it is up to the observer to judge whether to spread the news or not, and there are various ways of doing this. One is to wait until the species concerned has left, or finished breeding, before reporting it. You can still submit the rest

of the checklist after the initial observation, and then edit it later. Alternatively, just by delaying a report for 8 days means that a rare bird or needs alert will not be triggered. Another option is to hide the checklist after you have submitted it. This hides the whole checklist from public view, and not just for specific observations, but again, it can be changed at a later date.

For further information on this topic, see

<http://help.ebird.org/customer/en/portal/articles/1006789-guidelines-for-not-publicizing-certain-bird-observations?t=401194>

Richard Schofield

Taieri Mouth and End-of-year Picnic, Sunday 3rd December.



Birds NZ has been invited to do a bird survey of the Livingstone Wetland and Native Bush Walk, an area of private wetland and bush near Coutts Gully Road at Taieri Mouth that is undergoing restoration. There should be water birds, fernbirds and a variety of native bush birds. This is a great opportunity to re-explore this area.

Those who would like to carpool from Dunedin, please meet outside Bunnings on Otaki Street by 8.30am. We should all aim to meet at the Knarston Park Picnic Ground at Taieri Mouth, by 9.30am.

Contact Mary to let her know if you are coming; maryt@actrix.co.nz or 464 0787

We will walk around the Wetlands and Bush Walk in the morning, to do a complete species list and also travelling eBird records of numbers-it will take a couple of hours (bush walk has a small part that is fairly steep and tricky, but this can be avoided if stay on the lower path.)

Picnic: Even if you cant make it for the bird survey in the morning , All members are welcome and encouraged to come with their family and friends to join together for lunch at about 12 noon, at Knarston Park overlooking the estuary (near low tide). Please bring some picnic food to share if you can.

Then for those who would like to explore further, a short stretch of the Taieri River track would be worthwhile. We'll have telescopes to look over to Moturata for spoonbills.

Mary Thompson

Programme 2017-18

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar

- Wed Nov 22** "Adults only? The conservation benefits of investing in all age classes of yellow-eyed penguins"
- Sun Nov 26** Summer Wader Count. High tide Dunedin at 10.10am, 1.8m. Counters needed at Aramoana, Hoopers, Papanui. New counters very welcome to join the teams.
Contact: peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz
- Sun December 3** Taieri Mouth wetland and bush survey (start 9.30am) and end-of-year picnic (12 noon at Knarston Park). Please let Mary know if you plan to come. maryt@actrix.co.nz 464 0787.
- Sat January 27** Sinclair Wetland Summer Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 8.30 am. Backup Sunday 28 January. To join the survey teams and for information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, maryt@actrix.co.nz
- Fri-Sun Feb16-18** Weekend Field to Lake Ellesmere. Please let Mary know ASAP if you plan to come to ensure your place. See further details in newsletter.

Add Offers and suggestions for talks and topics for Indoor Meetings for 2018 would be really appreciated; contact maryt@actrix.co.nz

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

As usual there is no newsletter in December but if there are enough contributions there will be one in late January

Contributions please by 20th January.