



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 1/2018 January 2018



These three banded Bar-tailed Godwits were photographed by Nick Beckwith at Warrington Beach on 17 November 2017. Firstly, it is extraordinarily remarkable to have three banded birds in one image. Secondly, the colour combinations are very clear: blue/yellow, blue/yellow; blue/red, red/red and blue/white, white/red all with white flags on left tibia. And finally, to top it all off, these birds are at least 12 years old. From our records these birds were originally banded at Warrington Beach on 28th February 2006 and they could have already been several years old when banded.

The capture by cannon netting and banding of birds at Warrington in February 2006 was part of a nation-wide study to determine movement of Bar-tailed godwits within New Zealand. 39 birds were banded here and just over 700 throughout NZ. The key finding from the study was that godwits are very site-faithful, meaning that use a particular estuary nearly always return to that area after breeding in Alaska. These three banded birds were first seen again in Blueskin Bay in November 2006, presumably after migrating to Alaska and back. The last recorded sighting of B/Y, B/Y and B/W, W/R was 1 November 2011 and B/R, R/R was seen on 22/11/2008. It appears from this recent record that the birds are still returning to the same estuary where they were banded after all these years of migrating. [An up-date: Nick has sent photos of more banded birds, three of them also banded at Warrington in 2006. We have heard back from Phil Batley that the other two flagged birds, one was banded in Victoria, Australia and the other Japan.]

An additional outcome of the banding study was the confirmation that NZ godwits migrate to Alaska via the Yellow Sea; 5 of the Warrington birds were sighted at the Yellow Sea, one 9 days after a sighting at Aramoana by Peter Schweigman. Now the banded birds are giving us information about longevity of godwits. That they can undertake a 24,000km round trip successfully for over 12 years emphasises the amazing stamina of godwits. Keep an eye out for other banded godwits and report your sightings. Flocks of godwits are well worth a closer look. **Mary Thompson**

Oldest Record for Royal Spoonbill Longevity



Tom Waterhouse reports seeing a Royal Spoonbill at Kakanui River Bridge on 4th January 2018 with colour bands. From the photos it appears to be white/metal on left leg and green over yellow on right leg. If so, this bird is 033190, which was banded in Wairau Lagoon by Bill Cash on 6 Feb 1993, and that would make it 25 years

old - a record. This bird was also seen at Hoopers Inlet on 9 Nov 1996 so it is a bird that has moved south before. Not many of the Wairau birds were seen in Otago.

The other options (e.g. w/m B/Y, w/m G/R or even w/m B/R [if faded badly]) were also birds banded at Wairau in 1993. The white on left leg could be a faded blue but no birds were given Blue over metal combinations.

Mary Thompson

Fine food, fun and fellowship at Taieri Mouth



The final field trip of the year was to Taieri Mouth. The purpose of the day was two-fold. First to carry out surveys of the birds of the nearby private Livingstone wetland and bush reserve, and then to assemble at Knarston Park for a picnic. The day was sunny and warm and both groups enjoyed their time walking the tracks of the reserve. The track around the wetland was in excellent order – the grass had been recently cut and any overhanging vegetation trimmed back, particularly gorse. Numerous predator traps were seen indicating the commitment of the owners to this special reserve.

Around 18 members, friends and relations gathered for lunch. Plenty of food and a great location beside the estuary of the Taieri River made for a very enjoyable time.

Warren Jowett

Report on Bird Survey of Livingstone Wetland and Bush, Taieri Mouth, Otago.



On Sunday, 3 December 2017, 12 members of the Otago Branch of Birds NZ and Steve Green, as our guide, surveyed the Livingstone Wetland and Bush area for the species and number of birds present. This turned out to be a very interesting area and well worth follow-up trips and bird counts whenever you are down that way.

A total of 32 species was seen. 23 species were seen in the wetland and nearby shrubs; 14 of these were water birds.. Stilts, Paradise ducks and mallards were obviously breeding there as juveniles were seen. The

wetland is a suitable feeding area for Royal Spoonbill, stilts, pukeko, and three of our native ducks, shoveler, grey teal, and Paradise duck. One of the spoonbills had a band on one leg - this bird must have been at least 15 years old as the last chicks to be banded on Green Island was in 2002 (with all that time some of the bands have come off and this individual bird could not be identified). The presence of fernbirds was also a plus.

The bush count had 17 species including 9 native species. Juvenile fantail were observed. Shining cuckoos parasitize grey warbler nests; both species

were present. The numbers were high and probably the surrounding farmland will contribute to the high number of introduced finches in the count. The data have been entered on eBird.

A group has been working on trapping the area and in the 11 months has trapped 29 rats, 27 stoats, 11 ferrets, 1 weasel and 9 hedgehogs. They have applied for funds to get 30 traps for next year.

Mary Thompson



Photo: Janet Ledingham.

Ornithological snippets

This report covers the period from 20th November till mid-January.

Overseas visitors came across a few interesting birds in the period. 2 Mute Swans were reported from Wanaka on 28th November, and a King Penguin was seen briefly at Taieri Mouth on 30th December, before disappearing into the surf. A possible Westland Petrel was viewed from Katiki Point on 5th January. Sam Scheibel saw a Buller's Shearwater from the Monarch on 15th December.

A Pied Shag was found at Hooper's Inlet on 26th November by Mary

Thompson, while another was on the Catlin River estuary on 23rd December. Brendon Rae had multiple sightings of a White Heron associating with a White-faced Heron at Waikouaiti in November. Meanwhile a fisherman reported 5 Royal Spoonbills on the Waitaki River near Duntroon in late November.

A hybrid Black Stilt was at Andersons Bay lagoon in late December. Jill Hamel reports: High tide at the roost is a bit of slum at the moment - covered with guano from over-excited red-bills who have been gorging on the *Nyctophanes* krill. But if you go at falling high tide, the stilts are worth watching as they come off the roost. There is at least one family with a juvenile and it looks like the same female, mostly-black hybrid from last year is back with her pied partner. There were nine stilts altogether hiding in the grass on the roost yesterday, along with 6 adult spoonbills, 5 VOC, one Black Shag (who is a regular) and 4 Little Shags. It was odd to see some of the spoonbills and little shags lying right down, flat on their bellies. They looked as though they felt very safe. Meanwhile the compiler saw a Black Stilt (or a very black hybrid) flying alongside the car just south of Tarras on 20th January. It was accompanied by 3 Pied Stilts, so of dubious parentage. Nick Beckwith photographed a Turnstone among the godwits and oystercatchers on Warrington Beach on 15th January, apparently the first record for this site.

Mary Thompson came across a Little Owl on 2nd January on North Road near Signal Hill – they are scarce in Dunedin. Finally Alan Baker has been following the progress of a Morepork family: A pair fledged a chick in the Dunedin Town Belt, near Pacific Street. From 18/11 to 16/12, sometimes with Mary Thompson and Sue Galloway, he saw or heard one or more moreporks almost every evening around nightfall. They foraged both in the bush and on the grassed areas. He first saw the young bird on 7/12 - before that they had heard its cricket-like calls. He has not found the moreporks since 16/12.



Compiled by Richard Schofield. Any interesting sightings to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Books of ornithological interest added to Dunedin Public Libraries' collections in 2017



The most perfect thing: inside (and outside) a bird's egg, by Tim Birkhead

The Guardian book review says of this book "*The eccentric lives of egg collectors have inspired an exquisite book.*"

The Australian bird guide, by Peter Menkhorst et al.

Beauty and the beak : how science, technology, and a 3D-printed beak rescued a bald eagle, by Deborah Lee Rose et al.

Bird brain : an exploration of avian intelligence, by Nathan Emery

The cuckoo : the uninvited guest, by Oldrich Mikulica et al.

The curious bird lover's handbook, by Niall Edworthy

The house of owls, by Tony Angell

Mozart's starling, by Lyanda Lynn Haupt

Raptor : a journey through birds, by James Macdonald Lockhart

Remarkable birds, by Mark Avery

Seabirds beyond the mountain crest : the history, natural history and conservation of Hutton's shearwater, by Richard J. Cuthbert

Toroa's journey, by Maria Gill

The wonder of birds : what they tell us about ourselves, the world, and a better future, by Jim Robbins.

Alan Baker

Scaup Settling and Breeding at Tomahawk

Scaup that came as new arrivals to Tomahawk Lagoon last April have settled here, with two families breeding and raising ducklings.



2 days old



10 days old

Scaup, Papango, or Black Teal, are small uncommon endemic diving ducks. They prefer large deep lakes, and were rarely at Tomahawk or coastal areas. Occasionally after heavy rain and flooding a single male Scaup came for one or two days, with a single Australian Coot, and both

soon departed. The last record of this was 2 April 2012. What Scaup and Coots do in wetlands is their own business, unless you are there with binos and scope...

In April 2017, four Scaup arrived, two males with two females, during heavy rain squalls, which continued through the month. Soon there were

eight Scaup, in two family groups. A big adult male was with a female and two juveniles. The second family was a smaller male and female with two more juveniles. Sometimes all eight ducks swam together, other times the larger male chased away those not in his group of four. Any flying Scaup seen were always males, who were very alert and protective, and deliberately drew observers away by slowly swimming and making sure you followed them away from females and juveniles. Then males carefully circle back to their family again, joining them diving, or if they are hidden under bank vegetation he keeps a floating vigil just offshore. This was seen many times, long before observations of courting and breeding. They all frequently look sideways up at the sky, quickly aware of even distant Harriers, and once obviously watched a helicopter flying kilometres away. Calls ranged from males' whistled "Wirri – weeo!" as a contact and alert call, to females' shrill reedy "Queeek."

A few episodes of the larger male Scaup pecking Mallard Ducks with hard jabs into the mid body were seen, when Mallards were too close. Mallards swam away after being jabbed. No aggression from other birds at Scaup was seen. Once a small female Scaup, afraid of an approaching female Mallard, called alarm and flew low to a male Scaup. He whistled loudly, swam fast to her, and they stayed together. Usually, there were no interactions with nearby Mallards, Shovellers, Black Swans, and Grey Teal. Scaup groups slept afloat surrounded by 68 feeding Paradise Shelducks, surely a deliberate strategy. Paradise Shelducks tell everyone you are there, whether you are a Harrier, Falcon, a birder, or hiking up a mountain valley to the Chamois. They tell everyone, and other birds and mammals know it.

Also in April 2017, three young female Mallards followed the smaller Scaup pair out to deeper water, where they dived in the same places as the Scaup. Only those three Mallards copied Scaup, repeatedly on only one afternoon, others stayed near shore. The smaller Scaup couple showed no

reaction to the Mallards, they kept diving as three Mallards followed and copied. Scaup dived longer and for more distance than the Mallards' clumsy shallow attempts. Next morning, a Mallard male and female followed the other larger Scaup pair and two juveniles, copying them with brief inept dives. Again, most Mallards stayed close to shore, not interested in Scaup. Mallards copying Scaup was not seen again. Scaup diving are amazing, they quickly slip under with barely a ripple, like

grebes or Scottish divers, or Canadian loons, disappear and then pop up again up to 20 metres away. Watching Scaup constantly diving and surfacing challenges ability to count accurately.

After Easter 2017, an adult male and female with two juveniles were seen daily. Mostly they behaved like a family together swimming, napping, and diving. However sometimes Scaup chased one juvenile, but showed no aggression to closer juveniles. A chase was a swimming charge and lunging at the juvenile. The aggressor, usually an adult, but sometimes another juvenile, swam rapidly past closer Scaup to target that particular juvenile. The youngster fled by swimming away fast, and was left drifting alone away from the other three. It quietly rejoined the group, until an adult or juvenile chased it away again. The juvenile chased away was always on the outer edge of the group. Juveniles close together or surrounded by others were never chased away. Maybe one juvenile was a survivor from another family, and unrelated to the others in a new group? Simultaneously, other Scaup disappeared for some days. One Scaup juvenile was kept on the outside, and we don't know the story.

During April and May 2017, total numbers of Scaup varied from four to eight, in two groups of adult male and female with two juveniles. In June an adult pair with three totally black juveniles was seen, in a new location. Sometimes they all seemed absent, so waiting was necessary, until they quietly swam out from raupo, or carex, or from under overhanging shore ngaio. Some absences were filled by one or two males flying in low, always from south, always spotting the human, and others swam out later.

First courting behaviour was seen 23 July 2017 afternoon. Eleven Scaup were frequently separating into two groups of five and six, and then mixing together again. They were two larger males, an adult female, three smaller males, and five juveniles. All were very active, swimming and

diving. A larger male swam to the adult female, his bill extended toward her. She stopped, floating still, as he approached. He nibbled along the length of her bill, repeated as both drifted close together. Then all 11 Scaup continued napping, swimming and diving.

Reactions to a Harrier Hawk were seen on 29 July 2017 afternoon. Five Scaup were together: two small adult males, a larger adult female, and two juveniles. They were silent, until a Harrier circled at 100m altitude. All

Scaup called and looked up with quick sideways head twists. They repeated short swim dashes as a perfectly coordinated group in rapid alternate directions, as if to confuse which way they go, working rapidly closer to shore bush. Scaup called whistling “swee” and soft chuckling “wirri – woo,” amid splashes of fast swimming. Five minutes later the Harrier flew away, the Scaup continued swimming and diving, the female napping afloat with eyes blinking open.

15 August 2017 evening, a different group of five Scaup: a large male, a smaller male, an adult female, and two small females were feeding together. A large trout was feeding in the same area, and in the midst of Scaup. Over following days, Scaup numbers ranged from four to 12 in mixed groups of adults and juveniles.

First Scaup ducklings were seen 8 December 2017 afternoon. Two males close together drifted a few metres offshore, then swam slowly away together calling quiet “wirri – woo” while repeatedly looking at me, as if to lure me away. The larger male has a distinctive mark, a rust brown stripe vertically down above and below the bright yellow eye on both sides of his black head. The smaller male has only a normal yellow eye in a totally black head. I stayed still behind trees. A female Scaup with six very new ducklings swam quietly out from under long grass. Perfect views through binos and scope. They were all diving. One duckling dived for longer times, trailing behind the group, and hurrying to catch up. It would be more vulnerable if a hawk came. The two males swam back over. The female chased the smaller male, he without the rust brown head stripe, for two metres, lunging at him with her bill. The larger male with the head stripe calmly stayed closer to her. Both males clearly protect the family and distract observers. The larger head striped male is her mate, so who is the smaller male? Why does he invest in guarding and protecting?

Presumably the smaller male is a non-breeder. Are they related, giving a genetic behavioural advantage to protecting family? Over following days Scaup family dynamics and numbers became more fascinating.

Next day, 9 December 2017, I watched the same Scaup family, with Lena from Germany. Only a day since last sighting, but now one duckling gone, five remaining. Was the lost duckling tail end Charlie from yesterday, who dived longer and trailed behind, then hurried to catch up? Three hours later, Mary Thompson and Sue Galloway arrived, drawn by my

phone call yesterday. A southerly threw in rain. The family swam under vegetation, and the two males flew off fast and low to south.

On 15 December 2017, a different female Scaup with lighter brown plumage and eight ducklings with lighter yellowish down, far away from the first family. Simultaneously, through my scope, also the first female with her five darker ducklings, in their usual location. Two female Scaup with a total of 13 ducklings, seen as two distinct families within 10 minutes. The first female with five ducklings had two males guarding her, while the second family of one female and eight ducklings was never seen with a male. I was swinging scope wide between families. Next day, the second family had lost a duckling and was down to seven. The first family's five ducklings are clearly larger and quickly getting darker plumages. Two males continued guarding them, but no males with the second larger family who stay distant. Four metres up the bank above the five ducklings who were six previously, a clump of fine black down feathers, which I kept.

New Years Day, a howling NE gale. First Scaup family was one male staying close to the female and five ducklings. Each duckling an exact copy, tan light brown fluffy down with a white diamond patch left and right shoulders and mid lower back. All very energetic swimmers and divers. Second Scaup family is the lone female, now down to six tan downed ducklings, so she lost two.

Numbers are still same now, with both families often close together. No males seen lately. Ducklings are growing fast, 75 percent adult size, tan brown with feathers coming on. They stand preening on rocks near shore. Sometimes, either duck leaves her ducklings alone and flies to raupo a

kilometre away. She swims into raupo, then back and forth outside calling reedy “scree ...” “whirr.” An old nest site? Surely not used now, being very close to a Pukeko nest. She soon flies back to her ducklings. If the other duck swims over, with her ducklings, they stay away from the raupo. I dreamed about Scaup, replaying what I saw. What do Scaup dream about?

Andrew Austin

Summer Solstice Swallows

A southerly over the hill
 strokes long tawny grass in waves
 as the coat of a dozing beast,
 so walk quietly.
 Six swallows swoop and call,
 taking insects from sky
 and flutter raiding spiders' webs
 on walls and windows.
 Last winter two froze to death
 on ice under the bridge,
 blade wings open flying forever
 as if touched by polar Midas.
 My open door lets the world in,
 for without the Earth
 what would we say ?
 A lone swallow swoops inside.
 She rests on a shelf and says,
 man – there are no bugs in here !
 I am grateful – given what's said here.
 She says your large brain is your fault.
 We don't talk the pursuit of happiness,
 we are too busy doing it !
 And – we are in bliss,
 who remembers last winter ?

Andrew Austin



Notices and Business

The Summer survey of the Sinclair Wetland is planned for Saturday 27th January, with back-up of Sunday 28th January.

I hope a good number of you will be back in Dunedin and able to help with the survey which is coming up end of January. This survey is a great way to see a lot of birds and to learn survey techniques from others. New people to help are always welcome. The Sinclair Wetlands is a great place to see fern birds, check your duck identification skills and practise 5 minute bird counts. We will also check out the Marsh Crake pond with the hope of seeing the young birds.

We will car-pool from outside my place - 197 Balmacewen Road, leaving at 8.30 am. If you want to travel independently aim to arrive at about 9.30 am at the wetlands (50 min from Dunedin).

Let me know if you are planning on coming, and contact me to organize transport, and for any more information. Hopefully the weather will be good for Saturday, but you can phone me (464 0787) if weather looks problematic on the day to check whether cancelled or postponed.

Don't forget binoculars, lunch, sun hat, windbreaker, good walking shoes, pencil, etc. I'll bring survey sheets as usual.

Last Chance to sign up for Weekend Field Trip to Lake Ellesmere/Te Waihora with Canterbury Birds NZ 16-18 Feb.

A good group of us has already confirmed coming on the trip but there are still a few places left and it may be possible to book more. So please let me know straight away if you want to join this trip so that I can confirm accommodation. Thanks. maryt@actrix.co.nz 4640787

The plan is that we will carpool travel up on Friday 16th Feb and stay two nights at Ashburton at Coronation Holiday Park in Motel units with twin share rooms at a cost between \$45 and \$50 per night; 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.

This is a great opportunity to see the birds of Lake Ellesmere - 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. The trick is in finding the birds and we are lucky to have the help of Canterbury Birds NZ members who should have a really good idea of the best areas to search.

Bird Briefings – members night for April Indoor Meeting.

Our April Meeting this time will be a bit different. It will consist of a number of short 5 – 10 minute presentations by members about anything birdy that has captured their interest: special birds seen, unusual behaviours, great photographs taken, difficult identifications, etc. I'm sure there will be some interesting contributions. If you would like to be added to the list of speakers for the evening contact Mary (464 0787). Just put your images for presentation on a memory stick.

We still need more speakers or topics for Indoor Meetings later in the year. If you would like to talk at an Indoor Meeting or if you have suggestions please let Mary know (464 0787). Ideas for field trips, especially if you are willing to act as a leader/organiser, would also be greatly appreciated.

Birds New Zealand (OSNZ) Subscriptions 2018 – reminder!

The annual membership subscriptions were due 1 January 2018. It is all too easy to overlook this during the Christmas New Year period, and there are quite a few of us who have forgotten to pay. Remember that you can pay subs online. Or ask your RR for a printed form. Thanks.

Mary Thompson, Regional Representative

Programme 2017-18

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

- 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
- Tues February 27** Indoor Meeting. Hamish Spencer on “Birding in the Chilean Far South”. Note the day -Tuesday
- Sunday March 18** Field Trip with Forest and Bird. Otago Shags, and waders. A trip to Sumpter Wharf Oamaru via All Day Bay. A current conservation issue as there are plans for the wharf that the shags have adopted as a breeding area to be developed. Depart 8.30am from Botany Department carpark, cnr Gt. King Street and Union St. Carpool \$25. Contact Janet Ledingham 027 623 4948.
- Wed March 28** Indoor Meeting. Bruce McKinlay on “Results of Town Belt Survey”.
- Saturday April 7** Sinclair Wetland Autumn Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 9.00 am. Backup Sunday April 8th. To join the survey teams and for information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, maryt@actrix.co.nz
- Sunday April 22** Tomahawk lagoon guided birdwatching. 10-12am This is our contribution to the Wild Dunedin Festival. Meet by the large Tomahawk Lagoon just after the bridge on Tomahawk Road. We aim to have telescopes to let the public see birds close-up and to help identify them, etc. Contact Andrew if you can help; phone 454 5830

Wed April 25

Indoor Meeting. Bird Briefings - Members Night. A chance for any member to give a 5 –10 minute talk about anything birdy that has captured your interest recently: special birds seen, unusual behaviours, great photographs taken, difficult identifications. Contact Mary 464 0787 to be added to the list of speakers for the evening.

Wed May 22

Indoor Meeting. Natalie Forsdick on “Conservation management of kaki/black stilt.

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the next newsletter by 20th February please.