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**Birds New Zealand**

## *Otago Region Newsletter 2/2018 February 2018*



photo Mary Thompson

### **Lake Ellesmere Field Trip 16th-18th February**

15 Otago members of Birding NZ and Forest & Bird travelled up to Lake Ellesmere over the (long) weekend of 16-18th February, via various birding stops en route and an overnight stay at Ashburton. Saturday morning saw us assemble at Lincoln University, along with local BNZ members to show us around, along with more two more birders from Alex, making a party of 22 all up.

First stop was Wolfes Road Bay, which is where most of the Arctic waders had been present on the previous weekend's whole lake wader count. We soon came across a hive of activity, with many Pied Stilts and Banded Dotterels on the flats, and a single Wrybill among them. Large numbers of waterfowl were on the lake itself, dominated by Black Swans, Canada Geese and Grey Teal. In the distance were 9 Pied Shags and a single Spoonbill. On the return to the vehicles 6 Red-necked Stints were picked out on the turf by a sharp eyed local.

Lunch was had back at the cars, before we were encouraged to pack up by darkening skies and a few spots of rain. Various amounts of precipitation had been forecast, but about 5 minutes after arriving at Embankment Road, the sun came out, and most waterproofs were confined to backpacks. Off we trudged again, and here the full scale of Lake Ellesmere became apparent, with less vegetation meaning an uninterrupted vista across the mudflats to the distant water, Black Swans and Canada Geese dominating the skyline in the shimmering haze. A 20 minute walk led to a small patch of water, and large numbers of both Banded Dotterel and Wrybills. The combination of heat haze and a fresh breeze meant that birds would not sit still in the telescopes, but a slow approach to the birds enabled views of at first two, and then briefly four, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, which were definitely on the wanted list, and a Sanderling, which (apparently) was not expected.

We decided to try one more site, a short distance along the lake shore (but a significantly greater distance by road) at Jarvis Road. Time was getting on, and our guides had to leave us, as we ventured once more on to the vast expanse of the mudflats. No pools (and hence no birds) could be seen, but off to the right of the track was a bare patch of ground, which on closer inspection was occupied by a large group of Banded Dotterels and a couple of Wrybill. But time was against us, and dinner was beckoning, so we retraced our steps and returned to Ashburton for a well-earned Thai meal.

Sunday dawned bright & sunny, and the four carloads that were left headed (directly or indirectly) to the Ashburton River mouth. The early arrivals were rewarded with 5 Hector's Dolphins just offshore, along with good views of a mixed flock of mainly Caspian Terns, with a few White and Black-fronted Terns for comparison. Also a large gathering of Spotted Shags, with a significant proportion heading out to sea while we watched.

Meanwhile those who were delayed at Lake Hood by a White Heron took the route at the landward side of the beach, and tracked down the main reason for our visit, a very obliging but well-camouflaged Black-fronted Dotterel, a new bird for most of the group. During our observation it was joined by a further 3 birds, presumably a family as one was definitely a youngster.



photo Alyth Grant

The penultimate rendezvous was Washdyke Lagoon at Timaru. This area would justify a visit in its own right, as there were large numbers of all sorts of water birds as far as the eye could see, but many too far for identification (and too many to count!) We contented ourselves with viewing the area from near the start of the track, with highlights being our first Wrybill of the day, and a single Hector's Dolphin.

Finally, a quick visit to Oamaru, to check on the Otago and Spotted Shags. Very small numbers were present when we arrived, but birds were starting to return during the half an hour or so that we were there. On the beach below the harbour wall was a congregation of about 300 White-fronted Terns, and 3 Gannets were seen offshore.



Banded Dotterel View photo Mary Thompson



## and an **Impression from Rowena East**

*Otago went to Canterbury by way of Oamaru*

*From Central, South and East we came, the wading birds to view.*

*Binoculars and telescopes outdid our naked eyes,*

*Three days to look and learn and see surprise upon surprise.*

A birding visit to Lake Ellesmere was our prime target, enhanced by our travel stops at Sumpter Wharf in Oamaru (twice!), Saltwater Creek in Timaru, the mouth of the Ashburton River/Hakatere (south side), Washdyke lagoon, and (oddly!) the Lake Hood development. What a rich opportunity to spend time just observing birds in the great company of fellow enthusiasts, those of us who are still birding juveniles, watching beside the encyclopaedic members of our birding world. The organisation of the trip was great (of course – Mary did it!) and we all slotted into our allotted accommodation with only small amounts of lubrication required.

The friendly and helpful members of the Canterbury branch of Birds NZ guided our entourage to three different spots on the mesmerizing expanses of salt flats around Lake Ellesmere. (I was surprised to learn that the level is controlled, so it is no longer tidal). The sky was vast, the great shingle bank a dark smudge on the shimmering horizon. A place you could easily be lost (so I hope someone has heard from Craig?) The expected mud was covered with tiny purple flowers and an undulating carpet of emerging flies. And here in this alien place was the first excitement for me – a lone Wrybill, peacefully feeding away among the busy banded dotterels. Great viewing to see them side by side and compare. It was a first opportunity for me to observe carefully and at length and become comfortably familiar with its shape, behaviour and amazing bill. What a privilege. But wait, there's more!.... There's a big banded-dotterel-looking bird on the left, so what are all those busy little grey birds??? "Stints," says Mary, "Red-necked Stints!" though of course they had all left their red necks in Alaska. They are a first for me - how tiny they are! Without the scope I couldn't see them at all (so just as well I get specs next week!)

At the next stop - to my amazement there were Wrybills everywhere! The shimmer and the strong wind made viewing more difficult so I was pleased to have seem number one at leisure. Then "Uh-oh..." from the encyclopaedia as a tatty-looking wrybill turns out to be not a wrybill at all, it's back is too smudgy, and it has a bit of black on it's shoulder (yes, it

does), so it is a sanderling (another first for me, and need to swot that up). And the brownier birds in the water that I can't see very well as the scope wobbles about turn out to be Sharp-tailed Sandpipers - another first, but I don't think I would recognise one again, so I can't really count that.

A last Ellesmere stop, still hoping for other elusive waders, but no joy. Wrybills are becoming "the usual". Home to Ashburton (stressful last 25km with fuel light on) and Thai restaurant to celebrate.

Next day we agree to meet at the Ashburton river mouth, though Mary, Desperately Seeking black-fronted Dotterel, decides that Lake Hood is a good bet. Nope. Not where it has been developed. But incredibly a White Heron, unperturbed by water skiers, is hunting for morning tea, and ready for a photo-shoot, so all is forgiven. Finally extricating ourselves from the tentacles of Lake Hood we arrive belatedly at the river mouth. The others haven't seen any dotterels at all; they have been watching a pod of Hector's Dolphins making their way along the coast. But they have counted the big colony of Spotted Shags and the big (20+) group of Caspian Terns with juveniles on the top of the shingle bank. Alyth spots a little bird close by, another banded dotterel. Then it turns to face us... Wow! That big black V on its front.. it's a "That's a black fronted dotterel...." says Mary with a grin from here to Hokitika, and we try not to celebrate too scarily. What a beautifully marked little bird, and on the sandy/muddy/stony margins of the water, unbelievably well camouflaged. And then there are two of them, amazing... and then a paler version with the a pale grey V – a juvenile, and a fourth bird, and we lose them in the stones, but at one point I think I see that two are juveniles. Maybe. One gets chased off by a swallow (who knew they could be so unWelcoming?) but it returns to the group. A very special experience for all of us.

More? Washdyke lagoon – wader paradise, pencilled in for an excursion of its own, and another Hector's dolphin puts in an appearance. At Saltwater Creek, Timaru, on the way north we walked round the regenerating wetland, and did a duck refresher. As we leaned over the SH1 bridge Alyth (again!) spotted an eel in the (poor quality) water. In fact there were dozens of them, as big as an arm, and a really good reason to Keep Out.

And Oamaru... Sumpter Wharf is a gem, and deserves an information board in my opinion. Let's tell everyone who passes there (often hundreds a day, locals and tourists alike) about these amazing birds that are so easily visible, recognisable and important. Otago shags, their chimney pot nesting columns easy to see at the far end of the wharf, and interesting because they have plain and pied forms not related to gender

differentiation (I think that is correct!) Spotted shags at the near end – beautiful birds which seem to operate on a different daily schedule from the Otago shags. Red – billed gulls and sitting next to them White-fronted terns. Telling people about our birds and catching their interest and imagination is an important part of defending our birds and the places that are important in their lives. If people don't know, they can't understand, and we can't be surprised that they then don't care. If not us, then who?

Apologies – I didn't count much – but I loved every minute.

More thank yous for - Spaghetti Bolognese on Friday night – Mary provided that as well as organising and running a great trip. To all the Canterbury birders who enabled it to happen. Generously shared goodies all weekend by everyone. Real fruit sundaes at Butlers Fruit Farm. And Richard's expertise in helping us realise that we were looking at some very special birds, and helping us learn more about the birds we thought we knew well. Who needs Google

**Rowena East**



photos Richard Schofield & Alyth Grant

## Summer Sinclair Wetland Survey

The count was done on a hot but calm day and surprisingly the birds didn't seem to be hiding from the heat. The counters enjoyed lunch in the shade afterwards.

We now have Sinclair Wetland counts for three summers. The usual bush birds top the rankings - silvereye and redpoll. There were no tui, but bellbirds were again present after being absent in spring. This is the first year that fantails were seen at several count sites, and on Lonely Island we watched a pair very actively feeding 4 fledglings. Interestingly, fernbirds turned up at many of the count stations. The total count of fernbird along the 1 km transect was 15, similar to those of previous years.

Species	Average summer count/site		
	2016	2017	2018
tui	0.08	0.00	0.00
bellbird	1.17	1.00	1.00
grey warbler	1.08	0.42	1.17
brown creeper	0.33	1.00	0.33
fantail	0.08	0.00	0.75
tomtit	0.00	0.00	0.00
skylark	0.17	0.00	0.00
Welcome swallow	0.00	0.25	0.33
fernbird	1.25	1.00	0.83
silvereye	3.83	5.50	6.25
blackbird	1.00	0.75	0.75
song thrush	0.08	0.08	0.08
starling	0.17	0.00	0.08
dunnock	0.00	0.25	0.08
pipit	0.00	0.00	0.00
yellowhammer	0.08	0.25	0.92
chaffinch	0.25	0.25	0.17
greenfinch	0.00	0.17	0.17
redpoll	5.83	5.75	3.25
goldfinch	0.08	0.17	0.08
house sparrow	0.00	0.25	0.58

The total number of waterbirds was over twice that seen in previous summers, despite water levels being quite low. The Paradise ducks were up-ending to feed easily and were present in greater numbers than previously, although scaup still were the most plentiful duck, and present in much greater numbers than previous years.

<b>Species</b>	<b>summer 2016</b>	<b>summer 2017</b>	<b>summer 2018</b>
Greylag goose	0	4	6
Canada goose	25	45	51
Black Swan	27	7	2
Paradise duck	87	0	216
Mallard(hybrid)	35	9	77
Shoveler	2	4	7
Grey Teal	0	0	0
Scaup	83	90	269
Total	259	159	628

**Mary Thompson**

### **Town Belt Survey: Update**

An update on progress with this project. There are 374 completed counts for the 8 weeks that we ran this project during October and November. We recorded 27 species. A total of 5203 individual birds were counted. There was pretty even coverage across all the locations but it seems the Belleknoves location was least favourite while everybody was happy to count at Queens Drive 3 & 5, and Maori Road. Everybody kept the effort up and so there were twice as many counts in the last week as the first. There was a bit of a reduction in effort in the middle of November. The top three most frequently recorded species were: silvereye, blackbird and redpoll. The least frequently encountered species were mallard, paradise shelduck and kingfisher. The comments from you were very varied and so not much use for analysis. You were very good at counting cars and once the message got out everybody kept good records. Of the 27 species recorded about eleven have a high enough average count to pursue for analysis. I'm currently looking at the detail of this assumption and whether or not the style and number of counts will give a robust assessment of change in numbers over time. I'll be talking about this at the March meeting so come along and we can debate what looks best.

**Bruce McKinlay**



## The Great Robin Nest Hunt 2017



Robin with mealworm....waiting for more

A dedicated group of robin enthusiasts visited Jill Hamel and Ruth Houghton's native and exotic forest block next to the eastern side of Orokonui Ecosanctuary every 2 weeks, between 2 Sept and 19 Nov last year. The aim was to look for evidence that resident robins, which had dispersed from the ecosanctuary, were breeding. We were hopeful that we would find any nests that existed and we wanted to follow the nests through to their conclusion. We located between 3 to 5 males holding territories on Jill and Ruth's block, and one male with a territory on the Mopanui trig track. Only 1 female robin was found and one nest, which failed. As far as we know, this is the first recorded breeding attempt by robins that have dispersed outside of the ecosanctuary.

The easiest way to detect signs of robin breeding activity is to feed mealworms to a male bird. If the male has a female partner or chicks, he will take mealworms to them. By following him, observers can therefore, in theory, find a nest. Here we hit our first snag. Robins are usually fairly curious birds and generally cannot resist juicy grubs wriggling invitingly on the ground. Not the robins we encountered, however. It wasn't until our 4th visit on 14 October that a male robin obliged Jan, Andrew and George by picking up a beakful of mealworms, flying off with them and returning for more. The hunt was on! While Jan kept the mealworm supply line open, George and Andrew followed the male down through the (luckily

not too impenetrable) forest. There was huge excitement when a female bird was seen, and followed for a while. She then promptly disappeared, but not before we had a rough idea of where the nest tree (if indeed there was a nest) was located. There was much waiting after this (the mealworm supply had run out, and with it, the chance to get a quick result), until finally it was time for us to leave. Literally, just as we had packed up and got up to head back up the hill, eagle-eyed Andrew spotted the female once more. This time we saw where she disappeared to in the tree, and with the aid of binoculars, could just make out the top of her head and a beady eye keeping watch on us, from a nest! Judging by the behaviour of the male (he fed the mealworms to the female) and female (she fed herself), the nest contained eggs, not chicks.



The nest was a scruffy-looking affair from the outside, about 5 m up in the main fork of a Kanuka. Unfortunately, on the next visit to the nest, 2 weeks later, the nest was found abandoned, with 3 eggs. (Thanks to Jorge for confirmation.) The female robin was not seen on that visit or a follow up visit in mid-November, although the male of the pair was present on both occasions. A likely reason for nest abandonment was the disappearance of the female robin. It is worth noting that possum and rat control occurs on the block, and stoat traps have recently been placed.

Although the other male robins located during this study did not take mealworms, these birds were observed for as long as possible. From their behaviour, we do not believe they had partners. Male robins take food to their partner (before she nests and while she is incubating) or chicks fairly frequently. In the process of doing this, they call. No such behaviour was seen or heard in the other males, although territorial singing was heard.

We were surprised at how little breeding activity was encountered. Possibly it is male robins who disperse more readily from their natal area and fewer females are yet to be found outside the ecosanctuary. Possibly, as female robins do all the incubation, they are more vulnerable to predators than the males during the breeding season and do not survive as long outside the fence. Whatever the reason, we hope to return during the 2018 breeding season and maybe this year, we can document the first successful nesting for robins outside the ecosanctuary.

Thanks to Jan, Bruce, Andrew, Craig, Maree, Mary, Nick, Franny, Jorge, Ash and Ken for help with robin finding and following; to Nick for the photographs; to Jill and Ruth for allowing us access to their block; to Orokonui Ecosanctuary for providing the essential mealworms.

**George Pickerell**

## **Ornithological snippets**

Fergus Sutherland commented on the dedication of a **Paradise Shelduck** pair at Papatowai, which after raising 9 ducklings out of 9 last year, successfully reared another 8 this year, again without loss. A count of 120 **Grey Teal** on Catlins Lake on January 30<sup>th</sup> was notable; meanwhile after peaking at 113 in Balclutha on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb, numbers dropped sharply to just 4 two days later, corresponding with a rise in water levels.

Viewing the **Shags** in Oamaru is proving a hit and miss affair. A party of Australian birders counted at least 1500 **Otago** and 500 **Spotted** on 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan, while the previous evening there were only about 500 in total; travellers en route to Lake Ellesmere on 16<sup>th</sup> Feb saw good numbers earlier in the day, but only a few dozen remained at lunchtime. A **White Heron** was seen by another visiting birder at Ocean View Recreation Reserve on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb. and another at Waitati around the same time.



Janet Ledingham photographed a **Variable Oystercatcher** family at Aramoana on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan & 13<sup>th</sup> Feb; both parents were black, but the chick was pied. HANZAB suggests that where both adults are the same colour phase, then the offspring tend to follow suit. (A similar pied chick with a black sibling was at Karitane around 25 years ago. One of its parents had a very small patch of white on the rear flanks and the other was completely black. When the chick moulted out of its juvenile plumage it became almost totally black. The same pair -they were banded by Peter



Schweigman - produced all black chicks in other years. ed.) A late report concerns a **Turnstone** at Cabbage Point (Catlins) on 28<sup>th</sup> December.

**Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** have put in a couple of appearances lately, with 3 at Cabbage Point on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb, followed by a single bird at nearby Catlins Lake on 13<sup>th</sup>. A couple of presumed escapes had earlier been seen at Portobello on 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan. Finally Nick Dunkley, saw a **Tomtit** while walking the dog in the pines at Hawea on 29<sup>th</sup> January, only his third in 11 years in the Lake Hawea township river locality.

Compiled by **Richard Schofield**. Any interesting sightings please to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

### **White-winged Black Tern visits Tomahawk again**

A White-winged Black Tern briefly visited Tomahawk Lagoon in January, the second one seen since 2014.

This uncommon Asian migrant tern that hawks insects over water and land, was last reported in Birds New Zealand Otago January 2015 newsletter, detailing sightings from 9 November 2014 until 24 December 2014. Searching for an intriguing dotterel caused the latest lucky observation of an exotic tern.

Bruce McKinlay first saw the dotterel at lower Tomahawk Lagoon outlet on 27 January 2018. Drought exposed a large area of dry sand and mud for the bird to run about on. After returning from Sinclair Wetlands, Bruce, Christine and I observed the dotterel closely through scopes, and Bruce took good photographs. The plumage was a bit different, with a rusty rufous tinge, so speculated identification ranged through Sandpiper or Sanderling or Dotterel. We compared book illustrations with Bruce's photos. Eventually, Bruce decided it was a non-breeding or juvenile Banded Dotterel, which have highly variable plumage.

Next day, 28 January 2018, I searched Tomahawk Lagoon for the dotterel again. It was gone, of course, but why are Welcome Swallows attacking that little tern? Over the water groups of swallows were chasing and attacking a lone small tern in spectacular wheeling swooping dives. The tern was swerving over a wide area trying to dodge the determined



swallows, and feeding between attacks. It was hawking insects and contact dipping the bill taking insects off the water surface. Then the swallows departed, and the tern landed on sand close to me. The 2014 tern was always flying when I saw it, so this one landing was very exciting.

I made quick sketches and notes from perfect scope views of the tern on sand. My old film camera is dead again. It was an immature White-winged Black Tern, as described and illustrated in bird guides, with slightly different plumage than the tern of summer 2014. It was mottled grey and white, a small sharp black bill, with distinctive black ear muffs and club shaped black patch on the nape, and tail more straight than barely forked. Upper wings mottled dark and light grey, with white underparts. Differences to 2014 included: more mottled blackish grey than flat grey, and a crown of dark grey swept back lines as if combed back. The immature tern in bird guides has black legs – some with reddish tinge, while this tern has totally red legs which occur on a breeding adult, but it does not have adult plumage.

The tern seemed unaware of me, but was nervous and tired. It walked the sandy water edge in an agitated way, frequently stopping for short rests sitting on the ground, and drank quickly while watching the sky. It was nervy and indecisive, alternating between dropping down on the ground to rest poorly, drinking, standing in water, standing and walking ashore looking at the sky. On the water edge it picked at sticks and debris, and even swallowed a twig. The tern visibly started whenever a Black-backed Gull flew over or walked nearby, but it was comfortable with nearby Red-billed Gulls and seemed to deliberately stay close to them. Then the tern was attacked again by one to six swallows, who really went for it ashore and in the air. I don't know whether swallows actually pecked the tern, but they got very close. By now the tern flew only when evading swallows, and clearly wanted to rest ashore. The tern waded and drank, and again slumped down on its belly on sand. It stopped fleeing from attacks by lone swallows.

Then the tern walked over exposed sand toward inland, picking among sticks and debris, and along the mud shore of outlet creek. It didn't appear to eat anything. As it stood by a log, a lone swallow dived at it calling. The tern ran closer to the log, and called out once a shrill long "kliip" cry unlike anything I've heard before, and the swallow flew away. Have any other New Zealanders heard the call of a White-winged Black Tern, all be

it in Ternish for go away? The tern continued walking about and jabbing debris over a wide area, then stood at waters edge staring inland. An unseen swallow called and the tern flew off north over the lagoon, last seen swerving wildly as six swallows dived and swooped at it. Interestingly, the tern in 2014 was not attacked, although swallows were present.

White-winged Black Terns must frequently encounter swallows in Eurasia, Africa, and Australia. However this tern was alone and alien here, and usually local swallows have exclusive rights to hawking and contact dipping. There are more swallows than previous years, at the same time as fewer insects during the drought, which may explain the swallows' aggression.

Swallows now seem bolder, up to 40 line up socialising on my roof, and a few try to fly inside through open doors. They are unafraid of people. I had to close my door to keep swallows out. A quick stride to the letterbox can mean swallows dart inside through the doorway. As much as I like them, and usually they fly out again safely, at times one gets confused and needs careful moving out by closing interior doors until there is only the hall leading to the open door. A swallow attempting entry flies into the porch and pulls up fluttering 30cm from my face, gives a quick call and flies away, and tries again later. Some days there are 40 of them around the house, other times none, depending on wind and insects.

Seeing the White-winged Black Tern was a random lucky moment of one day, while searching for a dotterel. There must be other rare birds that no one sees, or that fly past people who are not birders. **Andrew Austin**

## **Scaup and Others Busy at Tomahawk**

Following a report of a White-winged Black Tern by a birder, the **Tomahawk Times** has to say there are a few other birds at Tomahawk.

The drought made an extended open sand and mud flat at lower lagoon outlet, so volunteers planned refilling it by human bucket chain to keep the integrity of the habitat and scientific accuracy. Naturally, most time was spent in committee meetings and applying for funds, giving nature time to solve it with rain. Disappointed volunteers were paid anyway with a chocolate fish and sent home. They put in expenses claims for buckets, but

the contract stated nothing beyond chocolate fish, and we don't reimburse for irrigation tools. Their buckets could be enjoyed making sand castles on the beach, when herds of black mustangs aren't galloping for a UK television commercial. It was a good time for a dark horse at Tomahawk.

Algal blooms cycled hues of green and red again. After 1 February, rains refilled the outlet as aquatic shallows again with lots of birds. Unspeakable rituals performed during the lunar eclipse achieved this. A permanent embargo was imposed on reporting those rituals, because they were unspeakable – which is why we want to report them, so the paper's lawyers are seeking an injunction to overturn this in the public interest; and in our own interest on advancing careers towards an overdue Pulitzer Prize. The magicians have been a bit unpleasant. Our office received a message delivered by Pukeko, referring to living in interesting times. A precautionary new lightening conductor was installed further from our building. Meanwhile, we are still allowed to report the birds...

One of the new Scaup fledglings was admitted to the Wildlife Hospital on 25 January with a fishhook through the throat. Speculation about how it was caught to take it to hospital made us wonder if the rescuer was a fisherperson who accidentally hooked it. We don't know the official result. A description of the event suggests the duckling was from the NE family, more likely to get hooked than SW solo Scaup mum's family. Later observations of the NE Scaup family showed a female and five juveniles, same as before, so hopefully the duckling was quickly healed and released. The NE female used to have two males guarding her, but no males have been seen since 1 January. SW solo mum Scaup, never seen with a male, had eight ducklings which decreased to six. However, maybe two more ducklings were lost, because latest observations are of 11 Scaup together that separate into families of a female with four juveniles and another female with five juveniles. They mix together diving and sleeping. After diving enthusiastically, they swam away when two Black Shags started fishing the same area.

A White Heron is every day stalking and stabbing its dagger bill down at lower lagoon, and Raupo Cove. It frequently inspects the illegal incinerator chimney on a shed roof near upper lagoon, where the Bittern used to live. The heron walking along a fence provokes a collie dog, and it stalks through long grass probably for insects and skinks. Mice are more

common lately, some fat ones, maybe the heron eats those. Big trout eat swimming mice at night, so there are fishing lures made as toy mice. It is time to worry if you see a lure made as a toy person, because then you know feral Frankenfish escaped from that secret aquarium. Night fishing under beech trees at Lake Mavora, it would be fun to play the Jaws theme on MP3 earbuds, but too spooky when knee deep wading. By day, those fish mostly go for mayflies and cicadas, leaping around ignoring your flies. Night swirls and splashes come from monsters cruising the shallows hunting mice, lobsters, fish, Tasmanian Devil lures, and knee deep anglers. A silent Morepork circles the campfire, bill clicking as it grabs moths.

Huge numbers of Paradise Shelducks are massing for their moult. Between 280 and 500 can be counted from lower lagoon outlet by scoping the shoreline, but numbers can be doubled by looking from Lochend Farm gate more directly onto their favoured shore. It is best to divide the area, count some from the outlet, then move to the gate where it is easy to exceed 700. More Paradise Shelducks gather on hillsides, upper lagoon and up the valley. A few Canada Geese, usually at night.

Also at night, sometimes a Sooty Shearwater calling and flying low inland. One especially foggy calm night, a lone Sooty Shearwater came in from the sea flying low and oohing and aahhing loudly along the length of our shared driveway and away west. Usually such calls come from tourists thrilled by local culture, or sunbathers on the beach suddenly seeing 18 black horses followed by a Porsche 4WD with a film camera boom charging at them, but this was a seabird. I heard it coming, and saw it fly below roof height about 2m from my door. Most people had outside porch lights on, so maybe the mist diffused yellow glow attracted it, as lighthouses and ships attract seabirds at night.

Others at Tomahawk Lagoons include Mallard Ducks, and quick flights of 70 – 100 Shovelers, fewer Grey Teal, up to 40 Pied Stilts together with two Pied/Black hybrids, and mobs of over 30 Spur-winged Plovers. Spoonbills wade around in groups of up to 10 scything the shallows and shaking their heads at birders. Will Cyclone Gita push anything new our way?

**Andrew Austin**



**Finally, a real mystery bird .....**



and a bit of a mystery photo. All we know is that it was sent to Mary from John Darby. Most exciting suggestion so far is the presumed extinct flightless New Zealand Osprey.

## **Notices and Business**

### **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) 2018 Subs – 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 (actually 28) 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**

### **Birds NZ Conference and AGM, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> June, Waitangi**

The annual meeting of Birds NZ is being held in the Bay of Islands at Queen's Birthday Weekend. This is a great chance to have some warm weather in the middle of winter, along with some very interesting research presentations, with a variety of workshops including use of drones, eBird, difficult bird ID, to choose from. The field trips have some exciting options: pelagic trip, Urupukapuka predator-free island, estuary kayaking and extended two day trips to Ninety Mile Beach or mist netting at Russell. **Early Bird Registrations by 30 March 2018.**

### **EBird News Checklist-a-day challenge**

Despite the fact that we're nearly two months into the New Year, it's not too late to take up the Checklist-a-day challenge. The aim is to submit an average of at least one complete checklist a day, for the whole year. A complete checklist is one in which all species identified are recorded, and there is a count (i.e. not an "X") for each species.

A submission does not have to involve a long list of birds from a hotspot, you can go birding absolutely anywhere – in fact lists from out of the way or seemingly mundane places are equally valuable, as they help to fill in the gaps in the bigger picture. The challenge also gives you the incentive to get out and look at some different locations. And of course you don't have to limit it to one list a day

So it's not too late to start (or continue), but the sooner you get going the easier your chances of achieving the challenge. And if you need any further encouragement, there are 3 pairs of binoculars to be won. Further details at <https://ebird.org/news/2018-checklist-a-day-challenge/>

**Richard Schofield**



Much more of this



and we will soon have to put up fences to control the crowds.

## **Programme 2017-18**

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

- 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](mailto: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](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)  
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the next newsletter by 21st March please.