



Birds New Zealand  
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## *Birds New Zealand*

### *Otago Region Newsletter 4/2018 April 2018*

#### **Sinclair Wetlands Autumn Survey.**

A team of 11 of us carried out the bird counts at the Sinclair Wetlands on Saturday 7 April for our autumn survey. Weather conditions were not perfect with a gusty south west breeze and the old shower, but at least it was before the 'winter' storms came on the following Monday! We were pleased to welcome three new members. The standouts were hundreds of scaup/black teal/papango, many fantails and elusive fernbirds. This count only 6 fernbirds were recorded but usually we have 12-14 individuals in the 1 km transect.

Scaup are the predominant waterbird; the high autumn count of shoveler in 2016 has not been repeated over the three years of the surveys; black swan, Canada goose and mallard numbers have been similar over the years.

Species	Autumn 2016	Autumn 2017	Autumn 2018
Greylag goose	0	3	9
Canada goose	83	55	37
Black Swan	38	4	42
Paradise duck	4	0	2
Mallard(hybrid)	43	55	57
Shoveler	157	32	7
Grey Teal	8	4	0
Scaup	386	124	340
Total birds	<b>719</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>498</b>

Over the seasons for the last year, total number of waterbirds was highest in summer and autumn: Paradise duck were only present in large numbers in summer; scaup were in highest numbers in summer and autumn, and grey teal have not been present on count days.

Species	winter 2017	spring 2017	summer 2018	autumn 2018
Greylag goose	3	6	6	9
Canada goose	16	12	51	37
Black Swan	8	22	2	42
Paradise duck		2	216	2
Mallard(hybrid)	55	5	77	57
Shoveler	0	2	7	7
Grey Teal	0	0	0	0
Scaup	93	75	269	340
<b>Total birds</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>498</b>

Five minute bird counts have been done on Ram Island at 12 sites (six in duplicate) per survey. The total number of birds recorded was around 200. The pattern of which birds were the most commonly seen was very similar in 2017 and 2018: silvereve, starling, bellbird and redpoll topping the list. Very few tui have been seen at the wetlands. We are also still hoping for tomtit and rifleman.

Species	Autumn 2017	Autumn 2018
tui	3	0
bellbird	24	28
grey warbler	13	4
brown creeper	8	4
fantail	16	10
skylark	0	0
welcome swallow	0	7
fernbird	5	0
silvereve	102	78
blackbird	15	10
song thrush	3	0
starling	28	44
dunnock	4	1
yellowhammer	0	0
chaffinch	12	2
greenfinch	0	0
redpoll	17	20
goldfinch	5	0
house sparrow	0	3
<b>Total birds recorded</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>211</b>

There were seasonal differences in the pattern of species counted. Bellbirds have not been seen in spring but were again conspicuous in this autumn count. One female bellbird was seen eating totara fruit. There seems to be plenty of flowers available in spring but Ram Island is deserted by bellbird in spring – where do they go to breed? Many species

are more conspicuous (due to song) in spring: blackbird, thrush, dunnock, chaffinch. Starling were present in greater numbers in autumn-they appeared to be foraging nursery spiders. Redpoll seem to be present in greater numbers in spring and summer.

Species	winter 2017	spring 2017	summer 2018	autumn 2018
tui	0	0	0	0
bellbird	8	0	12	28
grey warbler	1	25	14	4
brown creeper	1	7	4	4
fantail	6	17	9	10
tomtit	0	0	0	0
skylark	0	1	0	0
welcome swallow	0	0	4	7
fernbird	9	3	10	0
silveryeye	13	18	75	78
blackbird	15	27	9	10
song thrush	16	20	1	0
starling	0	0	1	44
dunnock	3	26	1	1
yellowhammer	0	5	11	0
chaffinch	7	36	2	2
greenfinch	1	0	2	0
redpoll	1	35	39	20
goldfinch	0	2	1	0
house sparrow	1	0	7	3
Total birds recorded	82	222	202	211

**Mary Thompson**

## Ornithological Snippets



On 16th Apr the inshore waters around Nugget Point were filled with a large feeding flock of **Sooty Shearwaters** - estimates from photographs suggest in excess of 10,000 birds in the immediate vicinity, with 3 **Fluttering Shearwaters** joining in the feeding frenzy. It has been another good month for **Pied Shag** sightings, with birds at Dunedin Harbour mouth on 22nd Mar, 2 in Oamaru Harbour on 24th Mar and 16th Apr, while the young birders heading down to Stewart Island also saw one at Katiki Point on the same day. Sightings also from Anderson's Bay inlet on 25th Mar, 2 on Quarantine Island on 30th, 6 at Moeraki on 2nd April and 2 adults at Karitane on 22nd.

A further urban **Little Owl** was heard at Brockville on 2nd April. Finally two **Australasian Pipits** were an unexpected sight running around on a suburban Balclutha street on 2nd April; road works were taking place, so presumably they thought they were on a gravel road!

Hot off the press, a **White Heron** was on the Catlins Lake on 19th April, and the first **Cattle Egret** of the season was on Inchclutha on 14th April. A **Brown Skua** was seen at Sandfly Bay on 21st March by Graeme Loh,



and presumably the same bird was at Lawyer's Head three days later (Nicky Rosner).



A **White-winged Black Tern** was photographed from Deborah Bay on 2nd March by Aaron Heimann and on 8th April Suzanne Schofield counted 27 **Black-fronted Terns** on the river in Balclutha..

compiled by **Richard Schofield**

## Notices and Business

### **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.

### **eBird**

As well being an online database for the benefit of all birders, and others, eBird is also a useful tool for storing all of your own personal records. Instead of all your bird sightings from over the years being in numerous notebooks, once submitted on eBird, they are all in one place and can be searched by species, location, date, etc. If like me you have difficulty deciphering your handwriting at a later date, then entering data into eBird while the information is fresh will mean this is no longer an issue. It also means you can use an abbreviated recording system when out in the field

(if you are using an old-fashioned notebook and pencil), and hopefully know what it means when you fill in your checklists. A while ago I tried to upload some data from UK surveys in the 1980s, but it was written in coded form for the species concerned, and so I couldn't identify a significant number of species! If it could have been transferred straight away into eBird, this would have not been a problem.

For this reason, it is worthwhile putting extra details into your eBird entries, which will add value to the records later on, as you would (hopefully) in your notebook. In the "Date and Effort" section, the "Comments" box gives the opportunity to give some background information about the count. You can put the weather conditions, state of tide, mode of transport (if you were travelling), if you were walking the dog, or anything that affects the birds you saw, and can give a bit more context to the count.

I will cover the options about adding extra information in the "Add details" box in a later article. In the meantime, if anyone has any aspects of eBird that they would like to know more about, please get in touch with me.

**Richard Schofield**

## **2017 Otago Bird Report**

I am currently compiling a report for Otago birds in 2017. It is mainly based on eBird reports & newsletter items, and covers all records of scarce birds, high counts, general distribution of records etc. If you have any sightings from 2017 that I may not have already come across and that you would like include, please send them to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

**Richard Schofield**



This year's Global Big Day is scheduled for Saturday 5 May. The aim is to see how many species can be seen throughout the world in one day. NZ has many unique species so our sightings are an

important addition to the total. Otago region was top in NZ last year—hopefully we can keep our record spot.

We will have teams visiting birding hotspots throughout Otago: Otago Peninsula; Aramoana; Orokonui; Blueskin Bay; Shag Point; Moeraki. Please can members from Queenstown, Wanaka and Alex. go birding in their areas to increase our total species list (especially grebe, quail, pipit, kea). Richard Schofield has invited anyone interested to join him on the Saturday for birding in the Catlins. Individuals can also survey their favourite spots. We also need to listen out for morepork and Little owl in the evening. And if you know where to see NZ Falcon, please check that out.

Remember, it is important to do is complete an area count, travelling count or stationary count (incidental reports will not be used in the official totals); you need to spend at least 5 minutes birding, count all birds seen or heard, and, most importantly, submit complete data for 5 May to eBird by 8 May at latest to count towards the grand global, NZ, and regional totals. No matter what you do—have fun, enjoy the birds you find, and record your sightings on eBird!

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**Mary Thompson**

## Programme 2018

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

- 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.
- Sat May 5** Global Big Day for eBird. Teams will be heading to Otago hotspots; to join a team contact Mary [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) or phone 464 0787. Carpooling will be arranged.
- Wed May 23** Indoor Meeting. Natalie Forsdick on “Conservation management of kaki/black stilt.
- Wed June 27** Indoor Meeting. Derek Onley on “Hawksbury Lagoon - Gettin' yer Ducks in a Row?”  
Followed by AGM.
- June 30–July 8** Garden Bird Survey. Record maximum number of each species seen at one time during 1h observation of your garden.
- Wed July 25** Indoor Meeting. Graham Parker on his research on our local falcons, “The Otago falcon project; the why, what and how, with early results.”

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the next newsletter by 16th May please.