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**Birds New Zealand**

## *Otago Region Newsletter 5/2018 May 2018*



### **EBird Global Big Day The Summary**

EBird's Global Big Day is scheduled for May each year, and this year it took place on Saturday 5th May. One of the aims is for birders worldwide to see as many species as possible in a single day. In the northern hemisphere early May is the peak season for variety of birds, with most birds either being on breeding grounds and in full song, or passing through on migration. In Otago we were hampered by short daylight hours, no high tide – and the start of the duck shooting season. Despite these handicaps,

on Saturday 5th May, 43 observers in 19 teams of between 1 and 12 covered the length and breadth of Otago for the eBird Big Day 2018. From Oamaru in the north to the Catlins Lake in the south, and from Glendhu Bay in the west to Taiaroa Head in the east, keen eyes were out from dawn (and keen ears from earlier than that) trying to make sure that nothing was missed.

And very little was missed. In total 80 species were recorded in Otago on the day (although that includes 2 redpolls!) which was the highest total in the country, pipping Auckland who finished on 77. Thanks to everyone who participated. Jill and Lala got 27 species on the Peninsula but didn't include a Fiordland Crested Penguin at Penguin Place! Lesley, Francie and Pat were at Aramoana before daylight and had to wait to see their first birds, and including Orokonui got a total of 43 species. Rachel, our Hawea member, was out and about and got Kea, Falcon, Mohua and Rifleman within her total of 34 species. John Darby reported Great Crested Grebe. Sam got us many seabirds from out on the Monarch. Derek was up at the crack of dawn and got us Little Owl and didn't go to bed until 11pm when he heard a Morepork. The Catlins team, despite the additional handicap of a misty morning in Balclutha, got 54 species. And of course Lei and Cui, travelling from Oamaru to Tomahawk Lagoon, got an incredible 68 species, topping Otago and coming second for the whole of NZ. In total 98 different checklists were entered into eBird for the day (151 including shared lists).

So how could it have been bettered? Only 3 species seen in 2017 were not recorded this year – Fluttering Shearwater, Gannet and Reef Heron, all of which can be hard to pin down. A Cattle Egret was on Inchclutha the previous day, but did not fit into any itineraries. Nobody claimed a Grey Duck (though it may be tricky to get that one past the reviewer!). So, a fine all-round effort, and close to the limit for the time of year. It would be interesting to repeat the exercise in spring, either locally or on a national basis, and get all the advantages our northern hemisphere counterparts enjoyed on 5th May.

To see the full results, go to eBird, Explore, and then Explore a Region. Once in Otago (or New Zealand), you can set the date to Big Day 2018.

.....**Richard Schofield**  
**and the travels/travaills .....**



## Global Big Day Trip Report

Last month, I realised that the Global Big Day was approaching. Well, it was time to make an exciting full day birding trip as I had not done such an extensive and well-planned birding trip for many months. On the big day in 2017 I had explored some birding hotspots in Otago and got an exceptional checklist with 60 species of birds. However, that result was based on a lot of lucks because I had not planned it quite carefully. This year, I would have a try if I could perform better on the big day.

Visiting a variety of habitats is a key factor for efficient birding. The representative types of environment in Otago region are forests, lagoons and inlets, pastures, coastal areas (e.g. harbours and beaches) as well as the sea. Planning a birding trip that covers all the major types of environments is not difficult. However, it had took me quite a while to plan such a ONE DAY trip including these types of habitats. My lovely wife Yue Cui also joined the trip. She is an excellent birdwatcher and wildlife photographer. During the trip she helped a lot in terms of looking for birds and ticking the checklist.

We live in Dunedin, but we started the trip from Oamaru. This is because the ponds near Oamaru may produce the extremely rare Black Stilt and the Bushy Beach in Oamaru is a good spot for the Yellow-eyed Penguin. Also, we had booked a whale watching (flight) tour as well as an albatross encounter pelagic in Kaikoura on 3rd May. On 4th we were back to Oamaru and then have a good night of sleep, which was the best preparation for the busy birding trip next day.



Sperm Whale at Kaikoura

In the morning of 5th May we got up early and checked out at 7:30am. The weather was not bad. Despite the fact that the light condition was not perfect – overcast and a bit foggy. Our first destination was Bushy Beach, a beautiful beach in the south of Oamaru. Patches of shrubs and trees are growing along the beach, providing good environment for the endangered Yellow-eyed Penguin. Actually, we immediately saw two Yellow-eyed Penguins moving into the sea from the beach when we were arriving at the bird watching hide, a good start! Apart from the penguin, some Red-billed Gulls and Spotted Shags were foraging actively. On the way back to the parking, we found a flock of Common Redpolls and two Dunnocks. A stunning male Yellowhammer was singing right behind our car.

We then moved to Oamaru Harbour, which is an important breeding colony of Little Penguins, Otago Shags as well as Spotted Shags. Shags were crowded on the wharf as usual: Spotted shags were close to the walk path while Otago Shags stayed at the further end. Occasionally the locally rare Pied Shag also appear here but not today. Two White-fronted Terns were hunting fish some distance away. I like watching terns hunting, as watching them doing the nosedives is very exciting. Some other interesting birds were also found here, including a distant swimming Little Penguin, a sleepy adult Black-billed Gull and a few passerines at a parking nearby.

Our next destination was the ponds along Fortification Road. This area, along with Kakanui River and All Day Bay Lagoon nearby, are spots for a few wintering Black Stilts. Up to 5 individuals had been reported here regularly from 2015 to 2017, and there had been one earlier this year (by Bruce McKinlay, on eBird). We checked all the ponds and lagoons in this area with hope however there was no sign of Black Stilt. Anyway, we managed to see a large number of New Zealand Scaup as well as waders such as Pied Stilt, Pukeko and Spur-winged Plover hanging around.

Aiming to watch seabirds, we quickly drove down to Moeraki (Katiki Point). My wife Yue spotted numerous Australian Magpies, Skylarks and Australasian Harriers on pastures on the way. Before arriving at Katiki Point we stopped at the old wharf in Moeraki Village to check out the possible Pied Shag. Fortunately, there were as many as 6 Pied Shags at the end of the wharf together with a group of Spotted Shags and 2 Little Pied Shags. We left the wharf in 5 minutes then headed straight to Katiki Point. In the shrubs and trees near the parking of Katiki Lighthouse we found

quite a few European Goldfinches, Silvereyes and a Song Thrush. A beautiful Welcome Swallow was flying around a post near the lighthouse. It was 10am so we did not see any Yellow-eyed Penguins by the coast. However, we were entertained by 4 Sooty Shearwaters as well as a Caspian Tern.



Welcome Swallow at Moeraki

We headed back to SH1 and drove down to Hawkesbury Lagoon in Waikouaiti. This is one of my favourite birding hotspots in Otago where I can easily find a good number of ducks, geese and waders. The prime target here was Royal Spoonbill. Sure enough, we quickly found 4 of them even though they were further than usual. Greylag Geese and Canada Geese (as well as some domestic or hybrid geese) were staying on the bank. We also got hundreds of Paradise Shelducks, Australian Shovelers and Grey Teals on the water, with a few Black Shags being present next to the ducks. Then it was time to leave.

After just 15 minutes' driving, we arrived at Carey's Creek Trail and parked at a small parking near the trail entrance. There is a nice patch of forest here, supporting good populations of different native passerines. We walked towards the trail, looking for birds in the trees along the creek. It was very cloudy, so the songbirds were more active than in sunny days. The 20 minutes' birding here was amazingly productive: We ticked almost

all the locally representative forest birds, including Tui, Bellbird, Tomtit, New Zealand Robin, Grey Warbler and Brown Creeper. At forest edge we also encountered a pair of friendly New Zealand Fantail as well as two gorgeous Eastern Rosellas. Just one week ago, a New Zealand Falcon had been reported here, however, we did not have the good fortune to see this elusive bird.



New Zealand Fantail at Carey's Creek Trail (outside the entrance)

Next, we moved south to Waitati, then stopped at different viewpoints (along SH1 and Doctors Point Road) where we spent some time on scanning water birds at Blueskin Bay. The tide was low, so all the waders and ducks spread out, which made it very difficult to search and count. Eventually, we still managed to spot a Bar-tailed Godwit, a Caspian Tern, an Otago Shag, at least 5 Pied Shags, some Variable Oystercatchers and as many as 192 South Island Pied Oystercatchers. One of those Pied Shags tried hard to hunt fish in the water then successfully caught a big flounder. Watching this shag attempting to swallow the flounder was very interesting.



Pied Shag and flounder at Doctors Point

We then made our way up to Orokonui Ecosanctuary, hoping to see Takahe, Kaka, Fernbird and some passerines in the forest. Yue saw a very fat New Zealand Pigeon flying outside the main entrance of the ecosanctuary. In order to save time, we drove directly to Mopanui Road and stopped at several points along that road instead of getting into the ecosanctuary from the entrance. As a result, we were happy to hear a Fernbird just near the fence close to the Takahe colony (but no Takahe there). In the deeper forest (still along the fence) we spotted at least two flocks of the cute Rifleman and a noisy Kaka. We soon drove back to Blueskin Road. On the way back, we ticked Bellbird, Brown Creeper, Tui and Rosella.

Orokonui Ecosanctuary is a lovely place. However, we did not spend too much time there as we needed to see a few more seabirds at our next destination: Aramoana. Aramoana Mole (the breakwater) is a perfect spot to watch seabirds such as albatrosses, shearwaters, terns and shags, even though most of them are quite far away. The breakwater is about 800 metres long. There were more than 100 Red-billed Gulls as well as a few White-fronted Terns resting on the rocks along the breakwater. We even saw a locally rare Pied Shag there which was just a few meters away. We then noticed a fishing boat was coming back to the harbour and a beautiful Buller's Mollymawk was following the boat. At the far end of the

breakwater, we scanned the sea carefully to search and identify the distant seabirds. After a while we managed to tick a Little Penguin, 2 White-capped Mollymawks, a Northern Giant Petrel, a White-chinned Petrel and a Hutton's Shearwater. Also, there were at least 3 unidentified shearwaters (2 Sooty or Short-tailed Shearwater plus a black-and-white shearwater). Some Black-fronted Terns were hovering above the sea. These tiny terns breed in inland and spend the winter along the coastal area such as here. We also recorded a good number of Northern Royal Albatrosses (both adults and chicks) and Otago Shags, which were resting on the opposite side of Otago Harbour entrance (i.e. Taiaroa Head).

We then drove a short distance and set off for a walk to a viewpoint at the nearby Aramoana Saltmarsh. Here we found 14 cute Banded Dotterels (busy foraging) and 2 Sacred Kingfishers (flew over). There were also regular reports of Bar-tailed Godwit here, but we missed them this time (maybe due to the season and the low tide).





Two of the Banded Dotterels at Aramoana Saltmarsh. Can you find them?

It started to rain when we were driving back to Dunedin city. But we still had a few birds to find. Our next job is to see a Coot. A family of this bird always present at Ross Creek Reservoir, which is just in the northwest of Dunedin city. However, we found that the lower part of Burma Road was closed due to the roadwork, so it took us more time to get the reservoir from the other direction (Wakari Road). The good news was that we immediately saw a Eurasian Coot after arrival.

Our last destination is Tomahawk Lagoon in the south of Dunedin. It was quite late (5pm) and still raining so we were not sure if the famous White Heron was still over there. Fortunately, the answer was YES! An elegant White Heron was foraging in the very weak light condition. At last, we spent a few minutes before sunset on birding and fishing at Upper Tomahawk Lagoon, producing a few swans, ducks and other bits and bobs, but no trout or perch landed, what a pity.

We then drove back to the city centre and had a great dinner in a Chinese restaurant (a good way to celebrate the day). Both of us were exhausted but happy. We produced 68 species of birds in total, which was really a good result. A great trip!

**Lei Zhu**



## **Twelve Released and 53 Counted for Catlins Big Day**

As if having Global Big Day on duck hunting opening day Saturday May 5 wasn't disturbing enough, releases and recaptures of 12 birders spread over South Otago ended with 53 species counted.

Twelve vagrant birders of diverse plumage, calls and behaviours were repeatedly released as small groups and joined together again as a single flock, before being loaded back into mobile release boxes yet again.

Big Day dawned with a heavy white mist cloak flowing down the shoulders of Kapaka-tau-mahaka mountain. The meeting place was a bleak plain near a big store selling imported junk kept cheap by underpaying workers. Some fauna got out there, but were contained and moved again. Normally, a fauna release is a one off stop in a good place where everyone is liberated, and you follow them around tuning in transmitters and recording bands to monitor what happens and who keeps living. Not today. Hatches opened on four mobile release boxes, and birders spilled out in scattered groups, uttering calls about who was travelling together. Then they were all rounded up again into mobile release boxes and taken away at speed.

We knew we were going south through drifting glimpses in the fog. Craig's great new Hilux carried our lead team in intrepid style. Dash instruments glowed with high tech lights, some connected to seatbelt sensors showing birders' blood pressure lowering as we left the city. There are birds, trees, wetlands, forests, and coast down south, so we felt better.

First stop was mist covered Lake Waihola, where we mixed with others from different motorised release boxes and found we might all be the same species and interested in each other. Along with co-operation and social behaviours, increased intraspecific competition between subspecies started here and accelerated through the day. We saw that e-birders are higher score extremists than field birders. Competition was not over territory or food or mates, but in counts of species and numbers to store on e-Bird. Foggy Waihola's water birds had slid through a blurred portal from another world we were allowed limited glimpses into. Black Swans, Mallards, and Scaup swam along, fleetingly visible through fog. Scaup

uttered spooky chuckling whistles as they counted us. They drifted in and out of haze as floating questions over whether they or us are really there. Trees, grass, and nearby home gardens were good for big numbers of Blackbirds and Silvereyes, a few Song Thrush, Dunnocks, brief overhead darting Redpolls. Everyone enjoyed three bold Tui loudly showing how their calls differ from nearby Bellbirds who stayed out of their way.

Maureen said misty Lake Waihola was a good place for the Loch Ness monster, and she seemed to really want Nessie in there. Just quietly, next time she returns to New Zealand with large luggage she might be examined as a potential biosecurity hazard. Nessie would be a mere burp in Waihola taniwha's memory. Plesiosaurus would become pleased you saw us, for lunch. Mermaids and sirens lure infatuated sailors to doom, but birders are strange so Waihola's temptations were Scaup showing and vanishing in drifting curtains of fog. Unusual self-discipline was shown by e-birders not losing their senses enough to plunge over the edge into mist pursuing more numbers promised by chuckling little black ducks. God knows what would have happened without field birders there to project calm and dignity.

Shifting small scenes of land and lake wavered in dense fog. How do we know where to go when the world keeps shifting in front of us? A witchy Scaup whistled encrypted bearings. Go on into the wind without stopping, know you pass the walking geese tribe without seeing them, over the long bridge, and to the pool of the ghost duck by a box of birds where your guide waits. We continued south, glimpsing flying Mallards in the haze. No one saw 15 Greylag Geese grazing a marshy field, except a field birder who said nothing until later. At Naish Park in Balclutha we found a totally white duck swimming among Mallard hybrids in a pond adjacent to aviaries of exotic birds, and Richard Schofield was waiting to guide us. We probably owed the white duck a muesli bar. Other pond Mallards may be her offspring, showing lots of white patches amidst brown and grey plumage.

We followed a flood stop bank along the Clutha River. We saw many Australian Coot, and Mallard and Shoveler Duck, Welcome Swallows, Goldfinch and a few Redpolls. Three Fantails delighted everyone by almost touching us. A Morepork called, in daylight morning. Looks were exchanged, did you hear that? Then Susanne gleefully showed her

cellphone ring tone, a dangerous act without a lifejacket and change of dry clothes near e-birders in full frenzy who heard a Morepork, only to have that score snatched away. Only presence of field birders ensured she remained terrestrial and dry, and not left drenched and marooned on a willow tangled island in the foggy Clutha River. Further proof that e-birders should be released only in the company of field birders, who save reason and culture.

Back in Naish Park, no one liberated exotic birds from the aviaries to add to e-Bird. Richard continued with us, guiding us to birding spots as our convoy of release boxes rumbled south. At stops along the way on this first day of duck hunting season, the more urgent monotone quackings were not from Mallards.

Repeat reunions of scattered groups into one flock were started with calls of “We got (bird species)...” One of us had visions of callers pulling claimed birds out of their pockets to prove their getting and releasing them in front of us. When we joined again at the Wisp near Catlins Forest, Richard reported that us four in the lead saw a Falcon over a steep bush hillside. People from following release boxes were incredulous that they didn’t see it. Warren said he couldn’t decide whether to be angry or pleased, but a kind suggestion he had two options so choose the happy one might not have helped. Birders in a frustrated mob looked at us closely, piecing stares said it all. You saw it and we didn’t. Oh, how could you. That’s unfair, bring it back now so we can see it. Our walk into silver beech forest along the Catlins River distracted them.

At the forest edge, Tomtits flitting in beech emitted their squeaky calls. The river rushing over boulders was white noise not ideal for bird counting, and to do a proper bush bird survey we would have to go further away, but there were few birds about. After queuing to cross the swing bridge, we climbed the track like a long line of woods nomads going somewhere. About 20 minutes in, a field birder heard Mohua calls from far away across the river where the sun lit up the beech canopy. He went off the track trying to see them and scout a route over, but there was a high vertical drop into the river. Mohua like to be where the sun is in the trees. Higher up, we heard the quick high pitch zip calls of Rifleman, and Lorena saw one. Descending toward the river again, Mary played her recorded Mohua calls, but there was no response. The recording would not carry



over the river to calls heard earlier. As we hiked out, Rifleman called again from the same place, and a few Redpolls flew over the canopy. A field birder wandered off the track following the river looking for Blue Duck, with no luck.

As we lunched at the Wisp, Richard pointed to a high Falcon, so now everyone saw it's rapid flapping flight over a beech forest ridge. We were too well mannered to say the first one we saw was much closer.

Teams split in two directions to cover more ground. Mary's convoy went coastal, finding Black-fronted Tern, Kingfisher, and Bar-tailed-Godwit. At Catlins lake (estuary), we saw many Black Swan, Mallards, two White-faced Herons, and Pied Oystercatchers. A lone Caspian Tern stood motionless on the low tide exposed mudflat like a strange craft from another world. We heard three Fernbirds at a flat scrubby marshland. Along the sand coast, we saw groups of Pied Stilts and Variable Oystercatchers.

A narrow path to Nugget Point lighthouse sidles steep cliffs high above the sea. People passed both ways. Most conversations were German, followed by French, Mandarin, and Thai. The most repeated English word was "penguin." On the small viewing platform, a tall German strode about looking at his smartphone screen waved over cliffs and sea, repeating "...penguin," a walking hazard to avoid. He suddenly halted, looked down beyond his feet on the metal network grid to the fall below. His swagger stalled into creeping as he stared at the void into sky and cliffs just over the rail, and he silently departed. White-fronted Terns gathered just above the splash zone far below the lighthouse. We counted Otago Shags bunched atop a far black rock pyramid, as others flew in joining them. They looked oddly taller against the flat dusk sky. Constant great skeins of Spotted Shags flew in to the Nuggets sea stacks, birds landing decisively at craggy footholds of home while others continued to where they knew their roost was. What it must have been to go on duty into the night at the lighthouse. What calls were heard from the tower? What flew past the lantern?

Visitors may have thought we were staff, lined up with scopes and binoculars. They looked at us expectantly. After moments of not being there for tourists, I melted. Two Chinese women saw the homing shags suddenly closer in the scope and gasped "oh!" They burst into excited

Mandarin, mixed with “penguins.” I tried unsuccessfully to find a Little Blue Penguin swimming out there. So no one saw any penguins, global communications were stretched saying so and that penguins fly only underwater. Who knows what commentary went into cellphones with their photos.

Fifty-three species seen were: Black Shag; Little Shag; Otago Shag; Spotted Shag; White-faced Heron; Black Swan; Greylag Goose; Paradise Shelduck; Mallard; Australasian Shoveler; Grey Teal; Scaup; Harrier; Falcon; Pukeko; Australian Coot; Pied Oystercatcher; Variable Oystercatcher; Spur-winged Plover; Pied Stilt; Banded Dotterel; Bar-tailed Godwit; Black-backed Gull; Red-billed Gull; Black-billed Gull; Caspian Tern; White-fronted Tern; Black-fronted Tern; Rock Pigeon; Kingfisher; Welcome Swallow; Rifleman; Silvereye; Grey Warbler; Blackbird; Song Thrush; Dunnock; Skylark; Fernbird; Brown Creeper; Mohua (yellowhead); Fantail; Tomtit; Tui; Bellbird; House Sparrow; Chaffinch; Redpoll; Goldfinch; Greenfinch; Yellowhammer; Starling; Magpie. E-birders recorded numbers from everyone.

E-birders who “got” birds remembered to put them back afterward. I checked their pockets were still flat at the vehicles. Birds not seen were White Heron (kotuku), Kereru (wood pigeon), and Little Owl (Fraulein Athene). We were not in beech forest after dark to hear Morepork (ruru). They wait for other days, along with elusive Rucksacker’s Puddlejumper and Startled Sonnetbird. Thanks to Richard Schofield for guiding us.

**Andrew Austin**

### **Wild Dunedin Festival-Tomahawk Bird watching**

We had a great day on Sunday 22nd April for Birds NZ contribution to the Wild Dunedin Festival. Over 40 people turned up keen to have a look and all were surprised at the variety of interesting birds to view through the spotting scopes. The first ‘customers’ were there well before 10 am but thankfully Andrew was also on deck and the first-comers had great views of two white herons and dozens of VOCs. Shovelers were close to the bank as well as pied stilts. Thanks to all our folk who showed up to help, especially Andrew, Bruce, Tim, Maree, and Mary. Met up with several keen birders too.



Stilts, shovellers and gulls. Suburban Dunedin Festival, Tomahawk Lagoon.

## Bird Camp Report

Recently in the school holidays I had the privilege of going on the OSNZ's Young Birders camp in Rakiura/Stewart Island Fiordland.

The camp started on Monday the 16th with a leisurely drive down from Dunedin to Invercargill where we met the other Young Birders attending. After an early start on Tuesday we drove to Bluff and hopped on the ferry over to Stewart Island. Bird sightings were limited with the rough seas we



encountered but we did see a White-Capped Petrel. On Wednesday we went to Ulva Island and on a half day pelagic bird tour out to sea, past a Foveaux Shag colony. It was an incredible experience which was only exaggerated by the mob of birds after we



had “chummed” the water by throwing in fish and chicken scraps. Bird highlights that day included Tīeke/Saddleback, Mohua/Yellowhead, Pīpipi/Brown Creeper, both Parakeet species, a diurnal Tokoeka, Southern Royal Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Hoiho/Yellow-Eyed Penguin and a Snares Crested Penguin. On Thursday we split up in the morning, some going around local beaches; others going on a personalized tour of the coast, while others went back to Ulva. This was followed with a brief lesson on bird identification before looking for more Tokoeka.



On Friday we had an early start to catch the ferry. We found a Cook’s Petrel stuck in a pallet which was rescued and put back in the water. We then drove to a bird rescue centre in Invercargill before driving to Borland Lodge. Keen eyes spotted a

Chestnut-Breasted Shelduck in a paddock, which stayed around the area for the remainder of the time we were there. On Saturday we drove to Milford Sound, with some stops along the way at Te Anau, Lake Gunn and Monkey Creek. Highlights that trip were Kikimutu/Riflemen, Whio, Kea and a Kōtuku/White Heron that sat on top of a moving campervan. On Sunday we slowly made our way back to Dunedin via Nugget Point.

Overall it was a great camp thanks to the fantastic contributions of Lloyd Esler, Ian Southey, David Thomas, Phil Rhoades and all the other volunteers. The people and the atmosphere were amazing and highly enjoyable. My favourite parts included the trip to Ulva Island and the trip to Milford Sound as well as generally socialising with other young birders. It was a great experience which I would highly recommend for any young person interested in birds.

**Max Cunninghame**

## Polaris Research Vessel well out from Taiaroa Head



was



Top: Westland Petrel

Mid and lower: Black-bellied Storm Petrel

The 18th May was a quiet day at sea on the Polaris water sampling trip with low numbers of all species and no feeding aggregations. Only 19 species were recorded. Occasionally sooty shearwaters were seen. No migrant flood. A Gibson's albatross and a Westland petrel were seen well out. The largest number of individuals were Buller's mollymawks 15, and Cape pigeons at 14. Hamish was pleased to get many views of grey petrels. It was quite rough which gave the storm petrels plenty of hiding places and the grey-faced petrel was not revealed until the photos were reviewed. Many birds did not come near the Polaris and it

hard to hold the camera steady.

The other species present were: southern royal & northern royal albatross, white-capped mollymawk, giant petrel, white-chinned petrel, Cookilaria petrel sp., fairy prion, black-bellied storm petrel, grey-backed storm petrel, red-billed gull, white-fronted tern and black-fronted tern.

**Graeme Loh and Hamish Spencer**



## Ornithological Snippets

3 **NZ Scaup** were seen at Sullivan's Dam on 10th May by Alan Baker. Kenny Rose found 4 **Chukar** above Omarama Saddle on 25th April. A **Great Crested Grebe** was seen briefly on 20th April at Lake Waihola, and Jill Hamel reports an **Erect-crested Penguin** was found at Brighton on 5th May, before being taken to Penguin Place. There were numerous reports of **Pied Shags** (helped by the Big Day) with sightings along the coast from Oamaru to Pounaweia. Graeme Loh counted 283 **Stewart Island Shags** at the Waitaki River Mouth on 5th May (possibly in Canterbury, but I think we can claim that one!) They have been seen in small numbers at this location over the last few years, but not on this scale. 3 **Coot** seen by Mary Thompson at Upper Tomahawk Lagoon on 10th May were the most that have been seen here.



On the same day, Mary saw and photographed a pair of **Spur-winged Plovers** with 4 chicks: are they late or early? An early **Pied Oystercatcher** was seen flying upriver in Balclutha on 10th May by Suzanne Schofield  
compiled by **Richard Schofield**



## **Pecking Order**

One of the more challenging aspects of autumn/winter birding is the counting of birds in large mixed finch flocks. It's generally hard enough to estimate the total number, without getting a figure for each species. On Saturday 12th May I was out ebirding south of Balclutha, on the road between Finegand and Kakapuaka. Not very glamorous stuff, but there are usually a few birds around. I had not gone very far when I noticed a harrier cross the road about 300m ahead of me. Behind it there was a cloud of small birds, presumably a mixed finch flock, but of which types I could not tell at that distance. The finches flew over the road, crossed a paddock and were absorbed by a conifer plantation. As I got closer I saw that a number of birds had gone only as far as the overhead cables, and were lined up waiting to be counted; all redpolls – so far, so good. I could hear the odd Chaffinch call from the trees, and see the occasional flutter of wings, but I reckoned there were at least 150 birds unaccounted for. However, as I waited and watched, small groups of birds, usually 5-10 at a time, emerged from their hiding place, and returned to where they had been before they were disturbed. They were all Chaffinches, and I counted 137 before the supply dried up. Then, after a further minute or so, more birds emerged, in a similar fashion, but this time they were all Greenfinches, apart from a solitary (confused?) Chaffinch. And then the trees were quiet...just need to get the rest of the birds trained up!

## **Rattus norvegicus levitator**

A Dunedin rat avoided health and safety hazards of crossing the road recently.

A large Norwegian rat was seen crossing Tomahawk Road in aerodynamic direct line flight just above power wires, it's nose aligned forward and tail trailing behind. A serious disadvantage for it was being held in the talons of a Harrier at the time. Two Harriers are concentrating on long grass and scrub areas near macropcarpas between eastern houses and the beach, where this hawk flew from.

Another Norwegian rat lies flattened further up the road. Local cats are killing mice outdoors every night, and frequently by day. **Andrew Austin**

## Music for Wild Dunedin Birds

Music for Wild Dunedin on come see birds Sunday  
 was contrary fluting of a southwesterly whistled  
 through hollow legs of a shouldered scope tripod,  
 like exhaling through wind dried bone,  
 walking behind Tomahawk dunes.

The same tune was louder  
 for godwits and flagged red knots  
 at flooding Aramoana mudflats.  
 When the music tried to push us over and the rushing tide said  
 you're running out of time,  
 Bruce sang out, you beauties!

The radio said no play today,  
 not heard on the sodden sports field  
 by sixteen black oystercatchers silently sorting  
 inherited memory of when this was lagoon too.  
 Now with rain drops and ice bits pinging our legs,  
 alloy and nylon and sinew and bone.  
 If you respect us, we might come over later.

Early at the lagoon to find something before people arrive.  
 They'll ask questions but I don't know anything yet.  
 Nine there already,  
 so join them incognito as if we are all the same early.  
 We watch the Paradise Shelducks watch us,  
 husbands and wives talk together ashore and afloat.

No – we're not going to the sea,  
 the ad says be here!  
 But it's wild, remember- so don't do as you're told.  
 Looks exchanged and time to own up.  
 White Heron forgot the deal,  
 there are two by the beach so follow me.

Then at the lagoon  
 are fifty-six Pied Stilts and now forty people,  
 as sixteen oystercatchers land piped in by wing leaders.  
 We name them early,  
 before we get our chest tags pinned  
 to remember who we are.

**Andrew Austin**

## **Notices and Business**

### **Designing a National Bird Monitoring Scheme for New Zealand**

The development of Birds New Zealand's new National Bird Monitoring Scheme has taken a major step forward recently, with Birds New Zealand engaging Wildlife Management International Ltd (WMIL) to assist with the design and delivery of this exciting new project.

The aim of this new national bird monitoring scheme is to determine long - term trends in the distribution and abundance of birds on a national scale. Birds NZ members will contribute most of the data via eBird.

Over the next 14 months, WMIL will be working with Birds New Zealand and eBird to finalise the design of the scheme to ensure that it will meet the needs and expectations of the Society's membership, and all those interested in bird watching and bird conservation in New Zealand.

The scheme should be ready for launch at the Society's 80th Anniversary New Zealand Birds conference in June 2019.

Summarised from memo received from Nikki McArthur

### **Wild Dunedin Podcast**

A six episode podcast series all about the wildlife in our own backyard. Episode 5 features our bar-tailed godwits. This excellent series is produced in association with Otago Access radio, Otago Museum and Wild Dunedin by Claire Concannon. She interviewed Mary Thompson about the journeys godwits make and what we have found from our banding studies here in Dunedin. She has done a great job putting the information together. Also included in Episode 5, Far far away-, is a segment on the Royal albatross and on eels.

Check it out on the OAR website or you can listen on your computer at this link. <https://oar.org.nz/event/wild-dunedin-podcast-2/>

### **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**



## 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.

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Wed May 23</b>      | Indoor Meeting. Natalie Forsdick on “Conservation management of kaki/black stilt.  |
| <b>Sunday June 10</b>  | Winter Wader Count. High tide 12.45pm. Counters are needed at Aramoana, Hoopers, Papanui Inlets and Blueskin Bay. Please confirm participation with <a href="mailto:peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz">peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz</a> To join a survey team and for more information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787 or <a href="mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz">maryt@actrix.co.nz</a> |
| <b>Wed June 27</b>     | Indoor Meeting. Derek Onley on “Hawksbury Lagoon - Gettin' yer Ducks in a Row?”<br>Followed by AGM.  |
| <b>Saturday July 7</b> | Sinclair Wetlands Winter Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 9 am. Backup 8th July. To join or for more information contact Mary 464 0787<br><a href="mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz">maryt@actrix.co.nz</a>   |
| <b>June 30–July 8</b>  | Garden Bird Survey. Record maximum number of each species seen at one time during 1h observation of your garden.   |
| <b>Wed July 25</b>     | Indoor Meeting. Graham Parker on his research on our local falcons, “The Otago falcon project; the why, what and how, with early results.”   |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)  
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the next newsletter by 20th June please.