



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 6/2018 June 2018



Trips out beyond Taiaroa Head in the Polaris research ship are regularly reported here by Graeme Loh, Hamish Spencer and others. From a birding point of view it is an exciting place (for those not prone to seasickness) and the photos are great. What with whales

barracuda



and milling flocks of seabirds, one could be forgiven for thinking that all was well with the world.

But a couple of photos that have been going the rounds of late are a reminder that things are far from well.



Opinions differ on the cause of this Buller's Mollymawk's black chin. Sandy Bartle says:

that it looks like oil to me (also see in the water) but note that the mandibular sulcus is distorted upwards.

As a result, my conclusion is that this bird has accidentally had its head drawn into a block ("pulley", for landlubbers (on a fishing boat ed.)) but escaped; hence the oil& the distortion.

Kalinka Rexa-Huber agrees that the black throat is due to warp (a bit of the fishing gear ed.) grease.

Graeme Taylor, Marine Species and Threats team DoC., while not dismissing the possibility suggests other reasons:

Grease is likely. Only other thing I can think of is ink staining from eating a squid. The bird seems OK otherwise.

However there can be little doubt about the cause of this Southern Royal



Albatross's problem.

And here I would ask that BirdsNZ/OSNZ members allow the editor of this newsletter (surely it hasn't been 10 years?) to launch into his very first editorial comment. In no way do I want to denigrate the efforts of many concerned and committed people, including Graham Parker and Kalinka Rexa-Huber on the Falklands and my old friends Sandy Bartle and Euan Dunn, but it is nigh on 20 years since I and Sandy published *Seabirds of the Southern Oceans*, a guide for scientific observers aboard fishing vessels. Many of the measurements for this book were made from two truckloads of solidly frozen dead albatrosses, mollymawks, petrels shearwaters and gulls dumped in the basement of a Te Papa building. A few years later we produced a similar ID guide for the Pacific Fishers Forum in Hawaii, where the tuna fishers of the Pacific wine and dined us in Las Vegas style clubs, promised much, yet continued to catch marine turtles and seabirds. Our seabirds. And here we are 20 years later and our mollymawks and albatrosses are still getting caught off our coasts.

True, there have been changes to fishing methods that can reduce the risk of casualties and there have been observers aboard fishing vessels to ensure these methods are employed and that dead seabirds are actually recorded. But large scale fishing still goes on in our seas, birds are still killed and injured and more important in the greater scheme of things, the

marine environment, already a shadow of what it was a few hundred years ago, is diminished and altered still further. So as BirdsNZ are we happy to just monitor this destruction and maybe now and then financially support a bit of research into the causes and consequences?

If in the future we are going to have any birds to count, study and enjoy, then we need to widen our focus and take part in changing the way we use the resources of our seas and our land. Our studies need to focus on developing practical ways of fishing and farming that do not harm and indeed benefit the environment and birds. And we need to go further and work out ways to make these economically and politically the norm.

Derek Onley

Winter Wader Count 2018

| | Karitane | Blueskin Bay | Aramoana | Harbour west | Harbour east | Papanui Inlet | Hoopers Inlet | Catlins | Total 2018 | Total 2017 | Total 2016 |
|------------------------|----------|--------------|----------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------|------------|------------|------------|
| Pied Oystercatcher | 19 | 361 | 125 | 60 | 28 | 124 | 42 | 183 | 942 | 1023 | 1192 |
| Variable Oystercatcher | 12 | 23 | 4 | 28 | 5 | 18 | 2 | 7 | 99 | 130 | 112 |
| Pied Stilt | 11 | 27 | | 64 | | 23 | 46 | 17 | 188 | 65 | 232 |
| Banded Dotterel | | 76 | 81 | | | | 83 | 54 | 294 | 36 | 268 |
| Spur-winged Plover | 73 | 55 | | 4 | | 11 | | 25 | 168 | 128 | 281 |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | | 51 | | | | 35 | 37 | 12 | 135 | 161 | 208 |

It was a good count this year in favourable, if dull conditions. No rarities were seen; not unusual for the winter count. Many thanks to all who took part.

Peter Schweigman

Report of Birds NZ Conference and AGM, Waitangi, Queen's Birthday weekend

Otago featured very favourably at this year's conference and AGM. Twenty members from Otago region attended the conference, the second largest contingent after Auckland. Bruce McKinlay was elected unopposed as the new President of Birds NZ. Congratulations to Natalie Forsdick, who was elected via membership ballot to the Council, and Helen Taylor

continues for another term on Council too. Our Otago region won the prize for greatest % increase in membership. Ann-Kathrin Schlesselmann won the best new author award for her paper published in *Notornis*.

And ten of the presentations during the Scientific sessions were from Otago members:

Susan Walker gave a key note address describing her analysis of the changes in distribution of birds using Birds NZ Atlas data – endemics are now dependent on cold beech forest refuges.

Helen Taylor presented her research on the contribution of sperm fertility on inbreeding depression.

Graeme Loh talked about the effect of our unusually hot summer on his fairy prions.

Emily Tidey described techniques for detailing the nature of the seabeds where penguins forage and Thomas Mattern complemented this with amazing video cam footage taken by foraging penguins with a go-pro on their back.

Natalie Forsdick and Denise Martini described their genetic analysis of kaki and kaka.

Graham Parker discussed methods for assessing population size of light-mantled sooty albatross.

Kalinka Rexer-Huber discussed the case for multi-national strategies for conservation of Southern Ocean seabirds.

There were many other interesting and well-presented papers at the conference. All the Abstracts can be accessed on the Birds NZ website. The topics that particularly interested me were studies on urban bird populations: comparisons of large reserves versus fragments; green corridors and edge effects; use of urban areas and effect of supplementary feeding - these are all relevant to our Dunedin situation.

The weather did not cooperate well for the field trips, with the pelagic trips being cancelled but the boat trip to Urupukapuka Island went ahead, also mist netting, and the trip to Ninety Mile beach. Several Otago folk spent time before and after the conference exploring the Far North. The birds in the Waitangi estuary were a treat for us – in one view at low tide I saw 26 white-faced heron, 31 kingfisher, 1 reef heron, several NI dotterel, and many variable black and white Variable Oystercatchers; there was a large covey of Californian quail outside the hotel rooms. On the trip up North

we had the excitement of seeing about 500 Royal Spoonbill roosting together in a flooded paddock at Unahi – birds banded on Green Island have been seen here – it is one of the main overwintering sites of ‘our’ Otago spoonbills so it was great to see where they go to. Other rare birds

for Otago birders were dabchicks, brown quail, weka, banded rail, and I went on a night time expedition and saw one of the Barn owls that are now breeding near Kaitaia. Others may have other tales to tell.

Mary Thompson

Trip North after OSNZ conference.

Spoonbills roosting, more than 700. Counted twice. First on a stormy evening in a wet paddock at Unahi Rd Awanui on the edge of Rangaunu Harbour then on a mild evening spread in three places, 330 at Ahiaruhi shellbank off Paua in Parengarenga Harbour, 48 at the old Tavern, Houhora, Houhora Harbour, and 350 this time in the Macrocarpas at the end of Unahi Road, Rangaunu Harbour. Where do they all come from? Are there even more? We saw 3 feeding in Hokianga Harbour as we zipped past fast.



Many exotic surprises. Sparrows well away from buildings in many wild places. Turkeys and pheasants everywhere, with two groups of peacocks in the paddocks on the ridge above Hihi. Touristy places are always great to see birds up close. Brown quail and pipits just step aside a little as you walk along the Cape Reinga path. Above a ridge paddock in Te Paki farm park was a nankeen kestrel. There were some nice native encounters. NZ dotterels in many places including Tapotupota Beach, a DOC campsite by Cape Reinga. A reef heron and banded rail also spotted there.

Tawharanui Open Sanctuary continues to inspire in its defiance of predators. You can drive in through automatic gates, the predator fence stops short of the sea, even so tieke persist. I was pleased to see kaka and hear kiwi at night. Yes you can camp there! Chris Gaskin's Northern Seabird Trust seabird attraction site had their first capture of a diving petrel this last weekend. Until now they have evaded capture because of the dense kikuyu grass. The grey-faced petrels are coming back to their boxes and burrows in front of the sound playback gear to start a new season now.

The big picture is more problematic. Staunch resistance to aerial 1080. The demand for jobs ground hunting pests for local youth is a prominent rationale. Pigs continue to be maintained as a hunting resource. We did see a tomtit from an old forest service fire lookout on the edge of Waipoua.

And after the Oamaru Penguin Symposium!

Sue and I stayed around and discovered (5th May) that there were almost 300 Otago shags roosting on the north shingle spit of the Waitaki River Mouth, along with several hundred spotted shags. They were quite wary, but their spit is not disturbed by motor bike traffic. It was an entertainment watching a hundred marching across the top of the spit to change location to an onto roost wind when the wind changed direction.



Graeme Loh

Ornithological Snippets

On the way home from the wader count at Hoopers Inlet on 10th June Mary Thompson stopped at Broad Bay, and found one adult and a juvenile Pied Shag among the Little Pieds.



8 Pieds were seen on the Blueskin Bay wader count and 7, all adults, were still around on the 18th.



Earlier, on 31st May, Derek Onley and Lorena Smith saw an adult fishing close to the cliffs on Quarantine Island. Mary also saw a juvenile Spotted Shag at Ross Creek Reservoir on 15th June. It had been fishing successfully with the 3 Black Shags in the photo.



Meanwhile on the afternoon of 13th May, Hamish Spencer saw 2 Pied Shags and a Gannet at the mouth of the Waikouaiti River. On the same day Hamish also saw a Reef Heron (next to a White-faced Heron) at the southern end of Karitane Beach.

A couple of parties of commuters between Dunedin and points south have been counting the Pukeko on the flood-free at Henley, with numbers regularly exceeding 100, and peaking at 171 on 7th June, counted by Pen Gillette (who was hopefully not doing the driving!) It may be the middle of winter, but Pied Oystercatchers are back on their breeding grounds around Balclutha, with several pairs establishing territories, and late in the day on 16th June 15 were seen to head off into the sunset up the Clutha Valley. 1 was also seen at Lake Hawea on 16th May, reported by Rachel Hufton. 57 Bar-tailed Godwit were at Evansdale on 27th May (Derek Onley), while 2 Banded Dotterel were reported from Tomahawk Lagoon on 16th May.

Suzanne Schofield saw a Caspian Tern on the river at Balclutha on 17th May. A flock of 12 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were a temporary distraction from wader counting for the compiler at Catlins Lake on 10th June. Finally, Mary Thompson has been seeing dozens of Blackbirds feeding on damp playing fields this week, including 76 counted on John McGlashan playing field on 15th June.

Any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

compiled by **Richard Schofield**

Notices and Business

EBird news

A recent addition to eBird is the Photo and Sound Quiz. This enables you to tackle a series of 20 randomly selected photos or audio clips, which can be customised by location and date. The photos are from the Macaulay Library, which is the repository for all photos submitted to eBird. Guess the species—and don't worry if you're wrong—this challenging quiz is for your own fun and learning. After each guess, you need to rate the photo or sound for its quality, before moving on to the next one. This helps curate the Macaulay Library so it is more useful for you and for science. Note that although all images are of birds that have been recorded in the

selected area, the photo itself could have been taken elsewhere. This quiz would be very useful if you are planning on birding in a new area. Go to “Explore” and in the upper right click on “Photo and Sound Quiz”. Instructions on how to take part and how to rate photos and audio are included.

And for those of you still using an old-fashioned notebook, and entering your checklist later, a quick tip that I’ve just discovered. Assuming you’re entering the data on the same day as the observations, instead of scrolling down the day of the month (having remembered what day it is!), just click on the calendar, and today is highlighted.

Richard Schofield

Notes from Regional Representatives Meeting.

On the Friday before the conference I attended the RR meeting. There was a very positive vibe from all present.

- The most important news was of the progress of the National Bird Monitoring Scheme; this will require checklists for each habitat within a square - details are still being worked out and it is hoped that the scheme will be launched at next years conference in Wellington.
- Importance of Regional Recorders role was emphasized, especially with the start of the National Monitoring scheme, which will use eBird as recording tool. We are fortunate having the expertise of Richard Schofield in our region.
- Health and Safety policy is being developed to comply with new laws covering responsibilities of trip leaders and participants.
- Recommended that Student travel/sponsorship be coordinated and paid for at a national level so that it didn’t always fall on regions with universities.
- Funding may be available for data analysis and writing up results of regional projects, so that all this valuable information is not lost in old notebooks or drawers; e.g. harbour survey, digitising field notebooks; we will provide our region’s requests and Council will allocate priority.
- A new Birds NZ logo was presented to conference; some strong opinions expressed both for and against, but the AGM moved that Council proceed with its introduction.

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.

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|--------------------------|--|
| Wed June 27 | Indoor Meeting. Derek Onley on “Hawksbury Lagoon - Gettin' yer Ducks in a Row?” Followed by AGM. |
| Saturday July 7 | Sinclair Wetlands Winter Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 9 am. Backup 8th July. To join or for more information contact Mary 464 0787 maryt@actrix.co.nz |
| 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.” |
| Wed August 22 | Indoor Meeting. Bruce Robertson on “Why we are banding silvereye in the Botanic Garden.” |
| Wed August 29 | Special Indoor Meeting. Steve Keeling and Jessie Barry from Cornell Lab of Ornithology, on “The eBird Enterprise- Engaging the Global Birding Community for Science, Conservation, and Fun.” |
| Wed September 26. | Indoor Meeting. Nic Rawlence on “Taxonomy and biological heritage of NZ birds.” |
| Wed October 24. | Indoor Meeting. Denise Martini on “Evolution and conservation of the endangered New Zealand Kaka.” |
| Wed November 28. | Indoor Meeting. Luke Easton on “Anti-predator behaviour of NZ Robins.” |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the next newsletter by 18th July please.