

Hello all

The less-than-summery weather we have been having lately has meant birding trips may have been on the back-burner to some degree. However there are still some interesting things to report from the region:

- The **Lake Wairarapa Wader Survey** conducted in February (with BirdsNZ members on the team along with DoC and GWRC staff) turned up a few interesting sightings - as it usually does – including:

~ Two **White herons** (kotuku) were seen together in a backwater behind Willow Island

~ Northern hemisphere migrants **Pectoral Sandpiper** and **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** were recorded

~ Several hundred **Banded dotterels** were present, many feeding on the wide mudflat area at the Oporua Spillway mouth. These birds, who breed on our braided rivers like the Waingawa and Ruamahanga, come to the lakeshore to over-winter.

- A **White-winged Black Tern** was seen at Paul's Bank (Lake Onoke) recently.

These migrants from the Northern Hemisphere are normally in pale, non-breeding plumage when they are seen in NZ. The only black feathers are on the head, typically a club-shaped area behind the eyes and linking with variable blackish markings on the hind crown and nape. See the photos on nzbirdsonline.org.nz to view the striking contrast with breeding plumage.

Probably fewer than 20 visit NZ annually, so to see one is quite special. One has been seen at this location before.



- A couple of **NZ Falcons** (**karearea**) have been seen recently – this fine example seen at Ngahape (pictured).....

..and the other in Pigeon Bush, the day of our fieldtrip, but sadly, after most of the team had left to head home.

It flew the length of the valley, calling (“kekking”) as it went.

Photo: Steve Orr, GWRC

● Wairarapa River-Bird Surveys

Many of you will know ornithologist Nikki McArthur, who now works for Wildlife Management International, based in Blenheim. He recently conducted a survey of the Wairarapa Rivers, counting all the shorebirds and waders as he went, **walking an impressive 210 km** to do so!!.

Of special interest to him was the census of the **Black-fronted Dotterels**, comparing his count with those done in previous years (by OSNZ members et al).

The table below shows Nikki's interesting results (which he will be talking about at this year's BirdsNZ Conference).

River	2017	1996	1993	1989	1972
Ruamahanga	218	141	-	141	31
Waiohine	13	10	-	2	0
Waingawa	10	0	-	8	1
Huangaarua	32	40	-	81	43
Tauherenikau	7	22	-	3	4
Opouawe	34	36	16	-	-
Whawanui	11	4	4	-	-
Awhea	67	33	42	-	-
Pahaoa	115	-	-	-	-
Other sites	28*	27**	-	15	0
Total	535	238	62	250	79

* Includes Masterton WWTP and the Tauanui, Turanganui, Wairongomai and Pounui deltas.

** Includes Oterei River



*Nikki commented: 'I'd estimate there's another 50-100 birds on east coast rivers that I didn't get time to survey (the Wainuioru, Mataikona and Oterei Rivers in particular). So factoring these in, I'd estimate we have **590-645 black-fronted dotterels in the Wairarapa at present**. Looks like they're now giving banded dotterels a run for their money in terms of which species is the more abundant.'*

Photo: NZBirdsOnline

- Other interesting observations made by Nikki (and colleague Daniel Burgin) include:



~ Discovery of the **Buller's Gull (Black-billed Gull)** colony on the Ruamahanga River at Black Rock Road, with 54 nests and some chicks already hatched.

As a result of this finding, a team from DoC (along with 2 BirdsNZ members) got cracking and banded the chicks which had not fledged.

A number of these chicks (wearing bright orange leg-bands) turned up with

adult birds at Henley Lake, where they remained for a couple of weeks.....possibly encouraged to stay for the regular handouts of fresh fish brought to them by *someone* hoping to balance the bread-diet they were getting there!



~ Sighting of a **South Island Pied Oystercatcher** (SIPO) on the Ruamahanga River above Double Bridges, near a Black-backed Gull colony. Interestingly, this is the very same site that a SIPO was recorded a year ago by BirdsNZ members. An odd location for this species to be in, especially two years running!



~ A **Wrybill** on Paul's Bank

~ A **Falcon** on the Pahaoa River – the only one sighted during the whole survey!

- *Did you know....*that **Magpies** predate the eggs of shorebirds? This fact was witnessed at Riversdale Beach one day when we went to check on the 2 nesting pairs of NZ Dotterels. A family of magpies had evidently driven the dotterels from their nest and one magpie was seen flying off, carrying a dotterel egg. The NZ dotterel parents eventually returned to the nest to incubate the 2 remaining eggs, but by the next day, these were also gone, sadly.

*On a happier note....*it was great to have a good turnout to our Pigeon Bush trip and we hope this will continue with our future outings!

A programme of trips has been planned which should provide something of interest and variety for everyone!

Regards

Joanna (Regional Recorder)