

Issue 41

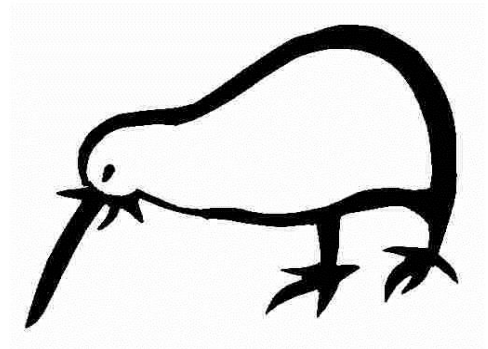
April 2015

Photos:

Detlef Davies (DD)

Les Feasey (LF)

Raewyn Adams



BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

FAR NORTH REGION NEWSLETTER

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

www.osnz.org.nz

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Far North birders have been active over the last 4 months with wader counts, beach patrols, a Whangaroa pelagic trip, censuses and many entries onto E-bird. There have also been some interesting rarity reports. The region's AGM in Mangonui on 7th May is likely to have passed by the time this newsletter is ready for distribution but it will be sent by email as soon as possible. We may be able to have a few printed.

Les Feasey has prepared a programme of forthcoming events for the rest of 2015. This will be sent out by email very soon and includes indoor meetings, field trips and day pelagics from Whangaroa.

Error in Dec newsletter – on page 3 for White-billed Magpie, read WHITE-BACKED MAGPIE.



These two Wandering Tattlers were found by Raewyn Adams on the island at the east end of Spirits Bay on 9th April. See report on page 4.

The Far North Regional Officers are:

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RECENT EVENTS

18 Dec 2014 – Three Kings Islands – preliminary Red-billed Gull count. Page 3
5 Jan – Whangaroa Pelagic. Page 6
9 Jan – Shorebird count – Paua (Parengarenga) & Kowhai Beach. Page 5
11 Jan – Shorebird count – Kowhai Beach. Page 5
4 March – Shorebird count – Walker Island. Page 5
12 March – Shorebird count - Paua (Parengarenga). Page 5
18 March – Beach Patrol – to be reported in next newsletter
18 March – Indoor social meeting in Mangonui

RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

Compiled by Detlef Davies

These records cover the period from January to April 2015 unless otherwise stated. Contributors include Les Feasey (LF), Anthea Goodwin (AJG), Isabella & Derry Godbert, Kevin Matthews (KM), Detlef & Carol Davies (DD, CD), George Watola, Raewyn Adams, CJ Ralph (CJR), Gary Little & Asta Wistrand (GL, AW), Gerry Messenger, John Haines, Ken Ross. **WP = Whangaroa Pelagic on 5th January.**

North Island Brown Kiwi – Good numbers reported recently in Kerikeri area. Occupying Penguin box on Moturoa Island.

New Zealand Dabchick – Only recent report from Lake Waiporohita

Wandering Albatross – 5 on WP including an almost all brown juvenile

White-capped Albatross – 2 on WP

SALVIN'S ALBATROSS – 1 on WP, 2nd record for these trips (DD)

Buller's Shearwater – c.130 on WP, often in BOI

Flesh-footed Shearwater – c.20 on WP

Fluttering Shearwater – c.350 on WP, some large numbers seen in Doubtless Bay.

Little Shearwater – 2 on WP

Black (Parkinson's) Petrel – c.35 on WP

Fairy Prion – c.25 on WP

White-faced Storm Petrel – c.80 on WP, many in outer BOI

NEW ZEALAND STORM PETREL – 1 or perhaps 2 on WP; 3 seen east of Moturoa Island on 4 Jan (LF, CJR)

Cook's Petrel – c.40 on WP

Pycroft's Petrel – c.6 on WP thought to be this species & several indeterminate

Right – Little Penguin coming ashore at Mangonui (LF)
Below – Brown Booby, not George's bird but one off Muriwai cliffs in January (DD)



BLACK-WINGED PETREL – nice views of one on WP (DD)

Grey-faced Petrel – 2 on WP, 8 used burrows on Moturoa Is & 1 chick found (CJR, LF)

Common Diving Petrel – 3 on WP, one beach wreck East Beach

Little Penguin – Gerry Messenger reports at least 2 chicks were raised on Taumarumaru Reserve. Several birds have been seen coming ashore recently in Mangonui (AJG, LF)

Little Black Shag – c.150 in Rangaunu Harbour on 4 March

Australian Gannet – c.90 counted on Ninepin in January

BROWN BOOBY – an adult seen off Robertson Island from BOI cruise on 21 Dec 2014 (George Watola)

Reef Heron – up to 2 Unahi & Parengarenga, 1 Doves Bay 18 March

AUSTRALASIAN BITTERN – one in tiny swamp near Ngaiotonga on 16 Dec (George Watola)

Royal Spoonbill – 43 Parengarenga 17 March, Unahi Road, slowly building up, 5 Rawene 15 April (Ken Ross)

Banded Rail – Frequently seen on Moturoa Island

CAPE BARREN GOOSE – 4 on the hillside at eastern end of Stephenson Island from pelagic, 5 Jan.

Brown Teal – now regularly seen with young in Russell area. 2 on Moturoa Is in early Jan considered possible hybrids

Weka – now very common on Russell side of Bay

Bar-tailed Godwit – Four-figure counts from Parengarenga, Kowhai & Rangaunu (see counts)

Eastern Curlew – 2 Rangaunu 4 March (LF, KM)

Lesser Knot – max count 1500 Kowhai 11 Jan

Red-necked Stint – 1 Parengarenga 12 March (KM, LF)

Pacific Golden Plover – max 54 Parengarenga 12 March

Turnstone – max 205 Parengarenga 12 March

New Zealand Dotterel – up to 18 Kowhai, over 40 at Waitangi flocking site from early Jan (CD, LF)

Banded Dotterel – max 372 Parengarenga 12 March

Wrybill – 15 Dick Ulrich Road, several other sightings of multiple birds at this site

WANDERING TATTLER – 2, one in full breeding plumage Spirits Bay 9 to 12 April (Raewyn Adams)

Variable Oystercatcher – max 77 Parengarenga 12 March

South Island Pied Oystercatcher – max 884 Parengarenga 12 March

Pied Stilt – 271 at Parengarenga on 12 March was high count

Red-billed Gull – 106 Parengarenga but widely reported for census

White-fronted Tern – Hihi, c.80 working close inshore 8 March in evening, 174 at Parengarenga 12 March. C.20 breeding Tepaka Point, Russell

LITTLE TERN – 2 in non-breeding plumage at Parengarenga on 12 March (LF, KM)

GREY TERNLET – 2 sightings of 1 or 2 birds on WP

Pomarine Skua – possible sighting of 3 near Moturoa Island 3 Jan but no descriptive details (CJR, LF)

Shining Cuckoo – single call at Mangonui 31 Jan (AJG)

Long-tailed Cuckoo – Heard Diggers Valley, Herekino in early Jan (GL, AW), much sooner than usual.



Brown Teal – Orongo Bay (LF)

RED-BILLED GULL CENSUS - 2014

Les Feasey

After a brief account of this at short notice in the December newsletter, here is a full version.

Lou Gurr and Fred Kinskey published a review of known colonies of red-billed gulls in 1965, compiled from data that went in part back to 1887 and included data as recent as 1961. The Far North sites were plotted on a Google Earth map by Peter Frost. As part of a nationwide survey of red-billed gulls, Far North OSNZ members visited these Far North sites and other known breeding sites, and submitted a report excluding the Three Kings Islands to Peter Frost and Graeme Taylor, convenors of the current study, in December 2014.

Inclement weather and inaccessibility prevented reporting on the Three Kings Islands and northern locations N1-N9 until 18 December 2014. Gurr and Kinskey suggested that there were tens of thousands of red-billed gulls nesting there, so it was clearly a very important site. When the weather cleared briefly, and a fixed wing aircraft and funds to hire the aircraft became available from the Department of Conservation, OSNZ, and Far North members Les Feasey, Kevin and Lisa Mathews and Carol Davies, we raced to organise a flight. Members of DoC (Kaitaia) and Ngati Kuri Iwi were



invited to participate as guests but were unable to do so, due in part to the rapidity with which the flight arrangements were made. The flight left Kaitaia about 11:15am on 18 December 2014.

The flight took us over Scott's Point, (N8) out to the Three Kings Islands (N1-N6) for a circumnavigation of the Islands, and back over North Cape (N9) then down the East Coast to Kaitaia Airport.

The plane used was a 7 seater Piper Navajo operated very efficiently by Great Barrier Airlines (GBA). GBA runs a regular charter service

for Doctors from Whangarei to Kaitia, and by piggybacking on that service we were able to fly and return to Kaitia at a considerable saving.

The document Peter Frost recommended by Moore and Powlesland of DoC on the use of aerial photography was useful, but the full import of some of their suggestions relating to using GPS didn't have an immediate impact, which, in retrospect, created more work in determining locations. Camera equipment was a Nikon D4 with a 400mm f2.8, a Nikon D810 with a 200-400mm f4, and a Canon EOS 600D with a 70-300mm f4-f5.6. Over 1500 photos were taken, and these were individually examined and graded for red-billed gull presence and activity. Initial examination suggested about 1000 birds and 4-6 nesting sites. After well over 100 hours of photo examination 174 photos were deemed significant. 44 of these photos showed red-billed gulls presence and produced the following results:

- 3500 – 4200 red-billed gulls visible – more projected;
- 17 or more nesting sites of which 4 had over 100 birds, although 10 sites had fewer than 20 birds, and further photo examination may reveal others;
- 10 sites where there were more than 100 birds feeding on the water:
- N1 West Island - locations under review
- N2 Great Island- locations under review
- N3 Great Island- locations under review
- N4 Great Island- locations under review
- N5 South West Island- locations under review
- N6 Princes Island - locations under review
- N7 North Cape – no RBG seen
- N8 Scott Point – no RBG seen
- Matapia – no RBG seen

Further photo examination is turning up additional nesting and roosting locations. Kevin, Carol and I expect that it will take quite a bit more work to place the major nesting locations with some reliability, and the number of red-billed gulls at Three Kings Islands with some certainty. We are continuing this work.
Les Feasey, Kevin Mathews, Carol Davies.



Moore, P. and Powlesland, R. 2012. *Birds: complete counts—aerial photo counts, Version 1.0*. Inventory and monitoring toolbox: birds (DOCDM-308974). Wellington, New Zealand: Department of Conservation (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/inventory-monitoring/im-toolbox-birds-complete-aerial-photo-counts.pdf>).

WANDERING TATTLERS – SPIRITS BAY

Detlef Davies

There has been a lot of shorebird interest this season but surely the most significant find was by **Raewyn Adams** who found 2 Wandering Tattlers on the rocky island at the east end of Spirits Bay on 9th April. She and her partner, Keith Frazer, who are from Te Puke in the Bay of Plenty spent 2 weeks at Spirits Bay and at least one bird was still present on 12th April. One was in full breeding plumage & the other was plain below. Wandering Tattlers breed mainly in Alaska and regularly visit the north and east coasts of Australia in the northern winter.

Distinctions from the more regular (but still rare) Grey-tailed or Siberian Tattler include Wandering's larger size, more bulky appearance, supercilium more prominent in front of the eye, breeding plumage barring extends to the undertail.





SHOREBIRD COUNTS

Compiled by Detlef Davies

There have been 5 of these over the last 6 months and those set out here begin with one from November 2014 so that figures can be easily compared. Note that not all species were counted every time, also that more detail about some of the sightings and of additional species can be obtained by checking the results on E-Bird for which references are given. Although the 12th March count resulted in some very good totals, the main godwit flock could not be found on the sandspit.

Dates & details:

13 November – **Kowhai Beach**, c.1 – 3.15 pm, Les Feasey & John Haines.

View on EBird: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S20538705>

9 January – **Paua & Kowhai**, c.12.30 – 2.30 pm, Les Feasey, Carol Davies, Kevin Matthews, Isabella & Derry Godbert. Records refer to Kowhai unless marked (P)

View on EBird: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S21267655>

11 January – **Kowhai Beach**, 2.30 – 5.30 pm, Detlef & Carol Davies

View on EBird (not yet)

4 March – **Walker Island, Rangaunu Harbour**, 6.30 – 7.10 pm, Les Feasey & Kevin Matthews

View on EBird: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S22174064>

12 March – **Paua, Parengarenga**, 10.15 – 2.15, Kevin Matthews, Les Feasey, Anthea Goodwin, Derry Godbert

View on EBird: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S22308110>

SPECIES	13 NOV 2014	9 JAN 2015	11 JAN 2015	4 MAR 2015	12 MAR 2015
Bar-tailed Godwit	700	1800, 2000(P)	c.1500	3000	226
Lesser Knot	137	400	c.1500	300	24
Turnstone	54	96, 50(P)	c.80	150	205
Pacific Golden Plover		5	8		54
Eastern Curlew				2	
Whimbrel					1
Wrybill		9	7		2
Red-necked Stint					1
New Zealand Dotterel	11	40	13		18
Banded Dotterel		30	4		372
Variable Oyst	14	33	35	40	77
S Island Pied Oyst	1			260	884
Red-billed Gull		2		120	106
Black-backed Gull	11	156		60	36
Caspian Tern	1	5	2	40	6
White-fronted Tern		21	20	49	174
Little Tern					2
Black Swan				600	771
Royal Spoonbill				12	1

Kevin Matthews reports on the erosion of Walker Island as follows:

6 Jan 2015

36 freshly arrived albeit looking slim SIPO seen on East Beach not far from the Rangaunu Harbour entrance yesterday midday; one only VOC roosting with them.

Thousands of Fluttering Shearwater moving along and just beyond the surf break the length of East Beach yesterday early afternoon. Also one fresh beach wreck Diving Petrel.

Also yesterday 2 flights of Godwit approx 150 in each flight were seen leaving Rangaunu Harbour early morning before high tide at 9.00am and appeared to be heading for Kowhai Beach, Mount Camel.

Between 2.00 and 2.30 pm 9 flights of Godwit were seen leaving in v formation from the direction of Kowhai Beach and flying east across the sea at a height of approx 200m and then turning south into Rangaunu Harbour. One flock was 48, while the rest were approx 150 to 200. No Knot or Turnstone seen. The reason for the Godwit flying so far to roost is that no suitable and safe high tide roosts are available in the Rangaunu environs. East Beach had become a preferred roost as Walker Island, the sand spit just inside the harbour entrance, has eroded away; however constant traffic and dogs have forced them further afield. How this extra energy spent flying the daily 36km return trip from Kowhai Beach to their Rangaunu feeding grounds will impact on body weight gain is unknown but it certainly must be a negative, however if it means an undisturbed roost and free from vehicles, people, dogs and Kuaka shooters I guess it's a positive.

WHANGAROA PELAGIC – 5th JANUARY

Les Feasey

Participants Brian Candy (Skipper), Detlef Davies, Les Feasey, CJ Ralph, Michael Szabo, Anthea Goodwin and John, Jackson and Tyler Rogers from Australia assembled at 7:00am at the dock to depart on the Kuri II. After introductions and loading cameras and binoculars and food and ice we headed out. Going out of the harbour

we saw:

- 3 White fronted Terns;
- 3 Gannets
- 4 Little Penguins
- 3 Black-backed Gulls.

As we travelled out of the Whangaroa Heads towards Stephenson Island there were:

- 3 White-fronted Terns
- 3 Fluttering Shearwaters
- 1 Little Penguin
- 3 Red-billed Gulls.



Grey-faced Petrel (DD)

As we rounded the corner of Stephenson Islands to count the c.200 Red-billed gulls that had gathered in numbers to feed on the krill, sharp-eyed John Rogers spotted 4 CAPE BARREN GEESE on the horizon of the Island, the first we had seen for a couple of years.

Heading out to the Chum Spot, we passed 2 White-faced Storm Petrels, 4 Buller's Shearwaters, 2 Cooks Petrels and some Fairy Prions before encountering 'a feeding frenzy' of tuna fish that had attracted the attention of a flock of approx:

- 40 Fluttering Shearwaters
- 2 Cooks Petrels
- 30 Buller's Shearwaters
- 15 Fairy Prions

By then it was 8:30am and the captain was aware that we were still an hour from our destination so we started on our way again. Travelling there were numbers of Fluttering Shearwaters all flying north along the tide line, a Black Petrel, a Common Diving Petrel, and more Cooks Petrels, followed by the next surprise of the trip just after 9.30, 1, or possibly 2 GREY TERNLETS, a species we have only seen once before on these trips.

Then our journey exploded in another sea of boiling fish. Captain Brian Candy had put out a couple of tuna lures to catch skipjack tuna for chum and we encountered the largest school yet. The lines started singing. CJ was in his element hauling in the tuna in anticipation of a great supper, and Tyler couldn't contain his excitement – undoubtedly the highlight of his day out. Jackson was much more cool, and very proficient on the lines. 17 tuna shared among the 8 of us was a nice bonus for the day. Such a large school of tuna had its attendant flock of approx:

- 40 Buller's Shearwaters
- 30 Fluttering Shearwaters
- 20 Fairy Prions
- 3 White-faced Storm Petrels

- 1 **Black (Parkinson's) Petrel**

At 10:00am we arrived at the Chum Spot, and started putting out the chum. At 10:03am the first albatross appeared, attracted by our chum from the neighbouring fishing boat. Sightings at the chum spot with approximate numbers up to 1:00pm were:

- 18 **Flesh footed Shearwaters**
- 4 **Black (Parkinson's) Petrels**
- 5 **Wandering Albatrosses (Gibson's or Antipodean)**
- 1 **SALVINS' ALBATROSS** - this again was only the second record for these trips. It was seen better this time but could not be lured into the feeding flock.
- 2 **White-capped Albatrosses**
- At least 30 **Cook's** or **Pycroft's Petrels** of which we considered c.15 to be Cook's and c.5 to be Pycroft's, judging by both plumage features on those flying closely by, and from images examined later.
- 14 **White-faced Storm Petrels**
- 1 **BLACK-WINGED PETREL** which gave close views for a few minutes but soon disappeared.
- 12 **Fluttering Shearwaters**
- 22 **Buller's Shearwaters**
- 2 **Grey-faced Petrels**
- 5 **Fairy Prions**
- 1 or possibly 2 **NEW ZEALAND STORM PETRELS** - unfortunately neither was in view for long.
- At least one more **Grey Ternlet**.



Cook's Petrel (DD)

Soon after 1:00pm we continued to 2 more chumming spots along the deep water shelf where we spent a shorter time. With the use of fish oil, **White-faced Storm Petrels** were the main feature here and high hopes for more NZ Stormies were not to be satisfied. One more Wandering Albatross and a couple more **Grey-faced Petrels** came in to feed and a few pterodromas put in an appearance, but the rarer species did not rejoin us.

At 2.30 we headed back to the Whangaroa Marina and the end of a perfect day. But our fishing wasn't over! Tuna in numbers were attracted to our lures as we headed to shore and Captain Brian Candy had bait for his next days fishing. The day had also produced more than average numbers of Sunfish with that distinctive fin appearing at least 8 times. Going back into shore the flow of birds was southerly instead of the northerly morning flow, but the same birds seemed to be returning. As we approached Stephenson Island several more **Common Diving Petrels** were seen on the water. We were back at the dock by 4:40pm and well pleased with a great pelagic.

UPDATE FROM MOTUROA ISLAND

Les Feasey

I spent time with CJ on Moturoa Island 3-4 Jan 2015 and again on 11-12 Jan 2015.

3 – 4 JAN

On 3rd Jan we recorded 26 species and details were entered into EBird. 11:35 AM - 2:45 PM. Covered much of Moturoa Is. The more significant sightings were as follows:

North Island Brown Kiwi (*Apteryx mantelli*) 2 Pair have occupied a Penguin nesting box for the second year

Buff-banded Rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*) 2

Skua sp (*Stercorarius sp.*) 3 distant skuas in the Bay flying low and fast. CJ thought they might have been **Pomarine** (*Stercorarius pomarinus*). This would be an unusual sighting for the Bay but one was seen on a pelagic out of Opuia a few years ago. Would like to photograph them.

Tui (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*) 24



Whitehead – Moturoa Island (DD)

Whitehead (*Mohoua albicilla*) 3 Released on Moturoa Island several years ago and breeding successfully. CJ and Carol Ralph, Paul Asquith and others on the Island are committed conservationists and several rare species are now well established.

North Island Robin (*Petroica australis longipes*) 1 Released on the Island several years ago and breeding (this one wasn't banded). From the photographs, there was only 1 individual at several locations in Punga Gully.

This report was generated automatically by eBird v3 (<http://ebird.org>)

View this checklist online at <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S21248864>

11 – 12 JAN

On 11 Jan we went fishing but actually went looking for the brown booby out to Nine Pin, then did a nesting survey of **Red-billed Gull** on the Black Rocks on our return.

Significant birds were:

Nesting **GREY-FACED PETREL** chicks in burrows - We checked 24 burrows of which 8 had been used for nesting this season, and 1 had a chick.

Kiwi pair roosting in a penguin box (photo);

Nesting **Gannets** on Nine Pin, counted 90.

PERU ON OFFER!

For those interested in seeing tropical birds in spectacular quantity, North Peru is a very good choice. We are running 2 tours this year, one leaving **26 June** and the other on **13 October**. Both have spaces.

In conjunction with our ground agent in Tarapoto, we have put together various other options with a combination of other interests including other wildlife, archaeological sites, trekking, mountain biking and opportunities for children.

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NORTH PERU BIRD TOURS

2015
2016



Detlef & Carol - 09 407 3874

INDONESIA TOO! - 2016!

ECOLOGES INDONESIA has lodges in Bali, Flores, Kalimantan & Sumatra. We visited these in April and were amazed by the variety of birds and wildlife. From 2016 we will be running tours to these parts of Indonesia. To begin with we will lead tours for one week at Rimba in Kalimantan where wild Orang Utans are easy to see; and to Satwa Lodge in southern Sumatra for a birding bonanza. There are still Tigers and Rhinoceros in Sumatra. Dates and prices are not yet worked out but expressions of interest are welcome.

Look at www.ecologesindonesia.com



OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIRDING ABROAD

In the course of our travels abroad, we are gathering much useful information about bird sites and local guides who would be well able to arrange birding or wildlife tours without the necessity to use large, expensive tour companies. Very often a group of 4 or 6 people could easily arrange an economical trip arranged almost entirely in the destination country.

Contact us for information on Fiji, India, Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Europe, parts of Africa, Madagascar and a number of other places. A group of us wanting to do a birding cruise might get a good price by block-booking places on the ship. We are open to all such ideas.