



Studying NEW ZEALAND'S BIRDS
OSNZ®

NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER
DECEMBER 2010

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I have recipes for a xmas cake using six **duck** eggs, pavlova using four **hens** eggs, and a picnic salad with **quail** eggs if anyone is interested!

Thanks to those whose contributions and encouraging response helped to get a local newsletter up and running this year. We make a good team. Let's do it again next year. I'm taking the liberty to cancel out the January meeting, though birding projects will still be in progress. A newsletter will go out in late January to keep you up to date and remind you of February's programme.

All the best for a great festive season with a fabulous 2011 to follow, and may your roasted turkey, goose, duck, fowl, pheasant, pigeon, quail or skylark taste wonderful. No godwits please. I'm having glazed ham. GDQ

SHOW AND TELL

I could use this slot to talk about what I did in Wellington, but perhaps that's beyond the scope of this newsletter! At the last monthly get-together a group of birding enthusiasts enjoyed the hospitality at the Melville residence in Dovedale and several members got the opportunity to show off photos and power point presentations on their favourite projects. Many thanks to David, Vikki and Julia.

BIRDS SCENE

First there was one, then none, and then three, **dabchicks** on the Atawhai Sewerage Ponds. A good birding place to keep a watch for interesting sightings, but leave your picnic lunch for other excursions.

RECOVERY DISCOVERIES

Willie picked up a black-backed gull in full adult plumage, banded as a chick in Marlborough three years ago.

OUT TO SEA

From Don Cooper

'Willie and I were on the eastern end of Rabbit Is. 11-11-10 mid afternoon checking for possible VOC nests when we were treated to an amazing sight. Only about 100m offshore a large flock of white-fronted terns were feeding on small fish, which would break the surface in a 'boiling' water like effect. Within minutes skuas appeared and began attacking the terns in an aerial combat with one tern isolated by four skuas. An unbelievable action, how the tern evaded them was a miracle. As the feeding became more intense we counted a total of seven skua. The number of birds built up with c.300 fluttering shearwaters joining what we estimated to be 400 + white-fronted terns and a few hundred black-back gulls and a lone gannet. At the peak a half kilometre front of birds moved in a west to east direction and lasted for at least 15 minutes.

We believe the small fish were being chased by something larger although we saw no sign near the surface.'

Did anyone else catch this seaside action?

On 10 Nov I caught a glimpse of a feeding frenzy off Ruby Bay, then nearly two weeks later stopped at the Mckee Domain round lunchtime to watch a seabird melee close to shore, much as Don described. At one stage a skua was just about over my head. I endeavoured to count the skua in varying plumages from dark to light, this day c10 and seriously considered, as did Don and Willie, if at least one was a pomerine, the others probably of the Artic type. GDQ

ALSO OUT AT SEA, AND OVER THE SEA

Bird hotspots, island manoeuvres, and a beach outing.

A dedicated group of members has been bracing the salty air during the past few weeks in planes and boats to look for bird hotspots. This is part of oil company AWE and Friends of the Nelson Haven biodiversity surveys of Tasman and Golden Bays. Rob reported of interest, good numbers of **white capped mollymawks, buller shearwater, sooty shearwater, flesh footed shearwater and fairy prion** from the first boat survey.

To establish the contribution of pilchards in their diets, feather and blood samples have been taken from chicks of three common seabird species, **spotted shags** at Tata Islands, **little penguins** on Adele/Fisherman's Islands and **Australasian gannets** on Farewell Spit.

An Update from Rob

We hardly could find any chicks of little penguins at Fisherman's Island. Many deserted nests with abandoned eggs were found and some fresh dead chicks. A few chicks we found were very dry. Soon after our trip, reports came in of wrecks of dead little penguins. Dead penguins have now been reported from Golden Bay, Tasman bay and the Marlborough Sounds. In total we have now about 50 birds reported. Our timing of the biodiversity study is therefore in a year that is "uncommon". What is a true twist in the story is the visual observations of pilchards in the study area.

I would be grateful for any report of wreck of birds in the top of south island. Please mail me: Rob Schuckard. rschckrd@xtra.co.nz

OF A FEATHER

A siege of herons,

A sord of mallard

A watch of nightingales

A parliament of owls

A bevy of pheasants

A kit of pigeons

A rush of pochards

An unkindness of ravens

An exaltation of larks

A flight of swallows

A murmuration of starlings

A wisp of snipe

A lamentation of swan

WAIMEA ESTUARY

Tracking with Graeme, - 14 locals are now more knowledgeable to decipher footprints and droppings, and track their own banded rail. Plans are a foot for more monitoring and surveys early next year. Watch this space. I understand marmite was mentioned as a distinguishing look alike feature of marsh crane droppings. There were no tastings available on that day.

Banding with Willie

Don has handed in a brief account from Monday 12 Dec, of successful banding of **Caspian Tern** chicks on the Bells Is. shellbank.

Including Willie there were 11 helpers, four were local OSNZ members.

Overcast conditions were ideal with a low tide giving plenty of dry ground to capture the mobile chicks.

At 7pm we had 45 chicks in boxes and banding and data collection commenced immediately. Willie had briefed everyone at the start and assigned roles to individuals.

A shower of rain threatened to spoil data collection but 2 umbrellas came in handy.

This is the first year that the birds have been given an Alpha Numeric band in conjunction with the normal metal band. The black on white looked very distinctive and will be handy to identify individual birds at future sightings.

After 80 minutes the birds were all released simultaneously on the nest site and we exited the area without delay.

A few small chicks remained hunkered down in nests and ca. 6 eggs were still in incubation ? Willie will check out the state of these in about a fortnight.

PS. Watch out for a moveable hide out at the shellbanks with two pairs of shuffling feet underneath. I hear that the footwear is much the same as Willie and Don are likely to wear. (Ed).

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE

Blackfronted terns are getting a hammering from all sides. Nest predation on Wairau Riverbed is not producing a good outcome for the colony, and birds on the Motueka Riverbed were at the mercy of motorised whitebaiters. A small colony of 23 had chosen a bird brain spot below the Motueka Bridge, and Willie and Steve W fenced off the area, but to no avail as the colony then washed away.

A combined team of banders from Marlborough and Nelson had a day on the Matakita Riverbed recently and now 263 **blackbilled gull** chicks are sporting bands on their legs. A bit closer to home, 19 birds were counted during the Motueka River survey, in a small colony on the stretch between Tapawera and Wangapeka confluence.

THE ROVING BIRDWATCHER

Exotic tastes

With Christmas feasting on the minds of some of us, turn your thoughts to avian feasting, A TV ad for an iconic NZ breakfast cereal asks 'How many can you do?' For several days in January this year, in a Sawyers Bay garden (Dunedin) I watched a steady stream of keruru fly to a cherry plum tree and scoff plums. Seven fruit taken whole in close succession seemed to be the limit, before a pigeon would fly off managing to keep its height. In that same garden in July the year before, I saw two rosellas busily chomping away on phormium seeds. As there seems to be a paucity of kakariki in suburban gardens I guess NZ flax seeds are fair game. But, if endemic birds released into sanctuaries will persist in flying over the fence to feed perhaps we should gear up our gardens to feed saddlebacks and kaka. Big trees would help. My sister now in Aongatete near Kati Kati can watch North Island kaka feeding from her kitchen window. During the first week of August seven birds came into a pine tree, unfortunately almost out of binocular range, but enough to see them in the tops nibbling around the new shoots, then moving lower down into the tree. Later she found wood raspings on the ground. She guessed there were grub meals behind the bark. Then at much closer range, she watched several kaka in a eucalyptus tree remove cocoons of the gum emperor moth with beak and claws, then held between the toes and hacked away at, extracting greenish matter. One cocoon was dropped intact and on closer inspection she found the innards inert. Apparently kaka prefer their meals live.

I've seen pukekos in apple trees but I didn't expect to see one at my front door. Some years ago, a bird came trotting up my garden path in Atawhai and lumbered about in a tangle of jasmine eating passion vine hoppers. I heard later about a family's pet pukeko from near by that had gone walk-about unfortunately without any road sense.

Goldfish have to watch out for avian poachers. When the girls were at school at Clifton Terrace a white heron would visit and stand hopefully over the fish pond, I can't recall the outcome, and recently friends at Punakaki have seen weka running off with stolen goldfish from their pond feature. GDQ

PROGRAMME 2011

We meet usually on the 1st Monday of the month, at 7.15 pm in the "Solander Building", Akersten Street, Port Nelson (opposite the red Cruising Club building). Anyone interested is welcome! Contact Stuart Wood 03-544 3932 or Don Cooper 03-544 8109.

Monday 3 January

No Meeting

Monday 7 February

Indoor meeting
speaker to be confirmed

18-21 February

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Thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the January newsletter: please email or phone me by 10 January. Gail 03 5450456 stagefrightmusic@paradise.net.nz