



NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER NOV/DEC 2012

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Earlier on in November our counting stalwarts scoured the estuaries to bring home the **wader** numbers for Rob to collate. There's always a bonus or two on a day out – in the Waimea a **skua** was seen at close quarters harrying a **white-fronted tern** for its fish and the skua won, and **black-billed gulls** were spotted nesting on Sand Island. Sand Island just off the airport, created naturally in recent years, is becoming a valuable habitat for coastal bird breeding and wader roosting. It's not easily accessible to the general public nor bird counters! On a more recent visit the nesting colony of **white-fronted terns** were being harried by a handful of **skuas**, both **Arctic** and **Pomerine**, the evasive tactics being spectacular and more successful. The terns also have a colony close by on the Boulder Bank. Among the roosting **godwits** and **knots** a number of colour flagged birds were noted from Victoria, Queensland, Shanghai and Alaska. (Thanks for notes from Don C.)

UP COUNTRY

On 23 Nov, a **yellow-crowned parakeet** was seen at Angelus Hut apparently feeding in the nearby plant areas and about a third of the way along the ridge to Mt Robert, one **rock wren** was spotted. Gillian P.

On 3 Nov, on dusk, a close stone's throw from the Harwood's Hole carpark in open paddock country, Canaan Downes, a **kea** followed Tim R, "laughing" at the few trying to photograph it. A quick flyover of **Karearea** was also reported.

From Golden Bay, Chris Petyt reports that on recent visits to trap lines in the Cobb Valley, **falcon, shining and long-tailed cuckoo, riflemen and tomit** were noted.

Alec and Richard went into the Henderson Basin and reported 9 **rock wrens** present but tracking tunnels showed evidence of mice present, not the best situation.

A PARLIAMENT OF OWLS

I'm not referring to our current state of affairs, but of Ruru's state of affairs with or without 'little' opposition. Thank you to our night-time counters. Pete G. supplied the following report.

Nelson Branch's survey of morepork in the city.

The branch conducted this survey in late October, prompted by the successful work done in Waikato last year and being repeated in several other regions this year.

The objective was to establish a baseline of morepork distribution against which we could determine whether the species really was becoming more constricted in range. Other regions had instructed observers to record for 5 consecutive nights from each observation site but in Nelson we would have struggled to get that commitment from all but a few observers. So our instructions to observers were simply:

- any time in last 2 weeks of October
- start listening 30 mins after dusk and continue for 1 hour
- if no birds recorded please try again the following evening
- negative records are just as important as positive ones for this survey.

With the help of some publicity in the paper we ended up with over 60 observers contributing to the survey. The vast majority of these were not OSNZ members. With the few nights spent by each observer the negative records may be indicative of no activity on the chosen night rather than an absence of the species. Of the 65 records submitted 27 recorded morepork as being present. Nine of these birds were recorded on the 2nd night of listening and it is tempting to wonder how many more positive records would have been gained from further nights listening. The experience in Waikato has been that most birds have been detected by the 2nd night.

I am hoping that Nelson City Council staff will map our data which will make it easier to detect what patterns there may be in the birds' distribution. It seems that morepork are present in many localities along the eastern hills - Todds Valley, Dodson's Valley, Centre of NZ, Atmore Tce, Brook Valley, Grampians, Enner Glynn, Suffolk Road and Barnicoat Walkway. The birds were seldom detected away from this belt - even though there was attractive habitat in places like Atawhai Cemetery, Queens Gardens, Cathedral gardens. Mind you there are anecdotal reports from such places outside the survey. Perhaps the most central record came from Hallowell Cemetery behind the School of Music.

I will write the results up fully with all of the data so that the technique can be repeated some time in the future. PG

WASTE OF A WEKA

Pukeko, or the remains thereof are often seen on Wakatu Drive, but on 21 Nov, I spotted a different fatality - a weka. I even did a drive-by twice just to make sure.

Seasonal Musing

I've always been fascinated with the carol, '12 Days of Christmas'. There's a lot of ornithological interest there.

A partridge in a pear tree

Two turtle doves

Three French hens

Four colly birds

Five gold rings (a corruption of 5 gold spinks. More on that later)

Six geese a laying

And seven swans a swimming.

Recently I unearthed two torn out pages from a 70s magazine. The following is several isolated excerpts from the full page discussing the price of My True Love's bill40 years ago.

Unfortunately the page didn't reveal the English published magazine involved so I'm afraid I'm unable to credit the source, so if any editors or contributors out there recognise their words my sincere apologies!

"Take that partridge for a start. Is it alive – at a mere £7.50 – or stuffed, like the ones our Victorian ancestors used to have in glass cases on walls – at around £40 each, - or even plucked, trussed and oven-ready at about £4.20.

Turtle doves and French hens are easy enough to get hold of from a specialist breeder and should set you back about £10 apiece but colly birds, or "calling birds" in some dialects, present much more of a problem. According to our folk song experts, a colly bird is a blackbird and as blackbirds are songbirds, it's against the law in this country to buy or sell them. And our suitor would be very ill advised to think of going out and trapping them in the wild. The maximum fine is £50 per bird. Five gold rings, according to our experts is probably a corruption of "five gold spinks" a dialect word for finches. But then our hero would have exactly the same problem with spinks as he had with his collys.

Your common-or-garden geese will cost him £15 a pair, while something a bit special, like Orinoco geese will cost £400. The fact that geese are sold in pairs – one male, one female – present a problem here. The carol definitely says "geese-a-laying" and since only females lay, our besotted young lover will unfortunately find himself with 42 redundant ganders on his hands.

There's no question of sex discrimination where your swans-a-swimming are concerned. The ordinary white ones cost about £20 a pair. Our starry-eyed swain would be very foolish at this stage to try and save a few bob by nipping down to the Thames one dark night with a large sack. All the swans on the Thames belong to Her Majesty, so he might well discover a new meaning to the quaint old phrase, "swan-apping"

A REMINDER

No evening meeting in January. And a later date in February to avoid holiday weekends. A newsletter will go out in January.

"HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT!"

- Clement C. Moore

