



NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER APRIL 2014

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Earlier on this month 16 of us heard how Jonathan Banks got to the Antarctic and what he did whilst there. Sponsored by Cawthron Institute we saw his fabulous photos but also shots of life behind the postcards. In fact Jonathan spends much time at the rear end of things but comes up with clever DNA from faecal matter of seals, penguins, skuas, etc. I particularly liked the naturally scuptered dry rocks and mummified seals. Thank you Jonathan for a fascinating talk with your dashes of humour thrown in.

'Step Lightly Now'



Photos by Craig Martin. April 2014

Two lovely local pics: Royal Spoonbill from Motueka Estuary, where it received its adornment next newsletter, and reef heron Talley's Wharf. Two other sightings of this locally uncommon bird have come in recently, from Rabbit Is, and No Man's Island.

Recoveries and Discoveries.

If you were in Jiangsi China recently, you could have seen a couple of North Island marked **godwits** with David, or closer to home Willie spotted a tagged godwit in April which was marked at Foxton last November. Also c167 **black fronted terns** were counted by Willie at the end of March and early April a bird from the Clarence R with the colour yellow was in our area. For the fifth year in a row a **dabchick** is again on one of the ponds at the Wakapuaka Sewerage area. The first sighting for many months came from Peter and Charmain last weekend.

And Hot off the Press

Peter F noted down the combinations on a marked godwit seen at the Haven 31 March and 27 April, sent it off to Phil Battley and the reply came back:

“Well well. 3BYRR, which was seen near-daily at Catlins Lake by Peter Langlands up to the morning of 24 March, before being seen at Port Waikato in the evening of 25 March. We presumed she had stopped temporarily on migration due to poor winds, but now it seems she changed her mind completely! An interesting record Peter – many thanks.”

BIRDING ‘LIGHT’ from Paul Bennett’s travels.

Over the past few years, with the idea of doing some serious birding in retirement, I’ve done a fair bit of "SKI"ing (Spending Kid's Inheritance) on equipment to enhance and facilitate the birding experience. I wanted to have crystal clear views to compensate for fading eyesight and I was determined not to miss a bird!

As a result I found myself, last year, climbing up a pass in the Pyrenees carrying a Swarovski scope and tripod, a Cannon SLR with a 400mm lens, a pair of Zeiss binoculars and a hefty field guide. Added to this were the several pairs of glasses I seem to need, together of course with all the accoutrements of safe tramping.

I was pretty excited setting out, - the day was definitely going to hold a lammergeyer or two. Now I’m pretty fit for an old guy but half an hour in, sweat was pouring, interest was waning and I was totally over magnificent scenery, rock buntings and wood larks. When a possible ring ouzel flew past and landed about 100m downhill, I missed it because it was too far away for the binocs and it had moved on by the time I got the scope into action. Frustration mounted. Far from enhancing my birding experience the gear was killing it. Yes I did get some great views but instead of enjoying the birds and going into that wonderful Zen like state that I always associate with losing myself in a new environment, I was worrying about knocking the scope over, or where to put the binocs down, or should I use the scope or the tripod or the cannon? and what had I done with my glasses and Oh No it's starting to drizzle and I've got all this gear!

Now I’ve spent a considerable amount of time persuading the wife that the equipment I’ve bought is essential and really not that expensive. (“Well I don't play golf darling and it’s only the same as a year’s green fees.”) so when we visited our daughter in the wet tropics of NE Queensland a couple of weeks ago she raised both eyebrows when the only gear I packed was a (relatively cheap) Nikon Coolpix 42x optical zoom camera and my cell phone with the excellent “Morecombe Australian birds” app.

Of course it was wonderful to see our daughter, but with some of the most exciting birding sites in Oz on the doorstep, most days saw me up before light and heading into rainforest. I have to say that with just the Coolpix and phone, it felt like setting out for work dressed only in my undies and for the first day or two there were moments of panic and almost vertigo as I scanned the forest for the gear my brain told me I must have left behind.

The Nikon weighs around 500 g and fits in the palm of a hand. Despite the heat, walking was pleasant and easy and suddenly I was back to looking and listening for birds instead of stumbling around with gear. As in most rainforest, birds tend to be in pockets. You can walk for several hundred metres and see and hear nothing and then suddenly there is a fruiting or flowering tree and it’s all on, with many species present. Some are obvious and easy, but separating out thornbills, gerygones and many of the honeyeaters requires the familiarity that is impossible to acquire as a casual visitor. Often in the past, with binocs and a field guide, by the time I've made a positive ID on

one species another 5 have moved off. With the Coolpix though, the technique is simply to snap them all and then enjoy the show, knowing that there will be fun that evening accurately identifying what you have seen. The power of this sort of imaging is extraordinary. A bird can, to my eyes, be a faraway speck with no form or feature. Snap it on maximum zoom and it starts to take shape. Now use the digital zoom to enlarge the bird so it fills the LCD screen on the camera and key ID features become apparent. Later on download it to your computer and the speck has become a life size image that can be examined and compared to field guides at leisure. Now of course it's going to be pixelated and blurred and you certainly won't sell it to National Geographic, but 9 times out of 10 there is enough information in the image to make a positive identification. As an example of what the compact zoom can do the pictures below show great knot on the Cairns waterfront.



The first one is approximately as they appeared to the naked eye (equivalent to a 50mm lens on a 35 mm camera). The second image is with the Coolpix on full optical zoom and the final image shows one of the knots digitally zoomed. Blurry, but clearly a greater knot.

What's more, the nagging doubts that come from fleeting encounters with birds disappear. This image I took shows the crescent shaped cheek mark of a Lewin's honeyeater and the white streak from bill to eye. I've probably seen hundreds of these on various trips to Oz but have always had that uncertainty that they might have been yellow spotted (almost identical and with overlapping distribution but with a more square cheek patch.)



Pictures also provide evidence. I met another birder and happened to mention that I'd just seen blue faced parrot finches at Mt. Paluma. He was quite sceptical until I was able to show him some very blurred but clearly recognisable snaps.

The other bit of equipment you need for light birding is of course the cell phone. -Loaded with relevant apps. Now I understand that there are a number of reasons why we need to be careful about calling birds in with recorded song and I am not advocating this. However the ability that the app gives to compare the actual song or call the bird is making with a recording, while you are still in the field, is extraordinarily useful in making a good ID, particularly with small brown jobs.

Now don't get me wrong I'm not suggesting that you chuck away all that birding equipment. Certainly if I was heading over to the Mot sand spit I'd still take the scope and the cannon and I'd enjoy great clarity and hopefully some decent photos.

However going somewhere full of unfamiliar species and where there is likely to be travel involved, I would strongly recommend leaving all that expensive metal and glass behind and free it all up with a compact zoom and cell phone. PB.

Photo Richard Wells, Waikaia Bush, Southland April 2014



PROGRAMME 2014

We meet **usually** on the 1st Monday of the month, at 7.15 pm in the "Solander Fisheries Building", Cross Quay, off Akersten Street, Port Nelson (opposite the red Cruising Club building). All birders are welcome! Contact: Don Cooper 03-544 8109 or Gail 03-5450456.

Monday 5 May
Indoor meeting

Richard Wells
A trip to the Snares

Queen's Birthday Weekend Conference in Palmerston North.

Monday 9 June (2nd Monday)
Indoor meeting

Winter Wader Count
13, 14, 15, 16 June

Thank you to this month's contributors.

Contributions for May newsletter by 24th please email, snailmail, or phone:
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