



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 6/2011 July 2011

Ornithological Snippets



Craig McKenzie has been photographing two **Stewart Island Shags** that have been feeding in the Andersons Bay Inlet and roosting on the causeway beside the bridge for the last two or three months. They appear to be quite efficient at catching the small flounders. On two occasions he has seen them catch one on successive dives. He also counted 71 (plus or minus 1) **Black-fronted Terns** roosting on the mudflats at Aramoana on the 14th May at 4:00pm.

On 2/7 Alan Baker walked the Cloud Forests of Leith Track (above Sullivans Dam) for the first time. There was a satisfying variety of birds in the podocarp/cedar forest. I saw **Tomtit, Brown Creeper, Pigeon, Tui** and

Bellbird, among others, but the highlight was a **Yellow-crowned Parakeet**. It was a most considerate bird, calling to let me know it was there and posing on a dead tree in the sunshine so that I got a good view of it. The yellow crown was very obvious.

Sightings on my way up to the dam included 3 Black Shags on Ross Creek Reservoir, a young **Native Pigeon** being fed by an adult in the bush along Islay St, and a male **Tomtit** on Leith Valley Rd. Sullivans Dam had no water birds.

He went back to Sullivans Dam on 9/7 and saw 2 **Coots**, a **Black Shag**, a pair of **Paradise Ducks** and 22 **Mallards**.

There were rather more **Coots** on Waihola. Maree Johnson wrote “On Thursday June 9th I saw a very strange sight. The morning had been frosty and at midday the sun was shining brightly although there was still mist over Lake Waihola. In the distance there appeared to be a black raft moving across the lake. As the mass came closer I could identify the birds as **Coots**; they looked as though they were thoroughly enjoying themselves, flapping and splashing and all the time keeping in a very tight huddle. Through binoculars I lost count at about 250 as the mass rotated. I estimated there were probably over 300 birds.”



On the coast there was a report of a **Great Crested Grebe** between Company Bay and Broad Bay, on 27th June and the juvenile was still present at Kaikourai Estuary until 7 July as reported by Lesley Gowans and Derek Onley. Inland John Douglas reported one on Butchers Dam on 8th July. and Mark Ayre from Wanaka wrote “The **G C Grebes** have settled down a bit

and now with my new iphone App called Bird watchers dairy I am able to GPS all my sightings and export them to ebird. I have worked out roughly where the various pairs are round the lake. At Glendhu Bay they have been indicated in the environment court decisions regarding the new golf course



and associated buildings so a lot of my ebird data has been used in evidence. I also found one dead on the beach at the yacht club 11/5/2011, looks like it has been hit by a prop of boat.”



On a more mundane note on 3 July Derek Onley spent almost an hour looking in vain for Cirl Buntings amongst flocks of many thousands of **Greenfinches**, **Yellowhammers**, **Redpolls**, **House Sparrows** and **Feral Pigeons** gathered around a stock feed bale in a muddy paddock near Karitane.

And in a similar vein 77 **Blackbirds** and 15 **Thrushes** were counted on Logan Park areas on Sunday 10 July.

Fairy Prions at St Clair



A goodly number of us ventured to the St Clair cliffs on Sunday 26th June to see the area where there is a Fairy Prion Colony. Graeme Loh has been studying the birds for some time now and has obtained funds to have a predator proof fence built around the cliff top. It was a calm cold sunny day so not much action out to sea but we did see a Gannet and two Buller's

Mollymawk and dozens of Rock Pigeons and those who stayed later were treated to a pod of about 20 dolphin heading south. We were also recruited to help with the fencing, making staples and various other jobs!

Mary Thompson photo Jeremy Beck

OSNZ Wader Counts

Society President David Lawrie wrote: the purpose of the counts is to track changes in populations of endemic species and contribute to monitoring changes in the populations of northern hemisphere breeding waders in the East Asian-Australian Flyway (particularly Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and Turnstone).....

As many wader populations plummet across the globe OSNZ has a major contribution to make through the provision of information, particularly as we are the country at the end of the Flyway, and where the populations can best be monitored.

Otago has been involved in the wader counts since 1984. We covered the whole of coastal Otago until 1995. A lot of time was involved so in 1995 we decided to only cover the harbour and the Otago Peninsula. But even that takes time and has become a problem as fewer members take part. My impression is that the influx of new members is taken up with the harbour survey. Hopefully when it finishes in August more members will be available and the peninsula will be covered thoroughly.

This June count went reasonably well, although birds were not as numerous as hoped. A very high tide meant that a lot of waders were hiding. Wildfowl liked the conditions of course with a raft of 237 shovelers at Papanui and a ridiculous high number of 94 feral geese. Let's see what the numbers of these geese are in November.

	Karitane	Blueskin Bay	Aramoana	Harbour	Papanui Inlet	Hooper's Inlet	Catlins	Total
Pied Oystercatcher	3	580	66	430	63	65	75	1282
Variable Oystercatcher	3	38	2	86	21		5	155
Pied Stilt	36	30	23	62	16	28	14	209
Banded Dotterel		81					60	141
Spur-winged Plover	85		4	23	9	15	9	145
Bar-tailed Godwit		48	30		70		31	179

Compiled by **Peter Schweigman**

Hawksbury Lagoon Survey



Before

and after counting a thousand ducks.

	3 April 2011	3 July 2011
Black Shag		1
Little Shag	3	12
White-faced Heron	13	
Royal Spoonbill	27	
Black Swan	157	5
Paradise Duck	51	12
Canada Goose	3	5
Domestic Goose	12	8
Hybrid Goose	1	6
Mallard x Grey Duck	500	630
N.Z.Shoveler	310	289
Grey Teal	188	72
NZ Scaup	2	
Spur-winged Plover	10	1
Pied Stilt	8	48
Black-backed Gull	10	10
Red-billed Gull		3
Caspian Tern	2	
Welcome Swallow	4	

Several of the smaller pools were iced over which may account for the reduction in numbers of Grey Teal but the dramatic drop in Black Swan numbers is more likely to be due to the cycle of water turbidity and algal bloom and the associated die off of aquatic plants on which the swans feed. The water certainly looked murky.

compiled by **Derek Onley**

Otago Harbour Survey: June 2011 update

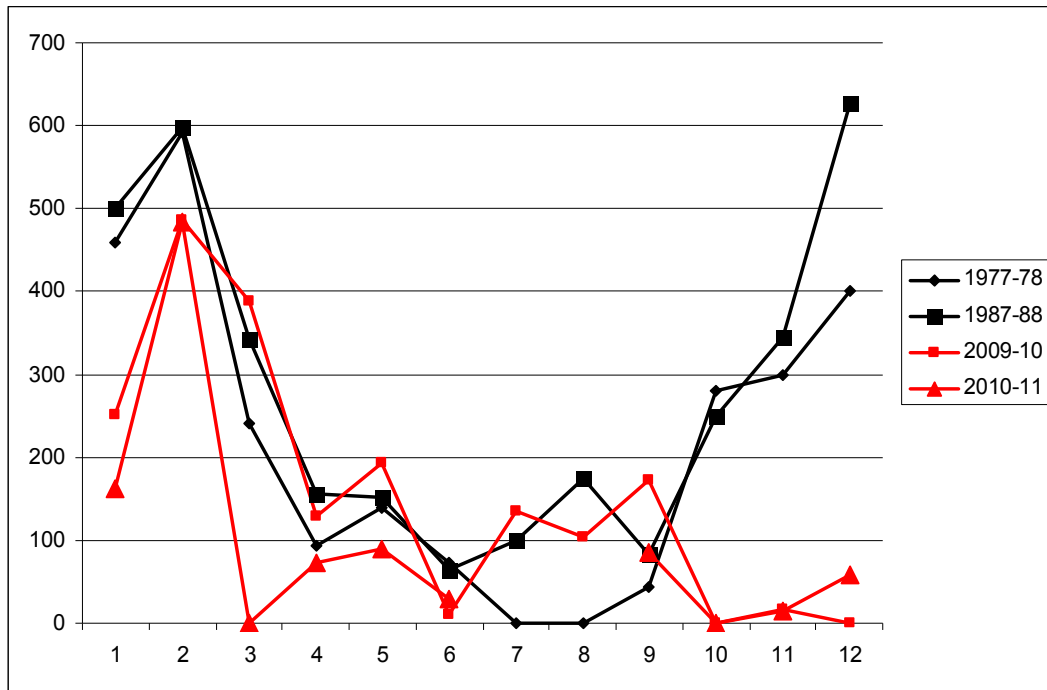
The normal summary table includes everything that was counted. If it's not correct for your section let me know.

Species	Section							Grand Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
bellbird		1						1
black backed gull	260	4	34	10	117	12	28	465
black fronted tern	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10
black shag	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
black swan	0	0	10	2	0	41	52	105
canada goose	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	14
domestic duck	0	0	0	6	2	0	0	8
dunnock		1						1
fowl				1				1
godwit	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	30
grey teal	0	0	0	0	0	32	183	215
greylag goose	0	0	26	32	8	0	0	66
harrier					1			1
kingfisher					2		10	12
little shag	36	108	108	122	73	85	34	566
mallard	6	65	225	118	161	143	0	718
paradise shelduck	4	0	0	6	2	9	61	82
piebald oystercatcher	53	0	117	8	231	21	66	496
piebald stilt	0	0	0	0	0	62	23	85
pukeko						14		14
redbilled gull	121	46	6	4	2	2	0	181
shoveler	0	0	0	0	0	17	3	20
skylark							14	14
spotted shag	54	0	2	0	3	0	0	59
spur-winged plover	2	0	13	4	0	4	4	27
stewart island shag	0	0	2	9	5	0	0	16
variable	23	2	11	14	0	36	2	88
oystercatcher								
welcome swallow					2			2
white faced heron	2	0	16	4	0	15	0	37
white-fronted tern	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	8

Here are the monthly totals for June last year and this year. Black backed gull, black swan, pied oystercatcher, paradise shelduck, spur-winged plover have all remained at about the same numbers. Grey teal, mallard, little shag, greylag geese, little shag, shoveler, spotted shag, variable oystercatcher and white faced heron are all up. Red billed gull, Stewart Island shag, are down compared to this time last year. All the key species are following the overall pattern.

Species	2010	2011
bellbird		1
black backed gull	539	465
black fronted tern	1	10
black shag	1	2
black swan	101	105
blackbird	4	
canada goose	9	14
crested grebe	1	
domestic duck	0	8
dunnock		1
fowl		1
godwit	10	30
grey teal	33	215
greylag goose	8	66
harrier	2	1
kingfisher	14	12
little shag	490	566
mallard	545	718
paradise shelduck	83	82
pied oystercatcher	465	496
pied stilt	2	85
pukeko	12	14
redbilled gull	865	181
shoveler	3	20
skylark		14
sparrow	22	
spotted shag	21	59
spur-winged plover	25	27
starling	16	
stewart island shag	37	16
variable oystercatcher	31	88
welcome swallow		2
white faced heron	9	37
white-fronted tern	7	8

Here is the total data summary for bar-tailed godwit. Notice how their spring numbers have changed in the last two surveys. It appears that they are no longer using Otago Harbour as much after arrival as they were in the 1970's and 1980's.



Bruce McKinlay

Tui or bellbird with coloured leg bands

You may well get asked by members of the public about tui or bellbirds with coloured leg bands. More than 250 birds have been banded in Wakari over the last three autumns, and they can turn up anywhere in Otago. Some Wakari tui have gone to Oamaru, and one to Papatowai! I am keen to get reliable reports of sightings – from these we can learn a lot about tui movements and longevity.

Each bird has a numbered metal band on its left leg, and a unique combination of three colour bands, one on the left and two on the right (please record left leg then right leg, top to bottom: the order is important). The tui colour bands are mostly white, yellow, red, green, or blue (there are a few orange or grey-black). Bellbirds may also have orange or purple bands.

A digital photo, even a blurry one, is good for confirmation.

If the enquirer is interested, and especially if they have details of all three colour bands in order, please ask them to contact me at murray.efford@otago.ac.nz.

People without email can leave a message at 03 476 4668 or send a note to 60 Helensburgh Rd, Wakari, Dunedin 9010. Sometimes I'm away and cannot deal with phone messages.

Notes of discussion at AGM, Indoor Meeting, 22 June 2011

Current Branch projects

Hawksbury Lagoon Survey, coordinated by Derek Onley, has nearly completed 4 years of seasonal counts. Decided to continue with these counts, especially now that a community conservation group is doing replanting and other 'clean-up' activities at the lagoon.

Harbour Bird Survey, coordinated by Bruce McKinlay, will have a complete set of monthly counts for 2 years when the last count is done in August. These are valuable data and will be analysed and hopefully published.

Falcon Study Group, convened by Steve Lawrence, will again locate NZ Falcon nests in the exotic forests near Dunedin and this coming season plan to use cameras to monitor nests for predators, feeding activities and fledging success.

Bar-tailed Godwit Study, with Peter Schweigman liaising with the national team; more cannon netting and banding of godwits in Otago later this year. With the return of the godwits, it is imperative that we make a special effort to resight banded birds to get the most data we can out of our banded birds.

New Projects:

Gull and Tern Roosting Sites in Otago

It was agreed that a new project would be to locate the Otago roosting sites for black-billed gulls and black-fronted terns, as well as nesting sites for white-fronted terns. Black-billed gulls and black-fronted terns are both classed as nationally endangered; both nest inland then migrate to the coast post-breeding. We do not now where all the roosting sites are or the numbers of birds using the Otago coast. The number of black-billed gulls reported during the harbour survey has dropped dramatically over the last

20 years. A planning committee of Graeme Loh, Derek Onley, Chris Lallas and Marcia Dale was appointed to put together a list/ map of possible locations to survey; the plan is that individuals, small groups can make excursions to any of these locations when they wish and report back. In addition we will also have some organised OSNZ filed trips (advertised in newsletter); one trip will be to the Inchclutha area. The locations will also be checked for nesting white-fronted terns (classed as declining); it is a puzzle where the 1000s seen at the Mole in March come from. A volunteer is needed to maintain records for each location and keep us up-dated via the newsletter.

Red-billed Gull Study

It was decided to explore the possibility of banding red-billed gull, a national vulnerable species, to look for distribution, longevity and survival, etc. Bruce McKinlay proposed this study with the following questions in mind: 1. How far do red-billed gulls disperse? Is there more than one population in Coastal Otago? This would require banding at Taiaroa Head and other sites to see if birds wander all over the city. 2. Can we develop a survivorship estimate for red-billed gulls in Dunedin? 3. Can we describe the annual moult process in red-billed gull in Dunedin? This project would need to be approved by the OSNZ Scientific Committee and the appropriate banding permits obtained, etc. Bruce is following this up and will report back.

Several members are undertaking their own projects and others can be involved when required.

Colour-banded tui and bellbirds, sightings to murray.efford@otago.ac.nz

Fairy Prions at St Clair; initiated and coordinated by Graeme Loh; a predator proof fence is being erected at the colony with funds from Forest and Bird.

Other possible surveys suggested were: S.I.Robin population at Waiora Scout Camp, Silverstream, birds of Harbour Cone, Akatore Creek area, rifleman, but no decisions were made to pursue these at this stage.

The following people were hugely thanked for their help in running our Branch:

Derek Onley-for splendid newsletters; Ken Gager-for mailing out newsletters and coordinating wader counts; Peter Schweigman for his vast experience and coordinating godwit and wader counts; Louise Foord, Hamish Spencer and Mary Thompson for looking after finances; Hamish Spencer and Zoology Department – emailing newsletter and for the use of Benham Seminar room for our Indoor Meetings. Mary Thompson was confirmed as Regional Representative.

The Otago Branch is to host the OSNZ Annual Conference and AGM in 2013

A steering committee is required for this. The various tasks are: finding venue for Scientific days, council meetings, dinners, etc; finding discounted accommodation; Registration; Scientific Days programme, Field trips, overall programme. Volunteers to help with any of these tasks would be greatly appreciated; let Mary know your interest.

Compiled by **Mary Thompson**



eBird needs us

I hope we'll all spend one of the days when you can't get out watching birds to check out eBird <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand>. Register and get started by entering your latest notebook records; browse the information articles and try some of the tools. In October, instead of our regular Indoor Meeting we plan to have a hands-on session in the Zoology Computer lab where Bruce McKinlay will take us through using eBird in real time, online, but to get the best out of this session you must already be registered - don't forget your password and have tried entering your observations.

The following are some notes on eBird I have compiled from information found on the eBird NZ website.

New Zealand eBird, which started in 2008, is growing rapidly. The grand hypothesis of eBird is that the observations of all birders can make a valuable contribution to understanding patterns of bird distribution and abundance

and become an invaluable tool for conservation in New Zealand. Your

observations will make a huge difference in our understanding of birds at many levels. The data can be analysed to find new patterns in bird distribution, abundance and population trends.

eBird means that all bird observations have value. eBird should to be used by birders of all skill levels: you should try to use eBird to its fullest capacity, report the birds you see and hear to the best of your ability, and err on the conservative side if you are unsure about your identification. The primary purpose of eBird is not to be a rare bird reporting network or a competitive listing website, although there are some features that highlight these things to help engage birders. eBird is fundamentally a tool to record *any bird, anywhere, any time*. For this reason, *every bird-watcher has something to contribute, every time they go birding*. Most likely you won't find a super-rarity, but your observations will help to strengthen our understanding of common birds in your area. The more information eBird gets the better. It thrives on volume. It doesn't matter where, or when, or from whom it receives data, as long as the data keep coming, it works better and better every day.

And of course, having a complete record of your birding trips is an amazing birding tool as well. Remembering your birding trips of the past, and having a permanent record of them, is one hugely useful. Regular visits to a specific location—be it your backyard, local park, or favorite refuge—can be one of the most rewarding and valuable ways to use eBird, and to gain a solid understanding of the ebb and flow of bird populations in your local area. Bird-watchers that report regularly from a favourite area develop an intimate level of familiarity with the birds there that often yields fascinating questions.

So, in summary, eBird allows any birder to contribute their bird observations to the whole birding community; observations that otherwise might be lost in notebooks now becomes part of a maintained database that is accumulating more and more data that is retrievable and can be used to follow changes in bird distribution and abundance.

So please give it a go and be prepared for our special session on eBird on Thursday 27 October. Note change of day for our Indoor Meeting.

Weekend Field Trip to Awarua Bay and Waituna Lagoon, 12/13th November, 2011

This area of Southland is a hot spot for a variety of migratory waders that we don't normally see on Otago (stint, turnstones, golden plover, sandpipers, etc) and also NZ Dotterel. Many Fernbirds are also in the area. The tide this weekend in November is suitable for observing roosting birds; the high tide is 4.30 pm so we would head out to the bay about lunchtime. This means we could leave early Saturday morning from Dunedin (some participants may like to travel down on Friday evening). The plan is for us to stay for the Saturday night at Beach Road Holiday Park, which has tourist flats and cabins that seem adequate. (Alternatively, participants could arrange their own accommodation.)

On the Sunday there would be several possible trips depending on interests: Waituna Lagoon, which is under threat of "flipping" because of high nutrient levels (bittern have been seen here) and walkways at Daffodil Bay on Sandy Point, the new lagoon at the former refuse site, Bluff Hill for seabirds or in any of the many reserves in the area. There is certainly plenty to interest everyone so would be great to have a goodly number come along, and for the weather to cooperate. We have invited the Dunedin Forest and Bird to join us on this field trip. Members of the Southland OSNZ will be guiding us.

Please contact Mary Thompson (464 0787) maryt@actrix.co.nz if you are likely to be interested in coming so that arrangements can be put in place, especially for accommodation.

Request for Blue-eyed shag samples for DNA analysis.

We have a Genetics honours student working on Blue-eyed shags with us in Zoology this year. We are looking to increase the number of samples we have for this study, and wondered if anyone held any frozen (or ethanol preserved) samples of Stewart Island shags, or if you could think about us if you ever happen across any reasonably fresh beach wrecked Stewart Island shags (any birds would be passed onto DoC or the Museum, if they want them, after we took a small piece of tissue for the DNA work).

We (well, Rob Schuckard really!) have finally got a sample from the King Shag, so we want to add more Stewart Island shag samples to compare it with.

If you happen to have any samples, or if you happen to come across some on your travels, please contact Martyn Kennedy, Department of Zoology, University of Otago (martyn.kennedy@otago.ac.nz).

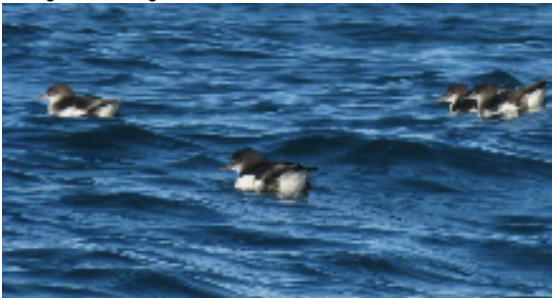
Thanks for any assistance you can provide.

Martyn Kennedy

Email Newsletters are in glorious colour!

Many of you will have received a pdf copy of this Newsletter by email as well as mail. It is quite a big job to photocopy, collate, address and post the newsletters so if you are happy to receive the newsletter **only by email**, or if you would like to but do not, please send your email address with your request to: mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Mystery Bird



Last month's mystery bird was one of the smaller shearwaters, two of which, Fluttering and Hutton's, have been recorded reasonably regularly off the Otago coast. They are not easy to tell apart unless you see the underwing.

Hutton's Shearwaters (right) have scruffy dark markings on the underwing whereas Fluttering underwings (left) are cleaner and whiter though this is not exactly a lot of help in this case as the birds are sitting on the water.

Hutton's tend to be darker on the head with less white on the chin which would suggest that the birds in the photo are Fluttering Shearwaters. However Hutton's also tend to be darker towards the back end, (rear flanks) and have slightly longer

bills not unlike the birds in the photo. Paul Scofield said that "without an underwing not really sure you can be 100% sure". All goes to show that it is a good idea to take notes as well as photos.

Programme 2011

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held in the Benham Seminar Room,
Benham

Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street at 8 p.m.

Wednesday 27 July Indoor Meeting Eduardo Santos
Dunnock behaviour in the Botanic Gardens

Sunday, 14 August Final Harbour Survey start time 14.12 pm

Wednesday, 24 Aug Indoor Meeting Kat Manoo
More about the Fairy Prions at St Clair

Wednesday, 28 Sept Indoor Meeting Bruce McKinlay
Bird experiences in the Sub-Antarctic.

Sunday, 11 Sept Survey of Styles Creek Reserve, Broad Bay.
Meet at Matariki Street, at 1.00 pm.
Phone Mary (464 0787) for car pooling.

Thursday 27 Oct Special Indoor Meeting. Bruce McKinlay
Hands-on introduction to eBird.
Note date and day but still meet at usual
Zoology venue by 8.00 pm.

Wednesday 23 Nov Indoor Meeting. Neville Peat
The Rich Legacy of Richdale

12 and 13 November Weekend Field Trip.
Awarua Bay and Waituna Lagoon.
Contact Mary Thompson, 464 0787

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.
Final date for copy for next newsletter 17 August