



# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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## **Down South - Highlights of the Awarua Weekend Field Trip**



A Godwit's view

21 people enjoyed an extraordinary birding experience in warm, calm weather and with perfect bright light behind us for looking at birds in the afternoon sun from the spit side of the bay. We were privileged to have expert guiding provided by Phil Rhodes and Lloyd Esler of Southland OSNZ who had also organized a key to the gate at Tiwai Point so we had the luxury of driving to within a few hundred metres of the bay.

The flocks of waders came close to the edge ahead of the incoming tide and several of us had the pleasure of watching them feed and take to flight before they settled down at high tide. The flock included godwits, some knots, stints and about 100 turnstones. The turnstones were spectacular with many colour variations and all the black and brown patterns were

clearly visible in the great light. Stunning. This was when it was easiest to spot any rarities as their movements and habits made them stand out, so Sue Odlin and Mary T spotted a Terek sandpiper (yellow/orange legs and upturned bill) and another sandpiper which was later identified as a Curlew sandpiper (down-turned bill) by Richard Schofield. Craig McKenzie spent time crawling in the mud with his camera photographing the NZ Dotterel. All enjoyed being so close (within 3 metres) to these birds, some of them in breeding plumage. Red-necked Stint were also dashing about quite close as well.

Sunday also dawned fine and we had a 2 hour walk around the newly made Estuary Walkway around the lagoon formed in the previous refuse dump. The highlight here was seeing the first Australasian Coot to be recorded in the Invercargill area. This walkway also gives great views of the waders feeding in the New River estuary: godwits, spoonbills, etc. Several Caspian Tern, White-fronted Tern, many Black Swan cygnets at all stages of development, most of the duck species and stilts inhabited the lagoon. The day was finished off by visiting Waituna Lagoon for lunch but the water level was too high for many birds, then on to see a research plot of cushion plants and to hear from Britt Cranston (PhD Otago) about the study she is doing on the effects of warming on the plant communities of these wetland areas. Some participants returned home via the Catlins.

My tally of total number of species seen was 45. That's not counting sparrows.

#### Awarua Bay List – 29 species

Bar-tailed Godwit	about 700
Turnstone	103
Red-necked Stint	20
Knot	15
Banded Dotterel	10
NZ Dotterel	6
Terek Sandpiper	1
Curlew Sandpiper	1
Spoonbill	5
White-faced Heron	2
Pied Stilt	2
Black Swan	dozens

Other species: Black-backed Gull, Canada Geese (2), Paradise Duck, Variable Oystercatcher (2), Little Shag (3), Harrier, Fernbird (numerous heard, 2 seen), Pipit (2), Skylark, Redpoll, Fantail (1), Welcome Swallow, Blackbird, Starling, Silvereye

Additional species on the beach side: Stewart Island Shag, Little Blue Penguin, Variable Oystercatcher (4), Banded Dotterel (12-15) and Hector's dolphin. There were no Spur-winged Plover.

Sue Odlin and Lesley Gowans visited Sandy Point on Saturday morning and provided the following list:

Brown Creeper, Silvereye, Dunnock, Fantail, Kingfisher, White-faced Heron, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied Oystercatcher, Spur-winged Plover, Black Swan, Little Shag, Red-billed Gull.

Additional species at Estuary Lagoon: Mallard, Shoveler, Grey Teal, Coot, White-fronted Tern, Caspian Tern and at Waituna: Pukeko.

**Mary Thompson**

### **Up North - A Birdwatcher's Week in Rarotonga and Aitutaki**

August is always a good time not to be in Dunedin and, after having to defer the final Otago Harbour Bird Count because of forecast snow fall, getting an earlier than planned plane to Rarotonga seemed like a very good idea.

The first morning we awoke to the squawks and cackles of Indian myna, which are ubiquitous everywhere around settled areas on Rarotonga.



Walks near where we were staying at Muri Lagoon on the Southeast corner of the island revealed odd birds in amongst the mynas; a frigatebird

amongst the coconut palms; wandering tattlers along the lagoon edge; and reef herons both grey and white along the water's edge.

We organised a visit to the Takitimu Conservation Area which was highly successful. Over about three hours we saw about a dozen Kakerori, heard but did not see a Rarotongan starling, and heard and saw lots of Pacific pigeon and got good views of the Cook Islands fruit dove. The Pacific pigeon is a lot more vocal than our kereru; uttering 'coos' whenever it landed in the canopy as well as the more expected wing beats as individuals passed overhead. From the lookout on a ridge high above the valley we could see way out to sea across the lagoon: in the distance white tailed tropicbirds wheeled about. Also noted while walking through an orange grove on our way into the conservation area were three rosellas the result of a release of cage birds.

As an aside we were also able to look out over a fruit bat roost from the lookout. Over a period of about 40 minutes there were regular disturbances in the roost and along with lots of loud squawks bats were observed flying between roost trees.

The success of the Takitimu Conservation project appears to be directly related to the ongoing twice yearly poisoning of kiore with talon; once just before breeding starts and another rebait during the fledging period. The grid is about 450 tunnels which are spread across some precipitous ridges across 155 hectares.

Tom, our guide, pointed out the range of exotic species present in the canopy and sub canopy. Rarotonga is a weeds paradise with its warm growing climate and good, rich volcanic soils. We saw lots of different crops being harvested and a wide range of vegetables available in the local stores and so like the desired plants the undesired are doing well on the island by choking canopy trees, replacing canopy trees and generally modifying the flora into something new.

Later in the week we flew to Aitutaki the famous coral archipelago about 40 minutes north of Rarotonga. In addition to the coral lagoon the main island is significant in size and has a fair number of different habitats. As on Rarotonga weeds are choking the forest and driving the existing vegetation associations in new directions. On both islands the transformations caused by the exotic vegetation are being aided by a



seemingly patch work approach to farming with some burning off amongst patches of intensively managed food crops.



Anyway, the birds along the lagoon edge were similar to Rarotonga with the addition of brown noddies, crested terns and occasional red-tailed tropicbird. Again reef herons were present in good numbers in both slate grey and white.

Mynas were everywhere along the lagoon edge and along roads. Also present in good numbers around where we were staying (along the Northwest edge of the main island) were blue lorikeets. These engaging blue and white birds with orange beaks and feet were present gnawing away on young coconuts and fingers of bananas. Occasionally groups of three or four would explode out of a tree and race to the next feeding station.

Reef herons were not restricted to the lagoon but occurred in rough ground some distance from the coast. Also present in such atypical habitats were black ducks.

One species that was a real struggle was the common fowl. Most of the time fowls were present in large numbers around houses. Hens always seemed to have very large (>10 of generally very small chicks) to very small (2 generally large chicks) broods: roosters were around and mostly made their presence felt in the early morning. The two places where I recorded fowl as living wild were on a walk to Mt Maungapue at least a kilometre from housing (check) and on one foot island some 10 km from permanent habitation. Also present on One Foot Is was a pair of myna.

On a walk to the highest point on the island, Mt Maungapue (124 m), we passed through habitat which appeared similar as that down on the coastal strip, but it seems that without humans the frequency of mynas decreased. While up on the main ridge of the island we saw our one and only long tailed cuckoo. It did not wait but took off behind a bush. Also visible from up on high were common terns wheeling about above the forest well inland from the coast. Generally these were seen in groups of two or four. I assume that they were looking for suitable nesting habitat.

The mornings and evenings were mild, but the middle of the day if it was cloud free was hot and required quite a bit of effort to keep going. We got around by walking and or bus but most other tourists rented cars scooters or bicycles. Overall, it is always exciting to go to a new place finding what's rare or uncommon, making your way around new places, and actually seeing some new birds. The species list for the trip was less than 20 so no matter how attractive as a destination, the Cook Islands remains a small block of land for birds.

**Bruce Mckinlay**

## Back Home - Summer Wader Count

	Karitane	Blueskin Bay	Purakaunui	Aramoana	Harbour	Papanui	Hoopers	Catlins Lake	Total
Pied O/catcher		206	43	4	276		47	52	628
Variable O/catcher	2	17	4	8	5	3		10	49
Pied Stilt	28	2	3				46	5	84
Banded Dotterel								3	
Spur-winged Plover	1				9		10		
Turnstone								1	
Lesser Knot								2	
Bar-tailed Godwit	178	850			10		500	356	1894

Derek Onley, Sue Heath, Lesley Gowans, Ken Gager, Lala Frazer, Mary Thompson & Richard Schofield, plus no doubt a host of un-named assistants, covered coastal Otago for the annual NZ wader count on 6 November. A good turn out of observers but poor weather conditions,

summarised in Adrian Reagan's spreadsheet as: Very strong Southerly, showers. Poor visibility, birds sheltering away from strong wind.

Again there were no godwits at Aramoana, formerly an important high tide roosting area. Lesley and Peter Schweigman went to have another look the following Thursday and came across just 25 that stayed about 2 minutes in the area.

**Peter Schweigman**

## Mating Stilts



I have just seen the Black Stilt at McIntosh Rd swamp propositioned by a standard Pied Stilt. It was over in a flash. I was photographing them at the time and just got to the telescope in time to see the actual hop and wiggle. According to the electronics of my camera, at 3.45.13 she was a couple of metres away from him, at 3.46.09 she was head down alongside of him, at 3.46.26 he walked round behind her as she held position, and 3 seconds later he was hopping up, and I shifted to my

telescope. I suspect that she was soliciting in the first frame, but he was walking away feeding. They hadn't been closer than 5-10 m though for more than a few minutes, so there weren't many visible preliminaries.

Considering that there had been plenty of piers about on the swamp since at least 14th October and there were at least two other pairs, maybe three still there at the moment, she was very determined to have him.

A total fluke that I caught them.

**Jill Hamel**

## Nesting Falcons

Firstly a short report on a trip we did on the afternoon of 10 November to a Wenita block in Toko mouth forest.

A group of forestry workers was dive-bombed last week as they started to log a block in the Toko forest so the presence of falcons was reported to Wenita office who contacted me to check there was an active nest. In the meantime logging was moved to another nearby block.

After some searching the nest containing 3 eggs was located by observing the male return to it while the female merely watched us from a nearby tree. They only dive-bombed when we were within 5m. of the nest which was at the base of a wind-thrown tree in a clearing amongst the mature pines.

**Steve Lawrence**

## and Robins

Elton Smith reports from the Orokonui that there are 10 robin pairs confirmed and the situation at the end of October was:

- 4 pairs feeding 8 fledglings (2 pairs of fledglings still to be banded)
- 1 pair feeding chicks on nest. Will fledge in about 3 days, already banded
- 1 pair on eggs
- 3 pairs courtship feeding and probably preparing to re-nest after their first nest failed (2 failed due to rain event and 1 nest's eggs were infertile).
- 1 pair up to nothing useful thus far.

## Ornithological Snippets



The **Royal Spoonbill** tally during the wader count day came to 87 with 21 at Karitane, 2 in Blueskin Bay, 1 in the Harbour and Aramoana, 28 at Papanui and 34 at Catlins Lake.

At about 7 in the evening of 3 November Derek Onley and Rosemary Penwarden saw a flock of **Royal Spoonbills** take off



from the Waitati side of Blueskin Bay and circle for at least 10 minutes, slowly gaining height in a bedraggled and unconvincing way. They finally arranged themselves into a vaguely v-shaped formation and headed off southward, high over the motorway. A couple of fortuitous shots with the digi finally allowed an accurate count of 47. Unassisted counts ranged from at least 30 to 51.



On 23 October Rowan Holt and family were walking along the beach out from Anderson's Road Inlet, east of Palmerston, when this (the penguin, not the man) popped out of the surf and wandered along with them. They believed it was the first here since 1970, some 40 odd years ago and decided that it was a much more momentous event than that other event of the day, one that last occurred a mere 24 years ago (something to do with rugby?).

More photos at

<http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=1428>

and a few interesting somewhat ungrateful comments that don't reflect too well upon "keener

birders" at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BIRDING-NZ/message/11761>

An "ordinary old" adult **Yellow-eyed Penguin** with a flipper band was on the rocks at the end of Huriawa Peninsula, Karitane on 6 November.

Sue Heath saw 190+ **Bar-tailed Godwits** on the sand bar at the mouth of Pleasant River on 14th October.

A male **NZ Falcon** flew over Waitati heading straight for the Orokouui Sanctuary on 7 November.

## **Notices and Business**

### **Special End-of-Year Meeting.**

It has been generously arranged that we can have our meeting for Wednesday 23 November in the Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaroa Head. So please mark this date in your diaries and plan to be there. The Centre will provide us with a light meal (cost about \$15) at 6.30 pm. The meeting will start at 7.30 pm, when Neville will talk to us about his research on the work of Lance Richdale.

This is a special event by way of celebration of the completion of the two years of the Otago Harbour Survey and of the publication of Neville Peat's book on Lance Richdale; having the meeting among the albatross seems appropriate.

We will organise car-pooling from Anderson Bay Inlet car park, leaving at 5.30 pm. It is a leisurely 40 minute drive down the Peninsula. Some people may like to go earlier in the afternoon to do some wader watching and looking at the nesting Spotted Shags and Red-billed Gulls at Taiaroa Head, and perhaps afterwards staying to see the Little Blue Penguins come ashore. **Please phone Mary 464 0787 if you would like to carpool.**

**Mary Thompson**

### **Notornis back numbers.**

Peter Schweigman and Mary Thompson have copies of Notornis from 1970s to 1990s, free to anyone who would like them.

### **Black-fronted Tern and Black-billed Gull Survey**

Black-fronted Terns and Black-billed Gulls will be returning to the Otago coast from their inland breeding areas by the New Year. Prompted partly by Lesley Gowans sighting of hundreds of Black-fronted terns at Aramoana during a Harbour survey, we decided at our local AGM that it was about time we had a better look at where these two endangered species spend the winter. A list of sites to visit will be in the next newsletter. Please send details of any sites you think should be included to Derek Onley [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com) or Graeme Loh [gloh@doc.govt.nz](mailto:gloh@doc.govt.nz)

## **Programme 2011-12**

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 23 Nov Special End-of Year Function at the Royal Albatross Centre, Taiaroa Head, starting at 6.30 with a light meal (cost about \$15), followed at 7.30 pm by Neville Peat on the topic, "The Rich Legacy of Richdale".

**Please phone Mary 464 0787 if you would like to carpool.**

Sunday 22 January Hawksbury Lagoon Summer Survey  
10.30am Stewart St end.  
Contact Derek Onley 03 4822831

## **2012 Programme**

**Any suggestions for speakers or topics for our Indoor Meeting Programme for next year to Mary please**

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)

Many thanks to all who contributed.  
Next newsletter will be in January  
Final date for copy 16 January