



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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Otago Region Newsletter 3/2012 April 2012

In Memory of Alan Wright



Alan Wright (a.k.a Arnie, Yogi) died at the beginning of April, aged 84 years, after a life of considerable adventure. He was born in West Yorkshire, the son of a coal miner, and never lost his north country burr, though his red Viking beard turned white. Major occupations included the Royal Navy (in submarines because he was short), the New Zealand lighthouse service (including the Brothers, Campbell and Auckland

Islands) and in the Wildlife Service as ranger in such places as Haast, Te Anau and at Taiaroa Head. It was his experiences on the subantarctic islands that set him off paying attention to birds and wildlife generally.

While working on Stewart Island, he met a District Nurse who had been brought up in the deepest back blocks of the North Island, and had a rapport and patience with sick birds that complemented his rough vigour. Being a sensible man, he married her, and Connie and Alan formed a remarkable team that has had an unusually effective hands-on practical effect on the conservation of endangered species such as takahe and royal albatross. Alan ran the tours at Taiaroa Heads for many years as well as caring for the albatrosses. He and Connie worked out the formula needed to hand raise an albatross chick and the first that they raised returned to breed itself. Alan extended his knowledge of albatrosses by spending two stints of 6 weeks each, with Chris Robertson, on the Sisters observing the larger population of royal albatrosses. Working as the eyes and ears of Chris and other scientists, Alan contributed more to a real knowledge of several rare species, including yellow-eyed penguins, than most of us realise.

Alan was the second ranger appointed by the Wildlife Service to Taiaroa Head. He succeeded Stan Sharpe. In those days the total population was still small and the number of nests each year was less than ten. Record keeping up until this time had been a bit haphazard and one of the improvements that was introduced was the Tuesday Plunket morning. It was compulsory for Alan and usually Connie to be there to do a round of weights and observations of the conditions of the birds present.

As time progressed Alan picked up more responsibilities on the Otago Peninsula, particularly relating to yellow-eyed penguins. Alan was encouraged by his head office to identify habitats and to improve management at the three existing refuges on the Peninsula.

Eventually day to day management at Taiaroa Heads passed to Shirley Webb, Sandra McGrouther, Isobel Burns and others. Alan and Connie moved to Te Anau to contribute to the takahe conservation programme which was starting to develop skills for chick rearing. As well, Alan was in charge of the Wildlife Park at Te Anau which was for many years the only place that the public could see takahe.

Arnie was always a welcoming smile with the latest gossip to hand. He was full of advice and care. For a young trainee he was a genial host and supportive colleague. His publication record was good solid ornithology: "I saw, I noted, I reported."

The partnership that he and Connie had was unique in the mix of skills and support for each other. That mix of wildlife handling, observational and nursing skills meant that observations could be applied for the betterment of individual birds.

Jill Hamel & Bruce McKinlay

Ornithological Snippets

Graeme Loh and Bob Cunninghame saw about 150 **Black-billed Gulls** feeding in a damp (dairy effluent) field in the Maerewhenua valley 5km south-west of Duntroon on Friday 23rd March.

Bob also saw two **NZ Falcons**: One on March 10th. on the Knobby Range road/track about 2km south of Graveyard Gully (Alexandra). Flying low overhead and it then perched on top of a matagourie bush 5m below the track. The second in the Silverpeaks on April 3rd. was perched on a rock outcrop on Rocky Ridge 100m south of Yellow Ridge junction, quite unconcerned by the other 24 trampers heading north towards The Gap.

A **Nankeen Kestrel** was reported from Taiaroa Head (around 12th April?). There was also one down south at Awarua Bay a couple of weeks before.



Out on the university research boat Polaris on 12 March, Graeme Loh saw amongst the commoner **White-capped Mollymawks** and **Titi**, **Buller's Shearwaters**, **White-winged Black Tern** (see photos page 6), **Soft-plumaged Petrel** and a couple of storm petrels

including this one?

Hawksbury Lagoon Survey

Half a dozen birders and 3 telescopes were lured out to Hawksbury by the beautiful calm autumn weather of April Fool's Day. They had considerably fewer Black Swans and Mallard/Grey ducks to count than

	3 April 2011	1 April 2012
Black Shag		
Little Shag	3	1
White-faced Heron	13	1
Royal Spoonbill	27	
Black Swan	157	25
Paradise Duck	51	51
Canada Goose	3	12
Domestic Goose	12	16
Hybrid Goose	1	2
Mallard x Grey Duck	500	147
N.Z.Shoveler	310	350
Grey Teal	188	186
NZ Scaup	2	
Pied Oystercatcher		
Spur-winged Plover	10	
Pied Stilt	8	4
Black-backed Gull	10	8
Red-billed Gull		
Black-billed Gull		
Caspian Tern	2	
Welcome Swallow	4	32

last autumn but remarkably similar numbers of Paradise Ducks, Shovelers and Grey Teal. Spoonbills were absent (27 last April) but there were 9 at the lagoon a couple of weeks later and they appear to move back and forth irregularly from Hawksbury to the Karitane Estuary.

According to Peter Schweigman's files, the colour banded Royal Spoonbill seen at Karitane on way back from Hawksbury on April 1 was banded (as a chick?) at the Wairau lagoons, Blenheim on 24 January 1995, making it 19 years old. There is very little information on the longevity of this species but the record for a European Spoonbill stands at 28 years.

Derek Onley

The Prion Fence Proceeds

Work has resumed on the predator proof fence near St Clair. Mesh and capping is being attached to the posts.

While we have been at work above the cliffs there has been an entertaining range of seabirds below, red-billed gulls and white-fronted terns feeding with the occasional spotted shag. Good Friday saw a couple of gannets going past and a giant petrel sat below us for several hours. We did not provide it with a carcass. Blue penguins are always calling and sometimes seen. Last Sunday there were five recreational boats fishing on nearby reefs with up to twelve mollymawks attending. Mostly shy, one Salvin's positively identified. Made me want to get out the sound play gear and call them up.

An evening visit was made to the caves below and there were a pleasing number of prions in attendance. At the main colony there is a great deal of activity with some first returns of chicks banded in the last few years. Three more birds with geolocators returned and the geolocators removed. So 12 of 15 geolocators have been recovered.

Come and have a look or give a hand, this will help have the fence closed by August for the prions to select new burrows.

Contact Graeme 0211322436



more from Graeme Loh on the Polaris 12 March

Notices and Business

Still time to go on the Field Trip to Inchclutha

Various sites will be visited on Saturday 21st April, with target species being Black-fronted Tern, Black-billed Gulls, waders and wildfowl. With luck there may be some early returning Cattle Egrets. Contact me at richard@pcconnect.co.nz or on 03 418 4415 or in Dunedin Graeme Loh at gloh@earthlight.co.nz or 487 6125

And if you miss that one



Anzac Day Seabird Trip

Two Grahams have booked the 'Caprice' catamaran of Alan Anderson to view seabirds.

Start 8am from Carey's Bay (or maybe Deborah Bay) with a pickup at Wellers Rock for the Peninsula-ites.

Objective 1 Graham wants to capture 3D footage of Northern Royals on the water.

Objective 2 the other Graeme wants to mix with the feeding frenzy of Jack Mackerel and associated birds about 3-8km off Taiaroa Head

Objective 3 See the seabird world for 4-5 hours

Shared cost of about \$100 each. If you are keen

Email Graeme (2) at gloh@earthlight.co.nz or txt 0211322436

Photos by Graeme (2) on Polaris 12 March. White-winged Black Tern and Buller's Shearwater.

or maybe for the less seaworthy

Earthquakes Trip

Earthquakes, just this side of Duntroon is where Trevor Worthy excavated some of the most interesting pre-human deposits of bird bones in NZ. See Worthy 1998 J of Royal Soc. NZ v28 p438. Just dust to see now! But I need your help to protect and manage the site by weeding. There is a live bird interest for the grey warblers there have an extra phrase to their song which is quite beautiful.

Come and help *Gentianella* and *Gingidia* by coming along to Earthquakes, and removing cotoneaster, spindle, elderberry and boxthorn. Earthquakes has its own endemic *Gentianella* and *Gingidia* which are high on the list of things that need help.

Graeme is leading a DoC. F&B and other conservation contingent there on Saturday 5 May. Meet at DoC or Botany Dept 8.30am. Transport and cutting implements provided. Bring your lunch, favourite cutting tool, stout footwear and resolute spirit. Gloves, sunnies and hats are a good idea too.

Also to be seen are beautiful rocks, cliffs and caves, a fossil whale, the nest of a laughing owl, hazardous crevasses and geomorphology.

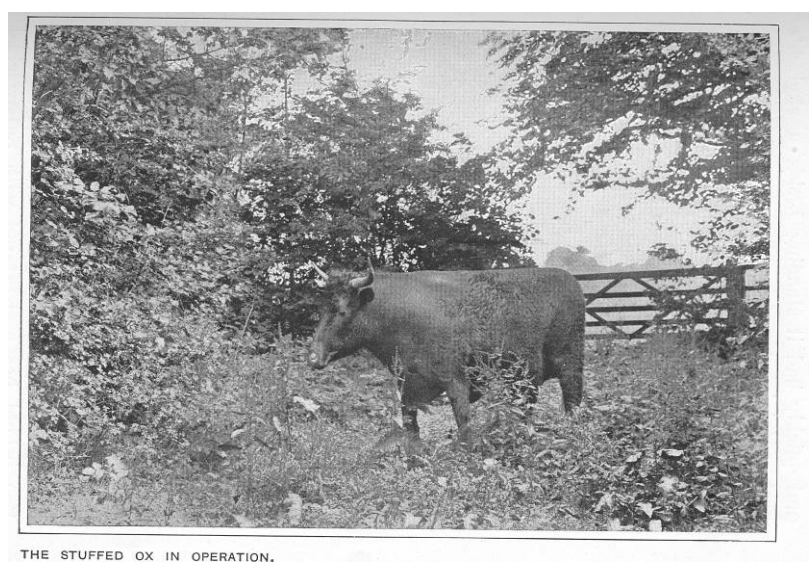
Any queries? Drop me a line or txt 0211322436 **Graeme Loh**

2013 OSNZ Conference and AGM, in Dunedin.

The Otago Branch is host to the 2013 OSNZ Conference and AGM, which will be held at Queens Birthday weekend, 1-3 June. The Hutton Theatre at the Otago Museum has been booked as the venue for the Scientific sessions. There is a small steering committee chaired by Bruce McKinlay and we are keen for more people to be involved; the areas that need planning input are the social/dinner events, the scientific programme and field trips. Any members who would like to be involved in any of these tasks should contact Bruce

email bruce.mckinlay@osnz.org.nz phone: 454 4555

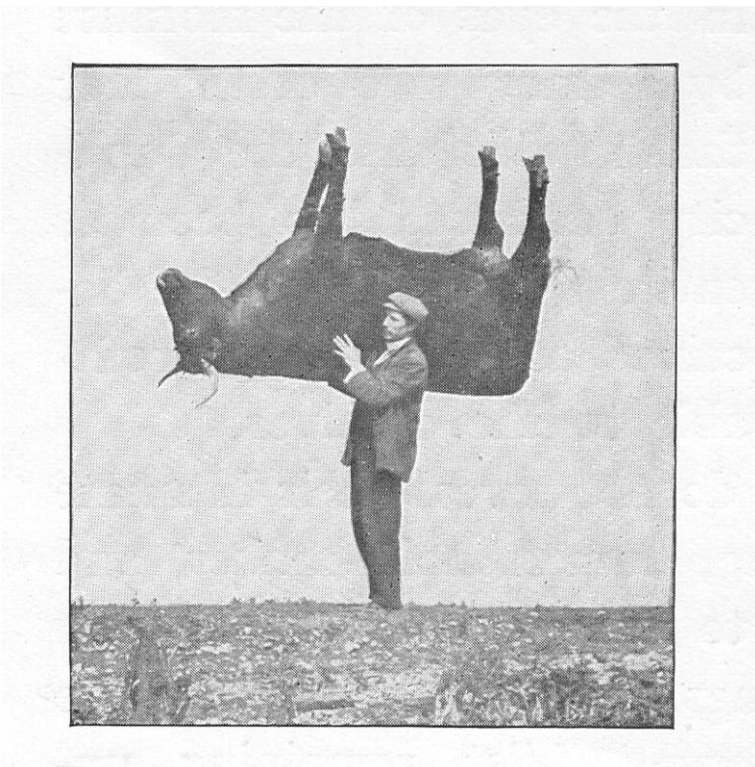
Mystery Photo



THE STUFFED OX IN OPERATION.

Last month's photo of the waist-coated abseilers was of Richard and Cherry Kearton pioneers of wildlife photography. In 1892 they took the first ever photograph of a bird's nest with eggs (top left).

Richard went on to develop the photographic hide. Spurred on, maybe by a desire to save his shoulders from further damage, he was ever resourceful and came up with the stuffed ox hide, shown "in operation" top right.



However he still seemed unable to rise above a supporting role...

Spare a thought for them next time you whip out your digi.

Programme 2012

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street at 8 p.m.

Saturday 21 April Fieldtrip to Inchclutha. Leader, Richard Schofield
richard@pcconnect.co.nz or on 03 418 4415
Local coordinator: Graeme Loh
email gloh@earthlight.co.nz phone 487 6125
Leaving from Zoology Carpark at 8.30 am.

Wed 25 April Anzac Day Seabird Trip
Graeme Loh : gloh@earthlight.co.nz
or txt 0211322436

Wed 25 April Indoor Meeting Mark Hanger
Restoring seabirds to coastal Otago.

Saturday 5 May Earthquakes Trip
Graeme Loh : gloh@earthlight.co.nz
or txt 0211322436

Wed 23 May Indoor Meeting Bruce Robertson
The New Zealand Storm Petrel

Sunday 17 June Winter Wader Count: high tide Dunedin 14.23,
1.9m. Contact Mary Thompson 464 0787

Wed 27 June Indoor Meeting Kaitlyn White
Kakapo hatching success.

Sunday 3 July Hawksbury Lagoon
Contact Derek Onley 482 2831

Wed 25 July Indoor Meeting Robert Schadewinkel
Radiotracking of translocated robins in Orokonui.

(continued)

- Wed 22 August Indoor Meeting Bryce Masuda
Consequences of brodifacoum operation on Ulva.
- Wed 26 September Indoor Meeting Kerry Weston
Rock Wren
- Wed 24 October Indoor Meeting - to be announced
- Wed 28 November Indoor Meeting Sue Odlin
Bird encounters in UK and Japan.

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.
Final date for copy for next newsletter 16 May