



# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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## **A Day trip off Taiaroa Head**

After being put off by rough weather on the Saturday, fourteen keen pelagic birders had a mild day on Sunday 7 October. We boarded the *Caprice* at Wellers Rock and headed out past Taiaroa Head. From close in the Stewart Island Shags were on the nesting mounds and Spotted Shags were all coloured up and sitting tightly on nests. Around the corner and into the bay under the lighthouse we could see a Blue Penguin hiding behind wrack. A brief glimpse of a chocolate coloured Giant Petrel was had by those quick enough. Further around eight Royal Spoonbills were observed on a Taupata close down by the waterline. Red-billed Gulls were in large numbers on the headland above.

As the advertised purpose of the day was to welcome the Titi home from the North Pacific we headed out to sea in a mild westerly with a long loping southerly swell. The water was variable in colour with some areas quite discoloured from the previous days' weather.

Once offshore the Cape Pigeons, Buller's Mollymawk, Shy Mollymawk and Fairy Prion all made themselves known. Occasional Gannets were present during the day. The prions were in large aggregations of some 200 birds and were dip foraging on the surface of the water. Every so often the group would lift off and move to a new site.

Rarities on this day included a single Salvin's Mollymawk, one White-chinned Petrel and a very fleeting glimpse of a gadfly petrel.



plus of course the usual photographic mystery:

photo Eric de Leeuw

Even 4-5 km offshore, White-fronted Terns, Red-billed Gull and Black-backed Gulls were all present. Stewart Island and Spotted Shag were observed feeding and, travelling even further offshore. One Little Penguin was seen during the day well offshore.

Eventually we made contact with Sooty Shearwaters. They were in large groups, feeding then moving on to new feeding sites. There was not a stream of birds moving with intention south to the Islands. A small amount of chumming was initiated and Southern Royal Albatross fighting for the lumps of barracouta joined the group of mollymawks. Interestingly we did not see a Northern Royal for the whole day. As we headed north off the coast a number of Dusky Dolphins had been seen. They did not join the boat but passed by on their way. Also three Hector's Dolphins passed by us and then some excitement as a Leopard Seal was sighted off the bow. It was quietly moving along with its head coming to the surface occasionally. A little time latter the Leopard Seal was seen again with a black form in its mouth. Closer inspection showed it to be the remains of a Sooty Shearwater. Interestingly the seal was sort of hunched over with its head under the water as it manipulated the prey.



The seal left the prey behind as we approached and Graeme retrieved it for closer inspection. The body was semi skinned with most of the breast meat removed but the flesh at the pelvic girdle and legs were intact. The gut was removed. Of note was the amount of fat around the lower back and legs of the bird.

There are more photos at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/98212195@N00/sets/72157631724677141/>

As we headed in we intercepted repeated groups of Hector's Dolphins.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## Ornithological Snippets



The Beauty and the Beast: Mary Thompson has been keeping an eye on this **White-faced Heron** which accompanies the kunikuni pigs rooting in a paddock off Polworth Road. It stays a few paces behind and eats any grubs or worms the pigs unearth. This heron has been with the pigs for at least 3 weeks from 28th September.

Sue Heath heard the first **Shining Cuckoo** of the year at Purakaunui on 1<sup>st</sup> October. Also returning were **Royal Spoonbills**: as well as the 8 at Tairaroa Head breeding site on 7 October, there were 5 at Purakaunui at the end of last month and a dozen or so at Karitane on 5 October.



Also on the fifth, over 100 **Sooty Shearwaters** were passing Huriawa, Karitane along with an immature **Black-browed (or Campbell) Mollymawk**, not a common sight along this coast. 145 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, including several colour banded birds had arrived at Warrington by 26<sup>th</sup> September and 126 had made it to Karitane by 5 October.



### **Pelicans in the Far North.**

At the last Indoor Meeting the question was raised as to whether we should be looking forward to seeing more pelicans or getting rid of them before they do ecological damage. Your RR contacted the RR for the Far North, Detlef Davies, and asked for his opinion on the ecological effects if these new arrivals did, in fact, breed in Northland and become more common. Here are his comments.

“I think the important distinction to make is between birds which find their way here by themselves, usually through weather conditions such as storms at sea or droughts in their normal haunts - and those which are brought here by man against their will, usually for some misguided reason thought up by man.

The latter, the introduced species, are always more likely to be a problem as they are often better adapted and so compete with our native birds. In our area the Common Myna is very abundant and aggressive, competing with other birds. Throughout NZ the introduced and highly competitive

Mallard has nearly wiped out our native Grey Duck. The Canada Goose, introduced from a long way away, is a serious problem in crop fields.

Birds that come here by themselves are part of a naturally occurring phenomenon. Australia is often the source of such species because it is the nearest landmass. Many birds which we take for granted and regard as our own, actually came from there, such as Pied, Little, Black & Little Black Shags, White-faced Heron, Pukeko, Welcome Swallow, Spur-winged Plover, Kingfisher, Pied Stilt, Nankeen Night Heron, Royal Spoonbill. The Barn Owl has recently started to breed in NZ and Cattle Egrets might follow suit. Increased temperature and drought might encourage this trend. It was self-colonisers that produced some of our precious endemics - a very early arrival of Swamphens (Pukeko) eventually evolved into the Takahe.

The Australian Pelican is the latest in a long line of possible colonisers. It might take time as not all species take to New Zealand instantly and some will always only be occasional visitors. We should welcome the Pelican as a new natural visitor. It has the same adaptability (and habitat) as our shags & spoonbills and should take to our country well. In Australia they range widely, even moving north to New Guinea & the Solomons occasionally. There is no reason to suppose that it will be a problem here.”

**Detlef Davies**, RR Far North.

**Notices and Business Lots of Birding Events to Get Involved in Coming Up – don't sit at home; phone the coordinator and get out watching and enjoying birds!**

### **Otago Summer Wader Count, 11 November 2012**

The date for the Otago Summer Wader count will be 11 November 2012, with a high tide in Dunedin that day of 2.1m at 14.44, so the count will start about 2.00 pm and run for an hour or so.

These wader counts carried out in Otago date back to 1984, when all of coastal Otago, from Kakanui to the Catlins was covered. In 1995 the cover

was reduced to Karitane, Blueskin Bay, Otago Harbour, Papanui and Hooper's Inlets and the Catlins.

While counting waders we hope that you also record all other birds in the area to get a full survey that you can enter into eBird.

It would be nice to be able to rely on enough members to do a proper survey, without having to rush things because of running out of time. If you wish to take part please contact Peter Schweigman on 455 2790 or email Peter Schweigman [peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz](mailto:peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz)

### **Morepork Survey of Dunedin City & Environs**

The Morepork was recently voted the third most favourite bird species in New Zealand in the Forest & Bird survey. The Morepork is our only native owl and is well known because of its distinctive call, although not many people have seen one in the wild. Morepork roost during the day and hunt at night, and are therefore most likely to be seen and heard at dusk. Very little is known about Moreporks in urban areas.

In 2011 Waikato OSNZ completed a survey of Morepork in the Hamilton area using counts of calls heard by a group of volunteers and were able to learn a lot about where Morepork are living in the city and more about their population size. The results were presented at last years OSNZ conference in Tauranga. Their protocols seemed to work very well.

In November this year, as part of an expanded effort to survey urban Morepork populations in a number of OSNZ regions, the Otago branch of OSNZ are planning to complete a survey of morepork in the Dunedin city area. We will be setting up survey sites using maps and local knowledge of the areas, and we are looking for volunteers to help us record Morepork calls at each site. For the pilot study in November we are keeping this to OSNZ members and friends but for future surveys we would like to canvass more widely via newspaper to involve the public and increase awareness of OSNZ. If successful we plan to do a seasonal survey in 2013.

**The Plan:**

The survey will take place across 5 nights in November, probably starting Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November – Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> (dates to be confirmed). It will consist of up to 20 sites around Dunedin, depending on the availability of volunteers. A “site” is an area of bush, for example it can be a stretch of the Town Belt, a gully, or a patch of bush in a park. Each site will be monitored for 1 hour each night from about 30 minutes after sunset, so during the course of the survey each site will be counted up to 5 times. Volunteers will need to be able to sit quietly and relatively still, to avoid frightening birds, and count the morepork calls heard in that time. The ideal situation would be to count from your own backyard, but groups of volunteers may also be needed to cover some sites. We hope that those members who live in North East Valley, Leith Valley, near Town Belt or other potential habitat will be keen to be involved. Data sheets and a protocol will be provided so that all calls and details can be recorded during each 1-hour timeframe in a consistent manner.

**Do You:**

- Want to take part in the Dunedin morepork survey?
- Know a site where morepork may hang out?
- Have a yard that you would be willing to have others spend time in to count morepork?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, or if you would like more information about the Dunedin morepork survey, please contact the Project Coordinator, Cody Fraser at [canis\\_latrans@hotmail.com](mailto:canis_latrans@hotmail.com)

**Falcon Studies**

We have permission from Wenita Forests to enter Akatore forest over summer to locate falcon pairs. The object this season will be to install cameras at nests to hopefully record any visits by predators. We won't be attempting to locate every falcon pair in the forest so there will probably be a few less trips than in other years. However there may be occasions to survey Mt Allan forests to check that there are no falcons breeding in forest compartments about to be logged.

I managed a quick trip in on Friday to Akatore forest and located 2 pairs defending scrapes (no eggs yet) and another male on the same territory as

last year. All were very close to last years sites- very convenient!

I would like to update the e-mail list of those keen to go on any trips - please e-mail [falco1@xtra.co.nz](mailto:falco1@xtra.co.nz).

**Steve Lawrence**

### **Bittern Survey by Acoustical Recording**

Last year several volunteers, led by Murray Efford, successfully trialled the use of automated acoustic recorders at Waihola. We recorded at least 4 birds booming, so this technology is a great improvement over sitting out in a cold wet swamp all night.

This year we want to extend our monitoring to include Lake Tuakitoto to find out if bitterns are present and hopefully breeding in these two wetland areas. Recorders will be placed at various sites throughout the wetlands and set to record at dawn and dusk for several days. Recordings will be downloaded to computer and analysed for the characteristic 'boom' indicating presence of bittern. The recordings will also help document other wildlife and other rare water birds, such as marsh crane.

We will commence putting out recorders later in October; if you want to be kept informed of possible trips to the wetlands please give your email to your RR. [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz). These trips come up at short notice because we have to make the most of good weather. We have been awarded a grant from BP Vouchers for Volunteers Scheme to help cover travel costs; we were one of the successful groups out of 2000 applications.

### **Nest Record Scheme**

This is the time of year to be out and about looking for nests. The Society runs a Nest Record Scheme, the object of which is to provide abundant and comprehensive data on length, time and peak of breeding seasons, clutch size, number of clutches, incubation and fledgling periods, nest sites and materials used in nest building. Hundreds of cards are needed before a valid analysis can be undertaken. Over 26,000 cards for 144 species have been submitted since the start of the scheme. More cards are needed however, to fill gaps in our knowledge. Individual nest cards are easy to fill in, and directions printed on the card should be carefully read and followed. The cards can be downloaded as a pdf file from the OSNZ website, or obtained from your RR.



## 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.

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| Wed 24 October  | Indoor Meeting Craig McKenzie<br>Photographing Birds   |
| Sun 11 November | Summer Wader Count, 2.00 pm<br>Contact Peter Schweigman 455 2790<br><a href="mailto:peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz">peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz</a> |
| Fri 16 November | Morepork Survey starts<br>Contact Cody Fraser<br><a href="mailto:canis_latrans@hotmail.com">canis_latrans@hotmail.com</a>                        |
| Wed 28 November | Indoor Meeting Sue Odlin<br>Bird encounters in UK and Japan.   |

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Many thanks to all who contributed.  
Final date for copy for next newsletter 21 November.