



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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Hawksbury Lagoon Autumn Count



After a year of high water levels, the Lagoon was low for the autumn count which appeared to provide more shallow water for Pied Stilts whose numbers were considerably higher than in April 2011 & 12. Mallard and Shoveler numbers were well down on the previous two years and Mallard numbers (42) were the lowest recorded outside the breeding season. Grey Teal numbers however were over twice as high.

Species	7 April 2013	3 April 2012	1 April 2011
Little Shag	1	1	3
Black Swan	5	25	157
Paradise Duck	8	51	51
Canada Goose	4	12	3
Domestic Goose	1	16	12
Hybrid Goose	11	2	1
Mallard/Grey Duck	42	147	500
N.Z. Shoveler	139	350	310
Grey Teal	425	186	188
Pied Stilt	89	4	8
Spur-winged Plover	5	0	10
Black-backed Gull	52	8	10
Red-billed Gull	1		
Caspian Tern	6		2
White-faced Heron	1	1	13
Royal Spoonbill	2		27
Welcome Swallow	8	32	4

A week or so before the count, the adjacent golf club and racecourse employed a local man to shoot the geese (and swans?) that were causing a “nuisance” on the greens and in the stand. At one stage he was seen wading out into the lagoon with his dog in order to retrieve injured birds and several local residents weren’t exactly impressed by the shooting in the late evening near the road, residential properties and stock.

From the point of view of management of native biodiversity it is probably a good thing to control the numbers of feral and Canada Geese on the lagoon. In the past the local Fish & Game representative has pricked eggs of these species; a considerably less disruptive method and one that the local Hawksbury Lagoon Group is proposing to the golf and racing clubs as a better option for next year.

Ornithological Snippets

After last months question about possible low numbers of **Shining Cuckoos** last summer, Alan Baker reported a **Shining Cuckoo** in a kowhai in his Roslyn garden on 19/1, the first he can remember seeing in the garden, plus three young cuckoos still being fed by warblers: in the Botanic Garden on 30/12, the Town Belt near Lachlan Ave on 12/1, and Ross Creek on 28/1.

On 24/3 he saw a group of 7 **Brown Creepers** in birches in the Southern Cemetery.

In answer to Rowena East's query about what species of owl she had seen in Frances Street, Lala Frazer replied that they had no luck with **Moreporks** on the Peninsula during the survey although some people around Company Bay reported owls and that there used to be **Little Owls** in Matariki St but they unfortunately got hit by cars and don't seem to be there any more as far as she knew.

However **Little Owls** have also been reported from Harbour Cone; the macrocarpas from whence you start the ascent to the Cone itself. Not really too far from Frances St

Book Review:

Puffins R. M. Lockley JM Dent & Sons Ltd, London 1953



I'm not quite sure why but I picked up this book over the Christmas break and read it. Although I've heard of Lockley over the years I have not read any of his books before.

So what is it? It's the record of a fairly intensive observational study of the breeding of puffins on

Skokholm Island, off the coast of Wales, with reports on other trips to different parts of the UK to other puffin sites. The core of the book is daily activities of breeding puffins woven with asides and diversions of other activities from Skokholm and further afield.

The book is published at the end of approximately 20 years work, which included the Second World War.

The style of the book is to greatly anthropomorphise the birds with a lot of labelling of activities and actions in terms of human society. Hidden in the

prose from another age are the nuggets of biological information that are of interest to me.

Approximately a third of the book is devoted to human interaction with Puffins, from detailed descriptions of how the birds were hunted for food (they are apparently, very tasty), the impact that this might have had on populations; to the more direct impacts of habitat change, invasion of islands by rats, and the impacts of oil.

There is significant amount of speculation in the text about behaviour and distribution at sea. Where do the birds go in the winter is a recurring theme. The questions of longevity of individuals and pair fidelity are also a theme of the text. The diet of the breeding puffin is described in the context of feeding the chick. There is no discussion about the ecological basis of the food supply.

So after 60 years is Puffins still worth reading?

The commitment to recording daily activity at study burrow cannot be discounted. It is laborious and clearly sometimes wearing work, but Lockley keeps at it with and without support from others. This body of work allows for a discussion of different ideas and propositions that in a more modern context would be described as hypotheses, which a more experimental scientist might want to test.

The lack of knowledge of at sea and non-breeding biology is significant. Not that the situation is much better here in NZ, where a large number of species still have the same issue. At least now we have the electronic tools that allow us to address such issues.

There is a very interesting discussion about the impact of invading rats on various islands around the United Kingdom. From a New Zealand perspective I found it quite incredible that the number of examples of rat invasions quoted do not lead to a much more strident call for eradication of rats from the islets around the UK.

“Puffins” is effectively one of the building blocks that current bird study stands upon. Methods about how observations are recorded, are what we take as second nature nowadays are effectively being tested out and

described for the first time. I think we have as a community moved on from the naming and attempting to humanise our study animals.

Whatever negative perceptions this review might engender the exercise has raised the desire to visit a Puffin Island way up my 'Bucket List' and made me aware that in some respects the UK has bird islands as important as those we find in New Zealand.

Bruce McKinlay

Skokholm Island and its Lighthouse have recently been purchased by the West Wales Naturalists Trust and after 25 years the Island reopened 2 years ago as a bird observatory with permanent wardens and accommodation for visitors in Ronald Lockley's cottage.



You can follow the daily goings on at <http://skokholm.blogspot.co.uk>.

Programme 2013

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

Wed April 24	Indoor Meeting Emily Weiser Black Robins of the Chathams – an update.
Wed. May 22	Indoor Meeting Steve Lawrence NZ Falcon nests of Dunedin forests
June 1-3 (Queens Birthday)	NZ Bird Conference and OSNZ AGM Otago Museum
Sunday June 9	Winter Wader Count
Wed. June 26	Indoor Meeting Junichi Sugishita Royal parenting – foraging strategies and risks in Northern Royal Albatross.
Wed. July 24	Moira Pryde Morepork Research
Wed. August 28	Alan Baker Food of NZ Pigeons in Otago.
Wed. Sept. 25	Kate Hand Important Bird Areas, Otago
Wed. October 23	Bruce McKinlay, Alaskan Birds.

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next Newsletter 16 May.