



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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Otago Region Newsletter 6/2013 July 2013

White Heron Watch



photo Ali MacArthur

On 6 July between 2.30pm and 4pm Maree Johnstone counted 7 white herons at Tomahawk Lagoon!. At first there were 6 in a group and one remote from the rest. Later they stretched out along the edge of the water and then at about 4pm all flew into a distant tree.



photo Maree Johnstone

The continued presence of white herons is a unique situation for us in Otago and having a group of 7 together is almost unprecedented, so don't forget to take a trip to Tomahawk for a chance to watch White Herons.

We have set up a roster to ensure a regular watch is kept at Tomahawk to see if and when they disappear or move on? The herons from Okarito return there about August, but if ours are new ones from Australia this season, will they know when and where to go? We will also note weather conditions, location and behaviour of birds and if possible, do a total bird count of the whole lagoon. Now that the herons are roosting in the bare fallen tree, the little shags seem to have gone (over 50 there in May).

Thanks for the enthusiastic response from members to be on the roster on a regular basis and many of us are keen to observe from time to time; it would be a good idea to choose a day not already covered by the roster. Anyone keen to fill the gaps, please contact Mary maryt@actrix.co.nz

ROSTER

Monday	Mary Ann Miller	Tuesday	Marcia Dale
Wednesday	Philip Pointon	Thursday	
Friday	Maree Johnstone	Saturday	
Sunday	Bruce McKinlay		

Ornithological Snippets



photo Graeme Loh

Zuni took me to see the white **Pukekos** on McNally Rd, Enfield, N. Otago. The farmers there told me about them a couple of years ago, and they are still around and onto another generation. We saw three, but the farmer said there are about four at the moment among several hundred ordinary ones that have flourished in recent years due to irrigated cow pasture and the Waireka Stream. Notice that the fence went under in the recent floods. **Graeme Loh**



Late in the afternoon of 5/7/13 amongst the 150 or so **Silvereyes** at my bird table was a bird with a canary-yellow blotch on its head and some bright yellow feathers I think on its chest and wings. I had a very brief look at the bird and of course I had neither binoculars nor camera at the window! My first thought was ‘why is there goldfinch in the company of so

many silvereyes?’ but I’m sure that it was a silvereye because it had the eye-ring and was too small for a green or goldfinch. Despite much time spent examining the visiting flocks I haven’t seen it again. Perhaps other birdwatchers have seen similar. **Maree Johnstone**

Tui and Rhododendron

The rhododendrons are flowering early and we (DOC) have had one dead tui and three handed in, suspected poisonings. One definitely survived. Tui and bellbirds (and other nectivorous birds) can become paralysed from the rhodo nectar. The best thing you can advise people to do is give them a bit of sugar water and keep them in a box until they recover. Line the floor of the box with a towel and keep the box in a warm quiet location. Provide a shallow bowl of sugar water. Offer some on a spoon - some tui will feed from the spoon. Clean the box every day to avoid faeces damaging the tui's feathers. Change the sugar water every day to keep it fresh and clean. Offer a perch in the box if the bird can stand. Release the bird as soon as it is able to stand and looks lively. If the bird is collapsed or doesn't improve, take it to a vet for a check up. It is not always successful but a better death than being nobbled by a cat. There have been several incidents in Dunedin in recent years.

For more information on wildlife rehabilitation see:-

"Wild City Neighbours" at <http://www.doc.govt.nz/documents/science-and-technical/BirdRehabGuide.pdf>

Melanie Young

Melanie says that a DOC permit is required to hold wildlife for rehabilitation and asked Graeme Loh "what's the local conservancy view on people holding a sick tui without a rehab permit???? The advice I give above is akin to temporary holding for rehabilitation which normally requires a DOC permit."

Graeme Loh has yet to answer the permit question but asked why would a plant have noxious nectar! Maybe to be fertilised by the dead birds?

Grayanotoxins (andromedotoxins) are a group of toxins found in rhododendrons and other plants of the family Ericaceae. The water-soluble diterpenoid compounds are present in leaves, flowers and nectar and in honey made from the nectar. *Rhododendron ponticum* and *Rhododendron luteum* (formerly *Azalea pontica*), both found in northern Asia Minor, appear to be the major sources while in Nepal, the flowers of *Rhododendron arboreum* are considered edible and enjoyed for their sour taste. Not sure where this leaves the culinary attributes of all those varieties in the Dunedin Botanic Gardens.

Hawksbury Lagoon.

	3 July 2011	1 July 2012	7 July 2013
Black Shag	1	1	
Little Shag	12		
White-faced Heron			1
Royal Spoonbill			
Black Swan	5	3	3
Paradise Duck	12	2	47
Canada Goose	5	2	3
Domestic Goose	8	4	11
Hybrid Goose	6	11	
Mallard/Grey Duck	630	219	349
N.Z.Shoveler	289	213	142
Grey Teal	72	11	
Spur-winged Plover	1	2	
Pied Stilt	48	4	9
Black-backed Gull	10	15	22
Red-billed Gull	3	11	6

After 4 years of regular counting of the Lagoon, it is beginning to look like duck numbers outside the breeding season, when the counts are consistently low, are very variable. Mallard/Grey Duck numbers were up this winter by 50% (120) but were still only just over half of the 2011 total. Shoveler were down to 142, half the number three years ago. There were no Grey Teal, not unexpected perhaps as there were only 11 last year. However, last year the ponds were frozen over, not the best of conditions for ducks. This year it was warmer. Considerably so. But the counters, far from being comfortable, had to cope with a gale force nor-wester. Not the best of conditions for birding.

Winter Wader Count Correction

A sincere apology. The results in the June newsletter were incorrect. All my fault, it was a draft copy for the National convener of the wader counts, but was sent by mistake to our editor, Derek.

Sincere apologies especially to Sue and Cody for the omission of the 86 Banded Dotterels at Aramoana and to the 2 godwits at Papanui who would be aggrieved to hear they were recorded as Spur-winged Plovers.

Peter Schweigman

Post Conference Peninsula Tour

One of the tours organized for the day after the NZ Bird Conference was out to the Otago Peninsula. Despite being the “wrong” time of the year to see penguin chicks and Royal albatrosses, it became a truly amazing tour with a wide range of experiences.



photo Maree Johnstone

Elm Wildlife Tours were receptive to suggestions, and the first unusual sight were the six white herons and a single egret sitting on the tree in the distance, as well as a Spotted shag sitting close by the bridge at Tomahawk Lagoon. While Elm do supply binoculars if required, being a birders' tour, most of us had either binoculars or large zoom cameras enabling positive identifications. However one white heron chose to do a graceful slow fly past so that it could be seen in more detail.

Next stop was the artificial roost in Andersons Bay Inlet, with a good selection of sea birds. This was of particular interest to at least one participant whose local society is looking at creating artificial structures for birds in their region.

Further stops at outcrops and bays in both the inlets and in Lower Portobello both now and later provided yet more close viewing of all the

usual waders (with the exception of godwits and banded dotterels); geese, swans, ducks, and roosting birds such as shags.

Donna one of the guides, was particularly good at spotting kingfisher and we saw a number at quite close range enough for zoom photos although only one with good light reflecting. She also pointed out a set of nests.

There was an amazing view of 5 pukeko going about their business undeterred by the parked vehicle with engine running on the other side of the creek near Sandymount. We were close enough to see the method of plucking sedges and stripping them.

Although the albatross tour was foreshortened -- we just got all our time in the observatory without the 20 min introductory talk and video - it was great viewing. Large chicks were in view, although warned that the lack of wind made it unlikely we would see adults, even those unemployed. However, the Stewart Island shags in front were actively constructing nests, and interacting with each other.

Then, surprisingly, two adult albatrosses came in to feed chicks, doing several flight passes in front of the observatory as they gained height in order to land and one even flying directly in towards the viewing window. At this time of the year they only stay ashore long enough to feed before disappearing for another few days to gather food, so the chance of seeing parents is rare.

The delicious packed lunch from the Penguin Café hit the spot as we headed towards Cape Saunders. Our knowledgeable guides, Donna and Shaun, knew exactly where to stop on the way to look down to see 6-7 Royal spoonbills on the trees fallen into Papanui Inlet.

Then on to Little Papanui Beach which was full of sea lions - including at least one female and three juveniles amongst the males. A walk behind them on the beach to the viewing hide allowed one birder to pick up a partly decayed sea bird and identify it from a groove in its clavicle! There were certainly some experts amongst us.



There was great viewing of yellow-eyed penguins. Two have moved into a newly planted area that forms the access and take no notice of groups as long as they are herded into the alternative paths that have been created. We saw penguins coming in from the time we arrived till we left, heard them calling, and most amazingly saw one at close range doing its characteristic shout.

Donna was concerned that she had found a young cat in a trap the previous day and felt unable, with the tourists she had with her, to empty it, merely steering them past. Our group on the other hand raised a cheer when we arrived at it. (63 cats caught this season!)

A walk over the paddocks to the seal nursery area saw lots of baby seals plus passing Buller's mollymawks and Cape pigeons and other petrels as well as continual streams of shags. This is the point where the Peninsula juts out furthest eastwards and as a consequence the warm and the cold ocean streams meet providing an abundance of food.

Elm Wildlife Tours really went the extra mile. Their viewing sites are excellent and the guides were extremely enthusiastic, knowledgeable and informative, although also interested in input from the "experts" on the tour. This was certainly a tour that, as several of us commented, had surpassed our expectations.

Lala Frazer

Wellington South Coast Walk

While in Wellington in May I had the chance for a walk around the south coast. I got off the bus at Island Bay and set off along the beach past black backed gulls and variable oystercatchers. Uncommon were red billed gulls and little shags. Island Bay was the first place to explore with lots of rocks providing nooks and crannies for birds to roost in and around.

Lyall Bay was dominated by walkers, surfers, dogs and coffee caravans and so it was not until the end of the airport where things got interesting again. A flock of eight banded dotterel were roosting on the clay area at the southern end of the Airport. Also present here was a flock of 20 goldfinches. Further around past Moa Point there were lots of places to observe pied shags and gulls. The number of starlings present here was remarkable, flocks were foraging on the sea wrack and flying in and out of shrubs all along the coast.

The coast between Tarakena Bay and Breaker Bay enabled good views of Barratt's reef along with little shags and pied shags. Houses here were down to the coast and it was only a very slim strip of land that provided habitat for birds. Harriers were scouting along the cliffs. Rock pigeons were roosting above the houses.

Climbing up Oruaiti Reserve above Seatoun in the late afternoon gave great views north and south. As it was dead calm Barrett's Reef was laid out to view with Baring behind in the warm afternoon sun. Variable oystercatchers and gulls were along the top and bottom of the cliffs. Looking north, Ward and Matiu/Somes stood out well. A short walk along the shore brought me back to Seatoun where a bus back into the city made for a great end to a wonderful day of rambling and ebirding. Total bus fares \$ 5.40. Number of ebird checklists 6. Amount of enjoyment without shopping - priceless.

Bruce McKinlay

Notices and Business

Royal Spoonbill breeding colonies in Otago.

Draft Plan of Census 2013/2014

A national census of all the Royal Spoonbill colonies and a count of active nests is to be undertaken this coming breeding season. Otago and Southland is a HOTSPOT for spoonbill colonies, at least 12 at last count. We need to put a good deal of thought into how the count is to be done as many of our colonies are fairly inaccessible and may need boat access.

Peter Schweigman has put together a draft plan; please contact Peter (peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz ; phone 455 2790) if you can help (manpower, know someone with a boat, are very fit and able to tramp to out of the way places, if you are interested in helping somehow, suggest likely areas that should be checked).

Breeding is usually in full swing early December till end of January. It would be ideal if colonies could be inspected, say twice in that period, mid December and mid January.

Maukiekie Island. It would be ideal to have permission to enter the private property opposite the island. A telescope is essential.

Taiaroa Head. Arrangements with DOC at Taiaroa to do a count.

Green Island. To do justice here, a visit to the island and count the two colonies from above would be nice. We would need to hire a zodiac to get onto the island. Failing that, a sea kayak circling the island is an option, but this will not be an accurate nest count.

Taiari Island. If the nests are on the base of the taupata on the eastern side, they can be counted by sea kayak. If the colony is higher up, close to the top, it is more difficult to get an accurate figure. A climb to the top has to be considered. A walk to island depends on tides.

The Nuggets and the Catlins. Hopefully Richard and Fergus can tackle this area with the assistance of Dunedin members. These two areas could

be covered during a field trip in December or January along with Southland OSNZ.

Wainono Lagoon. A kayak/canoe to inspect all maimais is the only option, with a party on the shore with telescope. Cellphone contact would be good and GPS readings nice for future surveys. It is important not to go too close to occupied maimais, to avoid young ones to try and escape and drown as a consequence.

If others know of colonies in other areas, or likely areas where there may be colonies that should be checked, please let Peter know.

For all these colony/nest counts it is essential that while in or close to colonies that disturbance is kept to a minimum. The birds come first!

Peter Schweigman.

Regional recorder's position

For some time I have been wondering if the position of regional recorder is of any use, now that Classified Summarised Notes are a distant memory. During the Queen's Birthday Weekend conference, I attended the eBird workshop, where I found out that the position is now very much linked with eBird. In particular, the present eBird reviewer, who assesses any records referred to him by the system as needing confirmation, would like regional recorders to take on that task. That is not something I want to do, as I don't have a home computer. Would anyone reading this like the position? We were assured that it would not be onerous. Presumably the requirements are a computer and a good knowledge of Otago birds.

Please contact Mary if you are interested.

Alan Baker

Banded Tui and Bellbirds

Murray Efford has been busy again this summer and autumn and has banded another 100 tui and bellbird at his place in Helensburgh. It is crucial for the project that re-sightings are made and recorded. The tui and bellbirds will be starting to come to feeders soon so keep a good look out. Please send information of any banded birds to Murray Efford email murray.efford@otago.ac.nz; or leave phone message on 476 4668 or post to 60 Helensburgh Road, Dunedin 9010. Include location, date, time, left leg: colour over metal; right leg: top colour over bottom colour. Also take a digital photo if at all possible.

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. July 24	Alan Baker	Food of NZ Pigeons in Otago.
Wed. August 28	Moira Pryde	Morepork Research
Wed. Sept. 25	Kate Hand	Important Bird Areas, Otago
Wed. October 23	Bruce McKinlay	Alaskan Birds.
Sun. Nov.17	Summer Wader Count High tide Dunedin 16.29hrs Height 2.1m. Contact Peter Schweigman	
Wed. Nov. 27	Nic Rawlence	Ancient DNA research on Moa

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next Newsletter 21 August.