



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



PO Box 834 Nelson osnz.org.nz

Jim Wilson
Regional Recorder
jjwilson @ actrix.co.nz
PO Box 6145
Dunedin 9010

Mary Thompson
Regional Representative
197 Balmacewen Road
Balmacewen
03 4640787

Otago Region Newsletter 9/2013 October 2013

One goes slightly wild in Alaska



McKinley & McKinlay

Unless you were slightly out of it you might have noticed that, in amongst all the excitement of the NZ bird Conference, I was even more excited as I was leaving the week after the Conference to go to Alaska for a fortnight. Essential equipment of binoculars and bird books (two just to be sure) jostled for space with my posh suit

jacket until I eventually scraped in with only about 2 kg to spare.

The reason for my trip was to attend the 7th meeting of the Parties for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. See here for more details: <http://www.eaaflyway.net/> . This was to take place for a week at a town called Seward on the South Coast of Alaska. The second part of the trip was a week's holiday to have a look around and do some serious bird watching.

At Auckland Airport I caught up with Hugh Robertson, David Melville and David Lawrie who were all attending the Partnership Meeting as well.

We all piled onto the plane to Los Angeles and at the other end once we had entered into the US we found a bit of grass and some trees in the middle of the airport and optimistically set out to look for local birds. Success! Our first was a European starling; closely followed by a sparrow. However things looked up after that with a rufous hummingbird spotted in a tree and some crows playing about on the ground below. A hooded oriole and a gull rounded out 40 minutes of ornithology in the centre of LAX. It's a five hour flight from Los Angeles to Anchorage and we arrived at Anchorage at 11 pm in brilliant sunshine after a solid 23 hours of travel.

The next morning we were out and about walking around with other birding friends along the foreshore of Anchorage. The mudflats are enormous and seem to only be covered by the very highest of tides. The rest of the time the birds are on the far edge (in other words about 400 m away) foraging along the waters edge. However with local walks along the foreshore it was no problem to see wigeon, cackling geese, greater scaup, red-necked grebe, arctic tern and bald eagle. The gulls were a bit of a challenge first up with mew, Bonaparte's and herring gulls all competing for attention. Teasing out tree swallow and violet green swallows took a bit of effort. It was surprising to realise that James Cook is as an important figure in Alaska for his early navigation and exploration as he is in New Zealand. The hotel we stayed at was the Hotel James Cook and had South Pacific art work and artefacts throughout.

The next day was a birdwatching trip as a "pre meeting mixer" hosted by Audubon Alaska and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. A bus ride back to the foreshore walk but this time with a guide who knew what all the squeaks and calls from in amongst the trees helped us sort out some of the passerines such as a White Crowned Sparrow and Black Capped Chickadee. Then in the afternoon we headed down to one of the much more well know sites for birding around Anchorage; Potter Marsh. Here we could see nesting bald eagles, green winged teal, sandhill crane, lesser yellowlegs and much more.

The formal part of the meeting started on the Monday and so we were given the normal conference gifts such as a conference jacket and badges. The first session was all formalities with welcoming new participants and

presenting certificates for new sites which member partners have nominated as network sites for the Flyway.

After lunch the Conference upped stakes and headed south to Seward in two buses. It was a beautiful drive along Turnagain Inlet. We carried onto Seward stopping along the way to view a trumpeter swan nest on a lake by the road and then arriving at the Windsong Lodge where the rest of the meeting was to be held. Because the evenings are so long I along with the other New Zealanders were able to add to our bird list that evening with a north west crow and a spotted sandpiper being seen on the river.

The conference field trip was a day long trip on a boat in Kenai Fjords National Park. This National Park is only accessible by boat. But the tourist boats are well set up and with a skipper who had his eyes open for anything that might be worth pointing out we had a very informative day. The highlight was a choice between seeing sea otters or the Aliak Glacier or the numbers of common murrelets and black legged kittiwakes or seeing two species of puffins and an auklet and murrelets as well as a few whales.

At the end of the week the conference headed back to Anchorage where for some of the participants they got straight back on a plane and headed home and for me I picked up a rental car and headed to a back packers for the night. The next day was spent gathering gear and meeting up with Nick from Australia and Minseon from Korea who like me had allowed a week to have a look around and enjoy Alaska. By lunchtime we were headed north on the Glenn Highway with our first stop at Reflections Lake where there a red necked grebe, lesser yellowlegs and an American Robin were seen. After a night camping at Rocky Lake we carried on north the next morning until we crossed a rise and could see in the distance Denali (or Mt McKinley). It took most of the day to drive there, repack our gear and get on the campers bus into the Park for two nights camping. The campsite had water and a lockable shed for food and anything with smell which we had to use to prevent bears being attracted to the site.

The next day we were up and onto a bus early. The landscape goes on forever and ever. The day was warm, clear and calm. We travelled into the Park to a visitor centre parked in the middle of it which had the most

spectacular views of Denali. We climbed the hill behind the visitor centre which got us up to 1700 m. The views went on for ever. It was sobering to realise that there was another substantive mountain range out of sight before you got to the Arctic North slope where all our godwits were nesting. Birds were scarce in the National Park a golden eagle seen once, a magpie and that was about it. But the locals weren't interested in birds as it was the wolves, bears and caribou that were the highlights.

After the Park we travelled south and I dropped Nick and Minseon off at Anchorage and headed back to the Kenai Peninsula. The salmon had not started running yet but were off shore. So the fishermen were going out in boats to catch them and leaving large salmon frames on the beach. At Halibut Point near Homer each washed up fish frame had a bald eagle scavenging on it and a mob of mew and glaucous gulls patiently waiting for the eagle to give up. I easily counted 20 eagles sitting on the beach at one go. Camp Halibut was also a good place to be because I finally managed to have good spotting of a fox sparrow and a golden crowned sparrow. These birds were nesting in conifers and so the trees were regularly searched by crows looking for the nest: a different type of predation than I'm used to. The evenings were calm and mild and by this stage not too many mossies. The next day south the end of the road at Homer. More gulls and then back up to Kenai town where red-necked phalarope, sandhill cranes and hudsonian godwits were all in river estuary. That night the last I spent at the Captain Cook State Park which again was a quiet campsite well away from the madding crowds. Next day the trek north to Anchorage stopping wherever I could along the way to look for birds. Another stop at Potter marsh where another phalarope was seen and a belted kingfisher. So that was effectively it! I cleaned out the car and packed; spent the night with friends and the next morning started the

massive trek back home.

Bruce McKinlay



Bruce will show more holiday snaps when he talks about his trip; Wednesday 23 October, 8pm at the Bentham Building, Zoology Dept.

Remote camera observations at Te Rere Yellow Eyed Penguin Reserve.

Remote cameras at Te Rere, the Forest and Bird Society's penguin reserve in The Catlins, recorded the comings, goings and night time activities of yellow eye penguins, little blue penguins and even one sealion over the month of September 2013.

Information gathered showed that there are about 72 yellow eyed and 18 little penguins at Te Rere, the birds share eight well-defined pathways from the rocky shore.

The yellow eyed penguin movements showed a fairly consistent pattern of going to sea between 05:00 and 09:00 hours and coming in between 14:30 and 24:00 hours. (Figure 1) One publicity conscious yellow eyed penguin chose to spend the night in front of the camera where it spent a remarkable amount of time in attending to personal grooming. (Figure 2)

The little penguins and Te Rere went out to sea earlier and returned later than the yellow eyed penguins. They also engaged in more night-time activities such as mating.

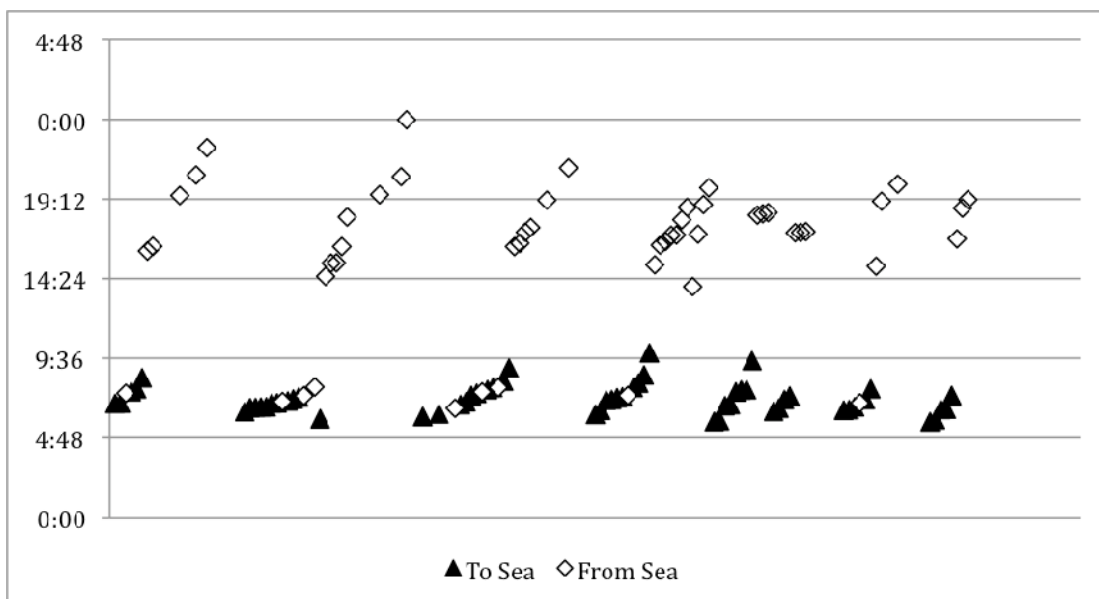


Figure 1 Te Rere Yellow Eyed Penguin.
All movements, 24 hour time on vertical axis

Time in hours and minutes

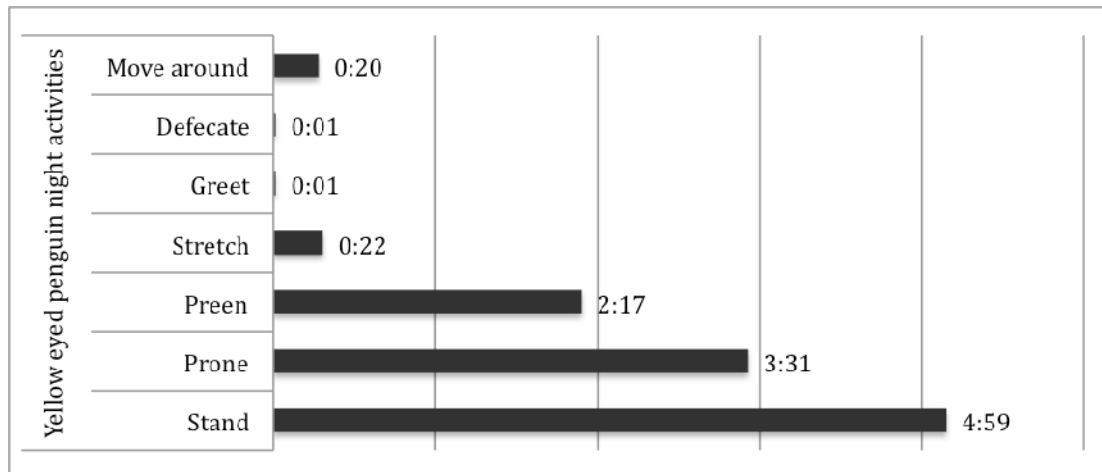


Figure 2 Te Rere Yellow Eyed Penguin Night Activities

QR code for youtube video about Te Rere:



Fergus Sutherland

Note: Fergus Sutherland is the caretaker of the Te Rere Reserve, he may be contacted at catlinw@ihug.co.nz

Ornithological Snippets

Murray Efford reported hearing a **Shining Cuckoo** at Silverstream on 29 September and at his place in Helensborough Road on 6 October. Valerie Fay finally heard a cuckoo in full song on Wednesday 2nd October at her place at the Waitati end of Mount Cargill Road but it wasn't until 11 October that Mary Thompson heard one calling near Orokonui and it took two more days for one to start singing in Waitati.

Please register all hearings and sightings of shining cuckoo and long-tailed cuckoo as part of a research project; see the OSNZ website for full details <http://osnz.org.nz/news/cuckoo-study-please-report-sightings>.

Mary T and Sue Galloway found 3 large colonies of **Black-billed Gulls** on a recent trip to Manapouri weekend of 5th and 6th October; 1000 on Waiau River at Balloon Loop and two colonies of between 2000 and 3000 on the Oreti River near Mossburn. Much comings and goings, copulations, but

only just beginning to sit on nests. The islands they were on seemed well above the usual river levels so hopefully they will not be flooded out. Some black-fronted terns were also flying about. Sue also saw a large number of **Black-billed Gulls** on Clutha just up from Beaumont on 27th September which is worth checking out.

Hamish Spencer and Abby and were in the Queenstown area over the weekend of 28-29 September.- “In addition to seeing ~4 **Crested Grebe** on Lake Hayes, I was delighted to see 2 pairs on Lake Wakatipu: 1 right in Queenstown and a second at Glenorchy. The track to Lake Sylvan, where they are trapping mammalian predators near the start of the Routeburn Track, produced 3 **Robin**, 1 female **Rifleman**, a pair of **Yellowhead**, 2 small flocks of **Brown Creeper**, a **Grey Warbler**, as well as dozens of **Chaffinch** and **Goldfinch**, right down low. No **Tui** or **Bellbird**, however.”



The flock of 155 **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Blueskin Bay on 2 October had increased to 453 by the 11th and 525 by 17th. Also there on 2 & 11 October were 4 **Wrybill**, the first since single birds on 7 November 2004 and 27 September 2011.



Janet Ledingham spotted a **Black-fronted Dotterel** at Hawksbury Lagoon on 5th October, the first record since 1 July 2008. It was still there the following day.



Joanne Kennedy photographed this unnaturally blue billed yellowhammer feeding at her bird table at Gladstone Oaks, Wingatui. At first we thought it might have been feeding on treated seed or slug baits but

Finally, for those suffering withdrawal symptoms due to lack of news about **White Herons** in this newsletter, we can report that 3 were still present on 3 October (Peter Frost), 2 on 7 October (Derek Onley) and just 1 on 13th (Bruce McKinlay).

Notices and Business

Regional Recorder.

As Mary Thompson indicated at our last in door meeting I have taken on the role of Regional Recorder. Many thanks to Allan Baker for his work in the role over the past years.

The role of the Regional Recorder has changed and is now to encourage members to make the best use of birding observations by encouraging:

- contributions to the regional newsletter,
- members to report on their observations at regional meetings
- the active use of eBird
- members to use online discussion fora etc
- members to publish in society journals

To this end I have spent some time looking at eBird reports for Otago for 2013. To my surprise I found that 425 check lists had been submitted covering 117 species. Are your reports amongst them? If not them please have a look at the site and start entering your valuable data, where it can be accessed by others and become an ornithological asset.

Check out the year to date report which summarises each species total on a monthly bases. Very interesting reading. Did you know that once you are

signed up and have a sighting entered eBird can also report on your personal observations

Like many of you I received Dave Bell's NZ Falcon Survey Newsletter recently and I check with him how best to get my falcon sightings to him. His response was that I should put them on eBird as he checks this site monthly to gather up to date information. A great example of the power of eBird, showing just how we can contribute to the wider work in ornithology.

If you would like to learn more you will find the eBird article titled "eBird is For Every Bird-watcher in New Zealand" very information and it is on the following link -

<http://ebird.org/content/newzealand/news/ebird-is-for-every-bird-watcher-in-new-zealand/>

In the early stages when I was of thinking about taking on this role I talked to Allan Baker about the job and the skill set needed. When we spoke of birding knowledge I told him then that "I knew enough to know I did not know enough". However If I can help you with the recording of any of your sightings please feel free to get in touch. I am sure I will not know all the answers but I am happy to work with you to track answers down.

Jim Wilson, j.j.wilson@actrix.co.nz 03-467 5163

Dunedin City Bird List, 3rd November at 4 pm.

Otago Branch has been asked to prepare a list of all the birds we see in Dunedin city to go on NZBirds Online. These lists will be a helpful entry point for beginner bird watchers as they try to learn the common birds of their neighbourhood. They will also assist overseas birders learning the birds of their port of entry before venturing further afield.

This should be a fun task if a few of us get together and share our knowledge. We have been provide with clear guidelines and how it is to be entered on the supplied computer database.

We decided to have a get-together at Mary's place, 197 Balmacewen Road, on Sunday 3rd November at 4 pm to compile the Dunedin City Bird list. Please let Mary know if you intend to come to help.

Volunteers for Great Crested Grebe Survey.

Rosalie Snoyink and Leslie Jensen are organising a grebe survey of South Island lakes for 25th January 2014. They organised a similar survey in 2004 under the banner of Women in Conservation. This new survey is a volunteer effort again, and they are seeking support from many various individuals and groups around the South Island. They are willing to co-ordinate so anyone who thinks they can help and will be up Central on 25th January, please contact Rosalie directly for more information. Rosalie Snoyink rsnoyink@xtra.co.nz

National Royal Spoonbill Colony and Nest Count, 2013-2014

This is our Region's main project over the summer (December and January) and as Otago and Southland have at least 12 known nest sites for these birds our part in this National Survey is crucial.

This is a challenging task and fortunately we have had very helpful offers from Grant Ward of boats to access some of the sites. We need names of a pool of strong, water-confident volunteers for these trips (see dates below).

The following plans are proposed.

Wainono Lagoon. Fieldtrip on November 30 (if weather unfavourable 1 December), with dinghy and canoes to get to maimais. This is located north of the Waitaki on the coast and an interesting birding area, so we will do a total count of the area and perhaps also visit Waitaki River Mouth (time permitting). You will need to bring enough food for lunch and possibly high tea, warm clothes, strong footwear as well as sun gear, etc. The lagoon is about 3.5 km long and can be accessed by foot (for most of us) as well as boat.



Green Island. Plan to travel to island by inflatable and land on island to count nests; weather permitting Sat 7th December or Sunday 8th December or try the following weekend (14th/15th Dec) if not successful. The craft has space for 4 people including the pilot; we have 3 volunteers

for the first weekend but please let us know if you are interested in being a backup.

Taiari Island. Plan to walk to island tide permitting. We need someone to volunteer to coordinate this trip; check out tides and possible dates, etc. Hopefully someone has done this expedition previously and knows the ropes. [Appears to be very low tides on 7th/8th December, 4th/5th January and 1st/2nd February around midday].

Heyward's Point. Need volunteers to walk out to see if can see any spoonbill nest from headland.

Catlins Area. Richard Schofield and Fergus Sutherland are surveying their patch; may require help from us. We will keep you informed.

Please let us know if you hear of other possible nesting spoonbills.

Volunteers for various trips, offers of help and information; please contact Mary 464 0787 maryt@actrix.co.nz

OSNZ Subscription Renewal Notices

Members will have received email notification of Membership Renewal at the end of September or in Southern Bird mailing. This seems rather early to me. It will be very easy for this request to be misplaced and forgotten so please figure out a way to remind yourselves to pay at start of 2014.

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. October 23 | Bruce McKinlay | Alaskan Birds. |
| Sunday Nov 3 | Dunedin City Bird List,
4pm at 197 Balmacewen Road.
Contact Mary 464 0787 | |
| 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 | |
| Saturday Nov 30 | All day Fieldtrip to Wainono Lagoon, leaving
from Zoology carpark at 8 am.
Contact Mary (464 0787) if you are intending
to come. | |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next Newsletter 21 November.