



# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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## *Otago Region Newsletter 3/2014 April /May 2014*

### **Antarctic Peninsula to Amundsen Sea. 27 Jan – 8 Feb**

After leaving Argentina the MV Hanseatic plugged its way across Drake Passage in almost idyllic conditions; hardly the crossing across one of the world's stormiest seas in the world I was expecting. Black-browed Albatross, Southern & to a lesser frequency Northern Giant Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Terns, Cape Pigeon (or petrel if you wanted to communicate with Europeans), Snowy or Wandering Albatross, Antarctic Prion, and Wilson's Storm Petrel were all present behind the ship.



Once across the Strait our first destination was Half Moon Island in the South Shetland Islands. A scoria heap with some basalt poking out of it the landing in bright sunshine and about zero degrees was surrounded by chinstrap penguins feeding chicks. Also on land were Gentoo

penguins looking like they were going to moult. Kelp Gulls, Antarctic Skuas were in close attendance as was a Snowy Sheathbill. We were able to walk around the island to an Argentinean Base which was just a couple of sheds with a lot of radio masts around it. In the rocks behind Wilson's Storm Petrels

were flitting about. Half Moon Island is surrounded by the much larger Livingstone Island which is draped in ice cliffs and glaciers heading into the clouds. It is a spectacular setting but did not look particularly attractive for a winter posting.

Next we headed south to Deception Island which is a Caldera with a large sheltered harbour in it. The Hanseatic entered through Neptune's Bellows and anchored at Whalers Bay. Whalers Bay is a large complex area of human habitation which has the extra complexity of being covered in

volcanic ash. At one stage it was an important logistics centre for the British Antarctic Programme but is now an archaeological site. A pair of chinstrap penguins was ashore. A colony of Antarctic skuas was hanging around hopefully. The afternoon was mild and calm; not the normal situation according to those who had been there before.



The next destination was Paradise Bay where we anchored in front of an Argentinean Base which was populated by Gentoo Penguins. Along the adjacent cliff Antarctic Shags were nesting. Around the corner into Neko Harbour (more an indentation in the ice cliffs than a serious harbour) there

was a large colony of Gentoo Penguins. The afternoon again was very mild and the penguins were showing obvious signs of heat stress; lots of panting and flippers being held out from the body. Antarctic Skua and Kelp Gulls were in attendance again.

The next day we cruised down the coast of Adelaide Island and entered Rothera Base. Rothera is the centre for the British Science programme on the Peninsula and has an extensive logistics role as well as its own science programme. Marine biology of the adjacent waters is an important activity. The Dutch have a facility here and have developed a novel pod style laboratory where equipment for a science project is build into a container delivered to the base and at the end of the project the container is

packed up again and returned to the Netherlands. Although Rothera is quite a large base there was clearly not much for the skuas with only 3-4 in evidence. Also an Antarctic Tern and the first Adelie Penguins for the trip were seen. That night we left the peninsula and headed for Peter I Island. The Bellinghausen Sea is not a great place for birds with only the occasional skua and Southern Fulmars present.



At Peter I Island a lone Southern Giant Petrel, Southern Fulmar and Antarctic Petrel were present. Peter I Island is a glaciated cloud covered volcanic rock a long way from anywhere. It was surrounded by sea ice which prevented a close approach. But as the cloud peeled off the ice cliffs were spectacular and we set off into the mist and sea ice for the Ross Sea.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## Ornithological Snippets

Subsequent to last month's ebird report by Sandra Bouma of a **Reef Heron** from Harwood, Otago Harbour on 23 February, Derek Onley saw one fly south along the cliffs past the carpark at Taiaroa Head while leading English friends on the cheap Albatross experience.

On 4 April, Richard Schofield reported that, "after its initial appearance in the middle of March, the **Little Egret** has been present intermittently on



the lagoon adjacent to Naish Park in Balclutha. On 25th March, it was feeding alongside a **Great Egret/White Heron** (first I've seen in Balclutha) which was also present on its own the following day. The **Little Egret** has not been feeding in the expected way of darting around in the shallows, but has been stirring the mud with one foot to disturb prey items".

A single **Cattle Egret**, possibly the same bird that was around last winter, has been seen back with cattle in the Karitane area from mid April and on 7 May Richard Schofield saw the first returning egret on Inchclutha, a single bird amongst 47 White-faced Herons!





Large numbers of **White-fronted Terns** and **Red-billed Gulls** were present on Aramoana Mole over the first 3 weeks of April. However these numbers were eclipsed by 7,000 or so **Black-billed Gulls** in Blueskin Bay over the same period. Derek Onley and Rosemary Penwarden estimated the number from a series of counts on site and on the computer from photos of several of the more distant flocks.



At 9.30pm -ish on 13 March, Mary Anne Miller heard a **Morepork** at 39 Prestwick St, Maori Hill, close to the Balmacewen Golf Course. However the owl was in their spinney, which has oaks, beech and kahikitea and an assortment of smaller shrubs. On 2 April at 3.30am she heard a **Morepork** at quite a distance, >500m, in the direction of the Golf Course.

Ebird reports include a **Cirl Bunting**, seen by Kim and Geoff Larmour at Bushy Point Reserve, Oamaru on 21 March.



**White-fronted and Black-fronted Tern, Black-backed and Red-billed Gull.** So only(!) 17 identified species No wandering albatross, few **Titi**, a frustrating three unidentifiable petrels/shearwaters and the usual unsatisfactory views of storm petrels. The observation that was most



Graeme Loh was out on the *Polaris* yet again on 28 March to 64 km east of Taiaroa. "A roly day that made many students green. **Northern Royal Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Shy, Salvin's and Buller's Mollymawks, Campbell Albatross, Giant Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Mottled Petrel, Cape Pigeon, Fairy and Broad-billed Prion, Stewart Island Shag,**

interesting to me was seeing two **Stewart Island Shags** foraging at 19 km. out and another at 14km. The water at 19 km is about 110metres deep. These are the furthest out presence observations I have made of these shags by quite a margin.

And the other interesting ob was to see **Shy Mollymawks** feeding on blobs (top left) about 40 km east of Taiaroa. Saw this closely twice. Fur seals were feeding in this area. Perhaps spent squid?"

DoC picked up this juvenile **Black-browed or Campbell Mollymawk** that had stopped at Long Beach after our long nor-east blow from 18-19 April. It was parked above the prion fence at St Clair to take off. The afternoon of 20th was calm and it did not depart until mid morning on 21st.

27 March 2014. tides, Graeme Loh went to Seconds Beach, St Clair and saw a **Stewart Island Shag** foraging in shallow pools among the boulders, waddling between snorkelling opportunities. It seemed to be getting plenty of small things to swallow. After going thru the pools it moved out to the shallow white water zone among the boulders and did diving. A **Red-billed Gull** attended it.

Graeme also dropped in on the Titri Road wetland walk on 16 April. "The only **Fernbirds** we heard were right at the railway line. A **Falcon** flew over and inspected the rush land. Plenty of ducks and swan on the pond."

### **The White Herons are back at Tomahawk Lagoon.**

A White Heron was back at Tomahawk Lagoon on 31 March and there was one at Kaikourai Estuary on 15 April. By the following day there were 2 back at Tomahawk and on 16 May Sue Odlin saw 4 there while Peter Schweigman reckoned there were 5 by the 20th.

We would like your sightings of White Heron and anything else you see while at the lagoon to be entered on eBird at the Dunedin, Tomahawk Lagoon Hot Spot. In that way we will have all the Tomahawk data in one place and it will be easy able to access the data for White heron numbers.

Procedure:

1. Go to eBird New Zealand website.  
<http://ebird.org/content/newzealand/>
2. Click on Submit Observations.
3. Log in (OR create an account if you don't already have one).
4. Click on Find it on Map.
5. Type "Tomahawk Lagoon" and the option Tomahawk Lagoon, Dunedin, Otago will come up. Choose this option. Then the map of the area will come up.
6. Click on the HotSpot icon (large flame-like icon) in the large lagoon; this is called Dunedin - - Tomahawk Lagoon. This is the site to enter all our sightings.
7. Click Continue.
8. Under Observation Type choose Stationary count; then enter date, time, etc.



9. Habitat: Coastal wetland
10. Click Continue.

11. Enter the number of White Heron seen. In Add Details include comments on location of heron in lagoon; whether in small or large lagoon; any interesting activities observed. If you have done a count of all the birds present in the lagoon, you can enter this as well.

12. You are asked whether you are submitting a complete checklist; if only entering white heron, press No; if full count press Yes.

13. Then submit.

You are done. Your observations have been recorded forever and will be invaluable in the future for studies of White Heron in NZ.

Any problems, contact Jim Wilson, [jim.wilson@actrix.co.nz](mailto:jim.wilson@actrix.co.nz) ph 467-5163

Prepared by **Mary Thompson, RR** and **Jim Wilson, Regional Recorder.**





## Hawksbury Lagoon Autumn Count

Species	13 April 2014	7 April 2013	3 April 2012	1 April 2011
Black Shag	1			
Little Shag	4	1	1	3
Black Swan	167	5	25	157
Paradise Duck	36	8	51	51
Canada Goose	35	4	12	3
Domestic Goose		1	16	12
Hybrid Goose		11	2	1
Mallard/Grey Duck	500	42	147	500
N.Z. Shoveler	647	139	350	310
Grey Teal	47	425	186	188
Pied Stilt	31	89	4	8
Spur-winged Plover	3	5	0	10
Black-backed Gull	27	52	8	10
Red-billed Gull		1		
Caspian Tern		6		2
White-faced Heron	1	1	1	13
Royal Spoonbill	8	2		27
Welcome Swallow	170	8	32	4

As you may have noticed there has been a fair amount of rain this year, 342mm at Waitati, approaching twice the average and almost four times last year's total from January to mid April. Unlike last year when water levels at Hawksbury were low with considerable amounts of mud, this year levels have been high reaching well up to the bankside vegetation. Mary Thompson, Lesley Gowans, Bruce McKinlay and Derek Onley braved a cool and increasingly windy day to count the lagoon on 13 April and found both Mallard and Shoveler numbers to be the highest yet for April and Grey Teal by far the lowest. Black Swan numbers had returned to those of four years ago, mostly in the eastern more tidal arm.



By mid May the water levels in the eastern tidal arm had fallen and over 100 Grey Teal were back feeding on the exposed mud.

**Derek Onley**

## Notices and Business

### **Winter Wader Count: A reminder and suggestion.**

This indeed is a reminder of the Winter Count on 22 June 2014. High tide for Dunedin will be at 1150 hrs with a height of 2.2 m. It was suggested to use the wader count as part of the eBird inclusion. This means that **all birds** are counted on these surveys.

The idea of wader counts was mooted on a National basis back in 1984. And Otago kept going, twice a year since then, a winter one in June and summer one in November. It is not often we can say that we have carried out a bird project for 30 years.

Hopefully we can keep this going with your assistance. Just let me know if you are available.

**Peter Schweigman**

### **Banded Tui and Bellbirds**

Murray Efford has been busy again this summer and autumn and has banded another 70 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. Murray is overseas until August but is keen for us to be looking out for banded birds. Please record any sightings of banded birds and send information to Murray Efford email [murray.efford@otago.ac.nz](mailto:murray.efford@otago.ac.nz); 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.

### **Dead Shags and Penguins**

A paper giving the results of a dna and morphometric study of Stewart Island and Chatham Island Shags is available at:-

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0090769>

Results indicate that Otago and Foveaux Strait Stewart Island Shags comprise "two regional groups (Otago and Foveaux Strait) that show consistent differentiation in relative frequencies of pied versus dark-bronze

morphotypes, the extent of facial carunculation, body size and breeding time."

However don't stop collecting those dead shags or penguins (all species, including feathers, bones and eggshell), especially from areas south of Dunedin (Taieri Island, Catlins). The samples will be used for genetic analysis in Martyn Kennedy, Hamish Spencer and Nic Rawlence shag and penguin research. We have a DoC holding permit and samples can be collected for us without a permit; we just inform DoC (the system we have been using as approved by Bruce McKinlay).

If remains are good it would probably be a good idea to place in plastic bag, seal, label! and put in freezer. Contact Nic and he will arrange pick-up.

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## **New Zealand Bird Conference, 2014**

This year the annual conference and AGM will be held at Palmerston North. It is always a great opportunity to catch up with fellow birders, hear about the latest studies and get to do some birding in new places. The 'early bird' registration has closed but there is still time to register.

## **Back Issues of Notornis and Southern Bird**

The stored journals are going to be disposed of so this is your last chance to receive free printed copies of any of these journals from Volume 1! Please contact [roger\\_sharp@xtra.co.nz](mailto:roger_sharp@xtra.co.nz) before the end of April if you would like to get any of these journals.

## **OSNZ is now Birds New Zealand**

The brand name Birds New Zealand has been adopted by OSNZ following a motion that was passed at the 2013 AGM in Dunedin. In addition you will have noticed the magazine is now Birds New Zealand. It was considered that this was an important first step for the Society's medium term strategy aimed at encouraging a better understanding of what the



Society aims to achieve and provide a more user-friendly name that would be accessible to all those who enjoy studying and watching birds.



The society's official name remains the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. Notornis Journal remains unchanged and the logo of the Takahe is retained. **Mary Thompson**

## **Editorial**

The logical consequence of the Society's foray into the modern world of PR is that the heading for this newsletter should also change but as those of you who actually notice such things will realize, we in Otago still soldier on under the boring old Ornithological Society banner. Please note that it took the editor of this newsletter 2 years to realize that the mailing address on the heading was many years out of date and another year to realize that the addition of the society's email address went some way to catching up with the ways of the new millennium. So don't expect change to happen swiftly. However an attempt was made to alter the heading but was thwarted by what appears to be a dastardly complicated set of formatting devised way back in the early years of electronic communication and the attempt was abandoned as photographs in the newsletter leapt around on a whim or disappeared entirely into what used to be the ether but nowadays may be the cloud.

Other equally observant Society members may also have noticed that the April newsletter did not appear. I apologize for this lapse but would like to point out that it was not my fault but that of the wild weather and an over cautious approach by Telstra Clear or whatever they call themselves these days, to our internet access being "compromised", Result no internet for over a week. Add to that yesterday's wild weather and power cut plus my mouse deciding to die - it was 11 years old which I'm told is a ripe old age for the species - and I hope you see that life for an editor on the cutting edge of ornithological communication is fraught with problems. Normal service will, hopefully, be resumed as soon as possible. Please keep all those contributions coming in. Next month's newsletter will feature Mary's Miranda Days.

**Derek Onley**

## Programme 2014

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

### **Note change of time to 7.30 p.m.**

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|------------------|--|
| Wed. May 28      | Graham Parker. Seabirds and trawl fisheries in the Southern Ocean.   |
| Sunday June 22   | Winter Wader Count High tide 11.50am.<br>To be allocated to a team contact Peter Schweigman (455 2790).  |
| Wed. June 25     | Indoor Meeting Graeme Loh.<br>Birding off the Otago coast from the Polaris.  |
| Saturday July 5  | Field trip: Dunedin Botanic Gardens<br>Start 1 pm at Information Centre beside Café.<br>This will be a recce to find out what birds are in the gardens in preparation for the Bioblitz the following weekend. Alan Baker will lead us around various areas of the garden where birds are likely to be feeding. |
| Saturday July 12 | Bioblitz, Dunedin Botanic Gardens, 10.00am to 4.00 pm. Contact Mary 464 0787 if you can help.  |
| Wed July 23      | Junichi Sugishita. Royal Parenting - foraging strategies and risks in N. Royal Albatross.  |
| Wed August 27    | Kalinka Rexer-Huber and Graeme Parker.<br>'Birds of the Falkland Islands and S.Georgia.'   |
| Wed September 24 | Jean Fleming. 'Learning to be a "birder" a report on Heritage Expedition's Birding the Pacific.'   |

Wed October 22      Derek Onley. The birds of Hawksbury  
Lagoon-results of 4 years of surveys.

Wed November 26    Bruce McKinlay, Birding around the world.

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next newsletter 19 June.