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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 5/2015 May 2015

Crested Grebes on Lake Wanaka Part 2



Even though I had a permit to work with Grebes, there was a degree of trepidation on my part when it came to making decisions regarding their welfare. What was clear was that nests built on the shoreline, on boats and on pontoons (unless managed) would fail. I was uncertain as to how the

birds (generally considered solitary and easily frightened) would react to me, even more, the decisions I would go on to make.

I have to admit that one of my greatest surprises working with this bird came when I first tried to change the ropes that I originally used to tether the platforms in favour of chains. The incubating bird raised its tippets and just leaned over and pecked my hand. It was one of three different birds to do so! (they are wimps compared to penguins).

In its own strange and perverse way, it was a mark of acceptance that if I did things slowly, carefully and sensibly, then they would tolerate my presence and activities and put up with my interference. I have built nests on all the platforms that have been used initially by weaving willow and lake weed into the weedmat that covers the platforms. If built well enough, they can take on a life of their own such as nest 2 after being in the lake for five months.



Five months after nest 2 was launched, it grew its own thicket of willows.

As already noted the first new pair (nest 2) adopted the first platform on the evening of the 9th October, and at that stage I thought that there were but two pairs on the marina, (nest 2 and the pontoon nest 7), but it took me a day or so to realise that in fact there were at least three pairs-maybe four. My overall impression was that birds arrived as singletons and were joined a day or so later by a mate. That probably is not the case. Birds were not marked and could only be separated eventually one from another pair by

the number of chicks they had, the size (age) of the chicks and territory and nest they eventually defended. To be quite honest, it was very confusing and in retrospect I believe there were at least 6 new pairs of birds over a period of 2-3 weeks all prospecting the shore and marina. So here is how I think things worked!



The original pontoon nest, later to become nest 7. The installation of a model magpie by the owner was designed to keep ducks off the pontoon.

The programme I had planned for 2014-2015 was to work with the pontoon pair of birds (nest 7) and get them to nest on a platform. I hoped that I might attract at least one additional pair, maybe even more based on my observations at Lake Hayes. Having successfully overwintered the pontoon (nest 7) birds I was delighted when the first new pair of birds prospecting the area adopted the platform (nest 2) I had placed under the over-bridge at the marina. They were no sooner settled than I noticed another pair of birds prospecting close to one of the boats moored on the marina and placing lake-weed on one of the flotation buoys that surround the marina piles. After a few rather futile efforts, they moved their attention to the stepboard on the back of a nearby powerboat and started to build a nest. Two days later I moved in with a platform and anchored it alongside at the end of the pier (nest 4). By then, the nest contained the first eggs, so nest and egg were moved to the platform and two days later a second and then a third egg was laid.

In the meantime, another pair of birds seemed to appear from nowhere, made a nest onshore and while I was at home furiously building yet another platform they laid the first of a clutch of four in the nest, (now nest 8) but not before a helpful eco operator had moved the nest onto an industrial pallet and anchored it some 5m offshore in a metre of water.



Nest 4 started out on the back step of a powerboat

This was one of three nests totally destroyed due to nor-west gales in November. Their loss caused a great deal of heartache on my part, especially as one of the nests was due to hatch the week it was lost. It led to a major rethink on platform design. The strongest hooks I could buy were bent 90⁰ and ropes frayed and broke. None of the nests broke completely free, but nests were simply washed off the platforms. The new platforms (now tethered using chains and bolts) have worked very well and despite storms, no more nests have been lost to weather. (a report is being prepared for DoC on the design and implementation of grebe nesting platforms).

It was only a matter of time before the interest of the public was aroused by grebe activities and at one stage there were 6 active pairs on the marina, five with eleven chicks between them and it was not uncommon to arrive at the marina and find enthusiastic photographers and bird watchers scattered along the shoreline. This led me to number all of the nests so that the public could read these from the shore and for boat owners to be also able to identify them when on the marina. This was done in tandem by producing a weekly “Grebe Diary” that was posted at the entrance to the marina and also on a willow tree that overlooked nest 8. It provided a brief summary of what was being done, how many eggs were in each nest and when they were expected to hatch etc. The diaries proved very popular.

After encouraging them (nest 7) to breed on the pontoon, I now had to reverse that behaviour and get them off the pontoon onto a platform. Nest site tenacity is strong in this species and not surprisingly they were to prove a difficult pair to retrain. After they had fledged their second clutch,



Nest 8 was the closest to the shore and was anchored to the lake bed..

they started to rebuild their nest on the original site on the pontoon. I moved a platform in to less than a metre from their nest site and moved their nest with one egg onto the platform. They immediately shifted to the other side of the boat, built another nest and while I busied myself building yet another platform, they yet again laid an egg in this nest. By now I had a platform both sides of the boat and moved their second nest onto the new platform together with both eggs they had laid in four days. They deserted that platform and moved to the shore (photo see April newsletter). I towed the second platform to the shore, loaded yet another nest complete with egg onto the platform and towed it back to the pontoon. By now it had three eggs, plus the remnants of three nests and they deserted the lot and went back to the other side of the pontoon and laid yet another egg in the most perfunctory nest any grebe ever made.



The most perfunctory nest a grebe ever made

I moved that egg into the platform nest and the following day the birds at last accepted the platform.



Success at last, nest 7 with added Lagarosiphon as nesting material.

A day later I spotted an unclaimed egg on one of the unoccupied platforms (I suspect it was the pontoon birds) and cross fostered that egg (marked) into nest 8 where birds had settled and had already laid two eggs. The effort was worth it. The pontoon birds went on to fledge two more chicks. The cross fostered egg with the two unhatched eggs all proved to be infertile.

It was a summer of highs and lows. The high was that 31 chicks fledged from the platform nests, the low was that we lost three nests with eggs; one within a week of hatching. And one nest was vandalised and then there was Greg.

One of the reasons for having a platform just offshore and anchored to the lake bed (nest 8) was to observe the reaction of the public to the birds and vice versa. The other was to use it as a test platform for anchoring directly to the lake bed. It went very well for the second clutch (the first clutch was lost to a storm) with two healthy chicks fledged. Sadly, the third clutch of three eggs, and a fourth cross fostered egg did not fare so well and was vandalised one evening. The presence of a beer bottle on the platform was the alert that all was not well and a closer examination revealed a number of stones on the platform and the remains of two broken eggs. Throughout the whole of the summer, this was the only incident of deliberate interference. Despite this, it was the bird remaining to incubate the cross

fostered egg that was one of three grebes that drew blood when I checked the nest.

Then there was Greg. It was Christmas Eve when I found a 5-6 week old chick on its nest with one of its parents. Grebes desert the nest once chicks have hatched, thus the presence of a chick on a nesting platform with parent was most unusual. Closer examination revealed that it had a severely shattered left leg. It was not hard to float my kayak close to the nest and uplift an emaciated and weak chick and ferry it to the shore in my kayak. Carol at “Aspiring Vets” agreed to look at the chick and after a quick consultation it was agreed that the best thing to do was to amputate the leg and tidy it up as best as possible. After some four hours with the vets the chick was returned to me, not only with a very tidy amputation but also a name. No matter how weak the chick was, it never stopped pecking me when I caught it and it continued to peck veterinary staff until it dozed off under anaesthetic. When it woke up it continued to peck and two hours after the surgery when I returned it to the lake its last action was to peck again, hence Greg, after Gregory Peck, the well-known Hollywood actor. Grebe chicks appear to sleep deeply and I found it relatively easy to catch Greg some 10 days later, reweigh him and have the satisfaction of knowing he had moved from 325g to 460g. However, a few days later Greg’s sibling was found dead, and weighed 740g. Clearly Greg had some catching up to do-weight wise.



Grebes when not peeping appear to go into deep sleep

Greg was later to illustrate (in his own sad way) the complexities of the breeding behaviour of *P.cristatus australis*. Greg and sibling were hatched on nest 3 during the first week of November. Adults and chicks moved to nest 2 during the third week of December and laid the first egg of a new clutch of 3. The adults continued to tend and feed both chicks until the first of their new brood hatched. Once the second clutch hatched its three eggs

(one chick was found dead in the nest), one bird continued to care for Greg and the two new chicks, but the other adult attacked and drove Greg away at every opportunity. And so Greg became thin and worn yet again and seemed sadly accepting of the beating he was receiving on an almost daily basis. He was last seen heading west, the adults leading followed by the two most recent chicks with Greg in the rear-still struggling to maintain a straight line.



Greg became thin and worn

I have been most surprised at the ease with which these birds have accepted my intrusions. Apart from the birds on nest 7, I believe that all the extra birds that arrived were naive to human presence. They quickly habituated to the intrusions I inflicted on them, but even more surprising was their tolerance to the heavy boat traffic that arrived and left on a daily basis throughout summer. I feel that one of the most important things learned was how tolerant and tractable this species is to intrusion and manipulation.

Despite losing at least two chicks to boat traffic, I think the positives outweigh the negatives. It has been a huge learning curve for me, but I think more importantly it has made residents and visitors alike more aware of the natural history of the Lake and that it is a complex body of water that needs as much care as the grebes have required over this last summer. There has been a collective concern for the birds by the public on and off the marina and this has made a big difference.

Acknowledgements. My thanks to Peter Marshall who has been most generous in helping with much of the materials for platforms and to Steve Burrowes Chair of the Marina Board and the owners of berths that allowed me to tether platforms next to their boats.

John Darby

Arctic Tern

Jason Wilder found this tern amongst the hundreds of White-fronted Terns at Aramoana on 22 April. This is late for an Arctic Tern to be this far south; adults would be well in their way back to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere and what little is known about immatures, like this one, would suggest they winter in the sub-tropics. Could the bird therefore be an immature Antarctic Tern? How do you tell immature and non-breeding Antarctic Terns from Arctic Terns.



From Jason's series of photos the general consensus now seems to be that it is an immature Arctic Tern.; the 2nd at Aramoana this season. But to see how similar they are, see Tony Crocker's photo of both together on the Antarctic Peninsula on NZ Birds Online.



For further photos and discussion:

<http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=4489>.

And just to simplify things further see Long Billed Arctic Tern at birdingnz again:

<http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=4564>

Derek Onley

Report of Field Trip to Sinclair Wetlands



Seven of us went on the field trip to the Sinclair Wetlands on Sunday 26th; the weather forecast was not all that promising but after misty drizzle cleared the day was very warm and calm – ideal for bird watching and counting. We tested out the various methods for surveying the area. Fernbirds were heard calling along the track to the islands and several good views were had. By the afternoon they had quietened down and were not responding to our playing of calls - we think that fernbird survey should be done as early in morning as possible with stopping for listening for birds every 100m along the track and then trying playback.

The waterbirds on large lagoon to the east and the smaller one to the west were easily surveyed by telescope from Lonely Island. Most of the large lagoon to west of Ram Island could be seen from the west point of Ram Island and the hidden corner could be seen from the Landing on the road; we decided that these viewpoints would be used to sample the number of waterbirds (see map). Most of the usual waterbirds were seen (see table) but surprisingly very few grey teal (only 2) and Paradise ducks were only seen flying over and not on the water.



Canada Geese	91
Greylag Geese	7
Black Swan	15
Scaup	158
Shoveler	53
Mallard	221
Grey Teal	0

The forest birds on Ram Island were surveyed using 5 minute bird counts at six locations about 200 m apart around the island (see map). This will give us good replicate results. At this time of year the silveryeye and brown creeper are flocking so some count site had only one or two birds whereas 20 or more were seen in some areas. Bellbird, silveryeye and fantails were the most obvious birds and chaffinch and dunnock only picked up by hearing contact cheeps (which some of us could have easily overlooked; identifying calls is a skill that needs a lot of practice). The table shows the

sort of numbers we were getting; no tui or kereru were seen. The total number of species seen was 31.

Species	South	Mid	West	North	East	Centre
bellbird	3	2	4	3	4	1
blackbird				1	1	1
brown creeper					2	1
chaffinch	3	2		1	1	
dunnock	2	2		1	1	
falcon						
fantail	1		1	1	2	1
fernbird			1	1	1	
goldfinch		2	1			
greenfinch						1
grey warbler	1		1			1
harrier						
house sparrow	1					
kereru						
kingfisher						
magpie						
redpoll	3		1		2	
rifleman						
rosella						
shining cuckoo						
silvereve	3	2	3	16	9	2
skylark		2				
song thrush						
starling						
tomtit						
tui						
welcome swallow	2		1			
yellowhammer					1	

We are looking for someone who might like to take on the job of overall coordinator of the Sinclair Survey, which involves planning the seasonal survey days and keeping a record of the data. Please contact Mary with your offer to help.

Mary Thompson

Tomahawk Times



Cold south westerly rain blurred windows of the late bus to town, revealing only a fleeting view of a small white heron standing ashore at Tomahawk Lagoon. By the time I returned it was still raining, and dark.

The bird looked like a small white heron, but the sighting was too brief to be sure it was not an intermediate egret again, as one was in the same place in November 2014. Over the next three days the area was checked many times, without any white herons or egrets.

A search of the same place on May 19 again resulted in no herons. Then, just a short stroll further, a white heron wading in the creek. Small sized, but definitely a white heron with the distinctive kink in the neck, long neck relative to body, and bill gape extending back beyond the eye. It waded, making a few jabs at aquatic prey, but not feeding actively. It flew a short distance, showing more white heron features, and continued wading. It was not seen the next day. This is the first white heron at Tomahawk Lagoons this year, the last one I saw was a single larger bird near the upper lagoon on September 30, 2014.

Duck shooting season did not cause an increase in ducks to the protected Tomahawk Lagoons. Some mallards there are used to people as always, while others on the water are more wary. Some Shoveler ducks near the bank flee instantly after seeing a human, while others react mildly by swimming further out. It is interesting to see some ducks within the two species view humans as a normal presence, while others react immediately

to people as danger, indicating which birds are long term locals compared to recent arrivals. Some of these birds must be from other wetlands, but numbers of ducks on the lagoon are about the same as before the season.

Black swan numbers increased on the upper lagoon, from varying counts of 6 to 14 birds in April, to suddenly 48 birds on Sunday May 3. Autumn usually means arrival of Canada geese at Tomahawk Lagoons, although sometimes they arrive more in winter. At night on May 4 a group of maybe six Canada geese, numbers guessed from calls, came in very low from the south over the houses and then into the raupo cove between the two lagoons. They were gone before next morning. The next night at about the same time, about four Canada geese came in low again, but flew on past the lagoons and over the hill.

A pair of tui fly restlessly through local gardens and trees along the lagoon shore. Autumn means the bush shoreline is quieter, with calls more muted from bellbirds and grey warblers, groups of busy silvereyes moving fast through the canopy, and a quick whisper from dunnock. Lagoon Creek usually has a white faced heron, and three or four pukeko, and a harrier gliding over. The kingfisher was last seen a month ago. A walk through the trees usually means being followed by fantails, both black and pied phase. Then the tui pair swoop in, rustling the canopy foliage and calling.

Andrew Austin



More challenging lunchtime birding. Sinclair Wetlands.

Birding from Home

As my mobility has decreases and I am not able to explore the outdoor world of NZ birds I have turned more and more to the internet to feed my birding interests, or obsession as my family call it. Having spent many hours counting penguins and condors I thought others may be interested in the Zooniverse projects. The Zooniverse is a collection of web-based citizen science projects that use the efforts and abilities of volunteers to help researchers deal with the flood of data that confronts them. Zooniverse has currently at least 12 projects on subjects ranging from astronomy, climatology, biology and humanities Zooniverse not only gives me a “fix” for my birding addiction but also lets me explore parts of our natural world I am not able to visit.

My first foray into Zooniverse was counting penguins on Penguin Watch. Here you are asked to count penguins and identify any other bird types or human activity. The Oxford University project has a camera-monitoring program that currently consists of 50 cameras throughout the Southern Ocean and along the Antarctic Peninsula, overlooking colonies of Gentoo, Chinstrap, Adélie, and King penguins. The project has *hundreds of thousands of images taken over the past three years*. The other birds I have seen are Snowy sheathbill, Southern Giant Petrel, Brown skua and Kelp gull. <http://www.penguinwatch.org/#/classify>

The second site I have been active on is looking at the California condor. The California condor is a critically endangered species and the population is suffering from the effects of lead poisoning. Citizen science is assisting by help track the location and social behavior of the animals. In addition to California condors I have also seen Golden eagle, Turkey vulture, Raven and some of the local mammals. <http://www.condorwatch.org/#/>

Recently I was emailed and asked to be part of the beta testing for a project based in the Serengeti National Park. This project has hundreds of camera traps in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. They are looking for help to classify all the different animals caught in millions of camera trap images. While this project is focused mainly on mammals; I have seen Guinea fowl, Kori bustard, Ostrich and Vulture.

<http://www.snapshotserengeti.org/>

Jim Wilson

Notices and Business

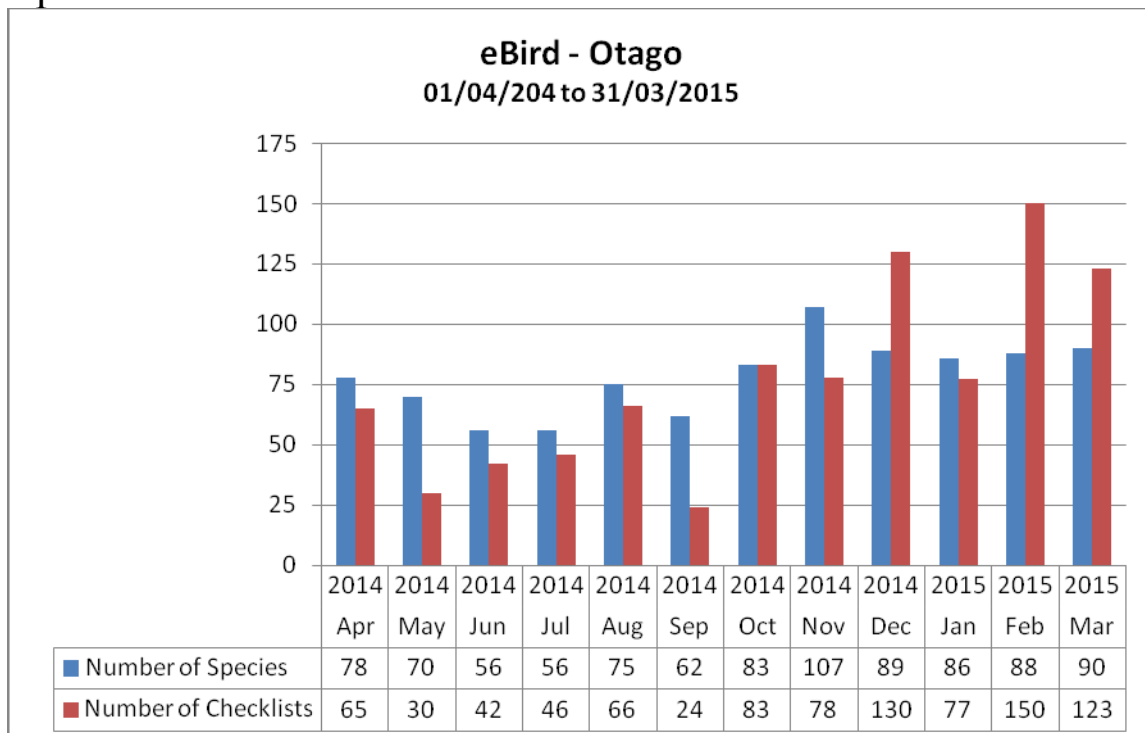
Regional Recorder's eBird Report

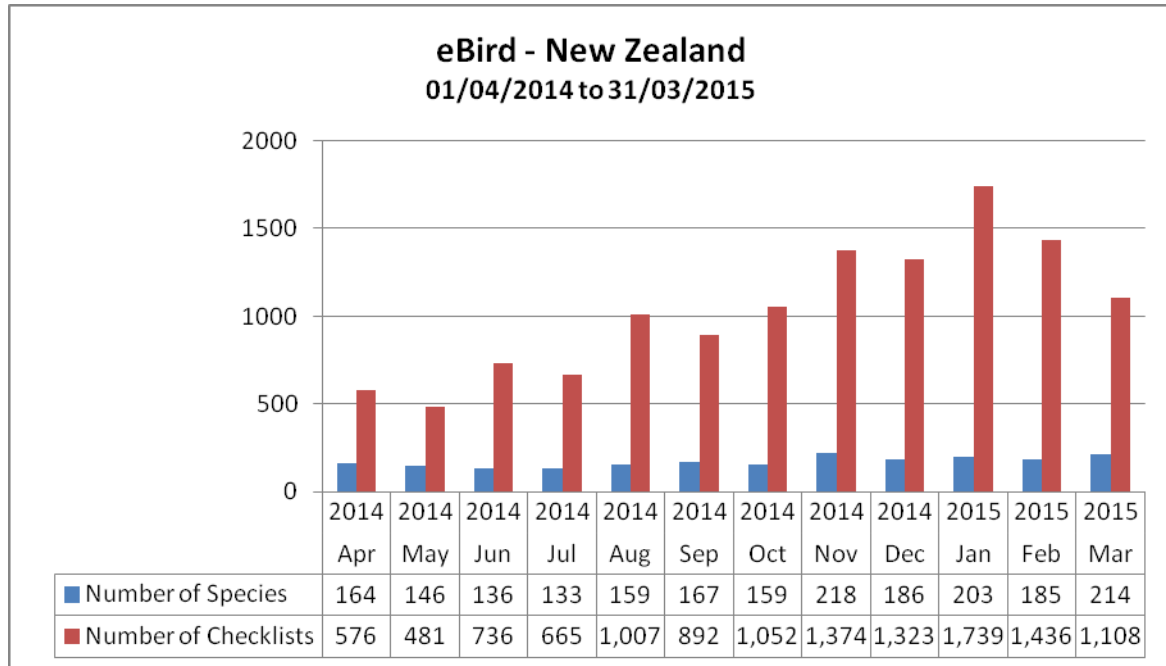
I thought it would be interesting to look back into Otago records and see how eBird was being used in previous years. I found a clear spike in species recorded in 2008 with 125 recorded compared to 73 in 2007. It is good to see Otago numbers increasing year on year since 2009. The table below summaries Otago species submitted to eBird from 2000 to 2014.

eBird – Otago Species

Year	# Species	Year	# Species
2000	62	2008	125
2001	97	2009	100
2002	76	2010	107
2003	88	2011	115
2004	83	2012	128
2005	78	2013	135
2006	83	2014	139
2007	73		

The first graph is a summary of eBird reporting activity for the previous 12 months in Otago while the second graph covers the whole country for the same period.





Please keep in mind that you are able to enter checklists from your old field notes and update the historic data.

Jim Wilson

South-East Marine Protection Forum

Roopu Manaaki Ki Te Toka

The New Zealand government is committed to creating a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) to protect a representative sample of New Zealand's coastal environments and habitats. The coastline between Timaru and Waipapa Point is currently being considered for marine protection by the South-east Marine Protection Forum. At the moment there are no MPAs on this section of coast that meets the protection standard set in government policy and this is a significant gap in New Zealand's network. The Forum was established by the Ministers of Conservation and Primary Industries and it is the Forum's job to recommend to the government what sites are deserving of marine protection and what type of marine protection are needed. There are 14 members on the forum, representing the interests of tāngata whenua, commercial and recreational fishers, local communities, and environmental, scientific and tourism groups. The Forum will first consult widely with local communities and interest groups and also consider any available scientific information. There are no predetermined sites for

marine protection. Then, on the basis of that first stage of information gathering, the Forum will decide on draft Marine Protected Areas, and will

notify these recommendations for formal submissions. On the basis of all the information gathered through this process, the Forum will then make a final set of recommendations to the government, on what sites should be protected and what type of protection each site needs.

The marine protection tools will need to meet a protection standard that achieves biodiversity protection. These may include marine reserves, Fisheries Act, or Resource Management Act tools, customary fisheries management tools, special legislation, wildlife refuges, sanctuaries and management reserves, provided they meet the protection standards set out in the MPA policy. To meet the protection standard a management tool must enable the maintenance or recovery of the site's biological diversity to a healthy functioning state.

The Forum's outcomes will be reliant on the input it receives, so it's important to get involved in the process now. There are several ways to be involved and have a say:

Visit the forum website or facebook page:

south-eastmarine.org.nz

[facebook.com/southeastmarine](https://www.facebook.com/southeastmarine)

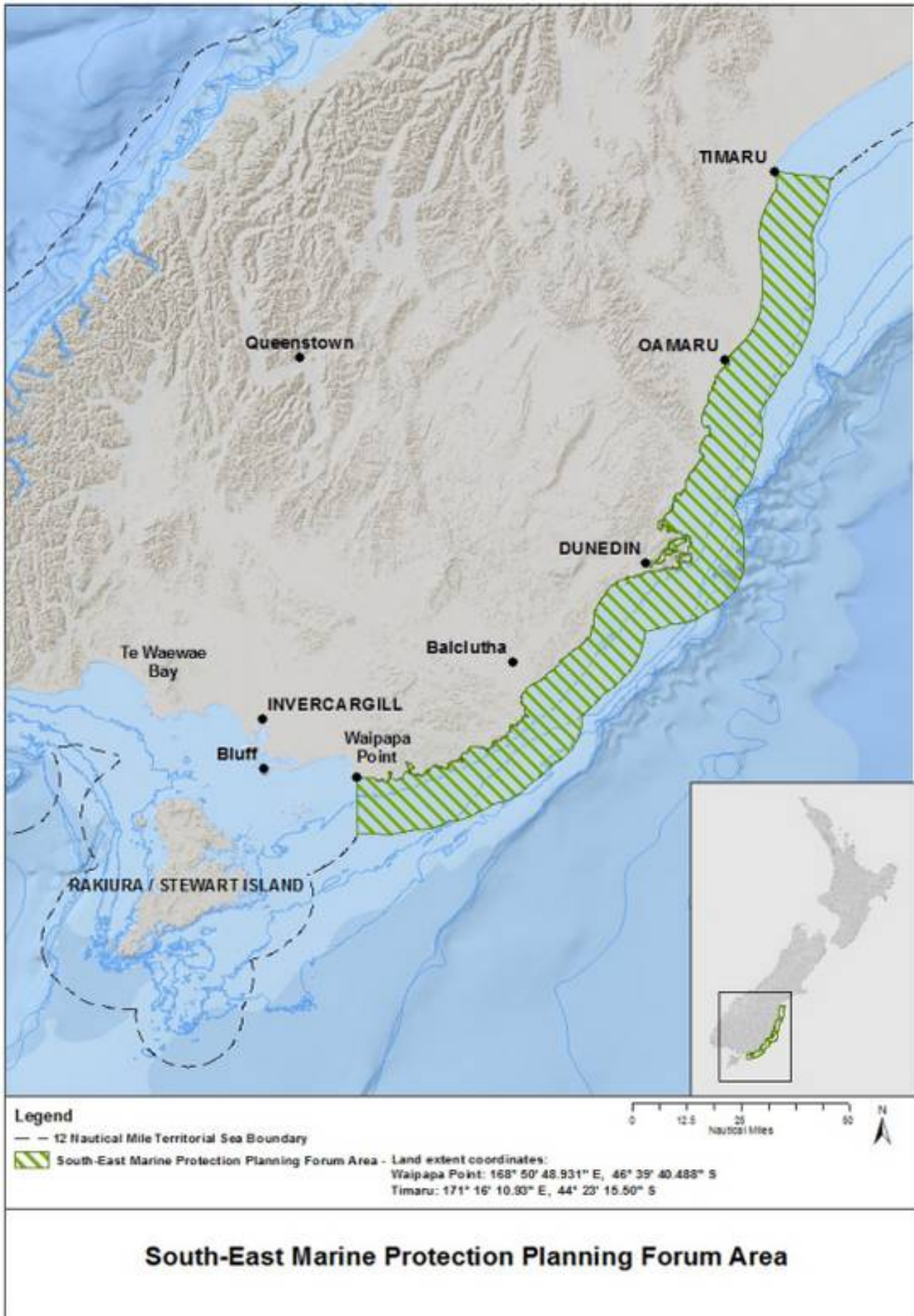
Attend a meeting: the next public meeting will be held at the Grosvenor Hotel in Timaru on the 28th of May from 4pm-6pm. Meetings are held each month at different locations along the coast.

Follow this link to fill in a questionnaire:

<http://www.seasketch.org/#projecthomepage/5331eff529d8f11a2ed3dd04/survey/5474fd3056fe77161bc623d6>

Call the Freephone: 0800 OURSAY (0800 687729)

Email: ruwhite@doc.govt.nz



Programme 2015

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

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|----------------|---|
| Wed May 27 | Neil Robertson
Birds of Ecuador |
| Wed June 24 | Double Bill: Wray Grimaldi "Disease in Adelie Penguins-a feather loss condition".
Jason Wilder "Birding experiences of a visitor from USA to Dunedin." |
| Sunday June 28 | Winter Wader Count, High tide at 12.15 pm at 1.9 m. We are keen for more people to be involved, so please contact Peter Schweigman peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz . |
| Wed July 23 | Hamish Spencer Classification of the World's Cormorants and Shags |
| Wed Aug 26 | Kelvin Lloyd
Update on the Beyond Orokonui project. |
| Wed Sept 23 | Catriona MacLeod and Priscilla Wehi
"Birds as measures of biodiversity." |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: June 18.