



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 11/2015 November 2015

OTAGO SUMMER WADER COUNT 8 NOVEMBER 2015

	Karitane	Blueskin Bay	Aramoana	Harbour	Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Catlins	Total 2015	Total 2014
Pied Oystercatcher	82	140	41	186		59	58	566	415
Variable Oystercatcher	4	5	3	21	6	26	2	67	87
Pied Stilt	31	11	2	2	5	18	4	73	102
Banded Dotterel	1						6	7	
Spur-winged Plover		3	21		3		4	31	21
Bar-tailed Godwit	123	442	178			658	322	1723	1438

This was one of the calmest days that a wader count has been carried out in Otago. Compared with last year, Pied Stilt numbers were lower, possibly due to late breeding, but the total for Bar-tailed Godwits was higher, but unfortunately the birds were too far away to identify juveniles. It would be good if the godwit trend applies for the total count nationwide.



Peter Schweigman

Ornithological snippets

This report covers from 20th October to 18th November. 2 **California Quail** were reported by Russell Cannings at Titri Creek, near Waihola, on 16th November, while on Lake Wanaka Gregor Tims counted an impressive total of 16 **Australasian Crested Grebes** on 18th November. Good numbers of albatross were seen late in the period, with Russell Cannings finding 35 **Shy** and 2 **Salvin's Mollymawks** at Penguin Beach, Otago Peninsula, on 17th November, with another 25 **Shy** and one **Salvin's** off Nugget Point the following day, along with a **Black-browed/Campbell Mollymawk** and 2 **Fairy Prions**. Although not strictly within the region, 2 **Black-browed Mollymawks** and a **Black-bellied Storm Petrel** were seen (and the latter photographed) from a cruise ship off the Otago coast on 14th November. (Look for Noam Markus in Explore a Region - enter Otago NZ - under Explore data in ebird to see photos)

A **White Heron** was reported from Papatowai, and the same or possibly another at Catlins Lake, from the 21st October, and finally 35 **Royal Spoonbills** were at Taiaroa Head on 17th November.

Tom Clarkson reported a **Kea** at the Organ Pipes, Mount Cargill on 5th November. Same one as popped up near Waikouaiti a couple of months ago?

This summary includes reports from eBird. Please send any records to richard@pcconnect.co.nz

Richard Schofield

Discovery of a new location for Black-billed gulls in Central Otago

The return of Black-bill gulls to inland Otago was observed in early / mid-September and then noticed that by mid / late September / early October there was either an absent or fewer gulls around. "Where had the gulls gone to."

Then on 30th October when driving along Earnsclough, passing McPherson Road, I observed a couple of gulls flying over a paddock where gold mining had been recently been going on and now had finished. A restoration project is now near completion. The only evidence that mining has taken place is the large hole filled with ground water. The hole is where the recovery plant once floated – the operation is much like the early dredging that took place late 1890s / early 1900s.



Walking over the paddock to the hole I observed two flocks of gulls had established themselves on the gravel slopes above the water. Revisited the site on 1st November. The largest flock closest to me likely numbered about 250-300. The smaller flock opposite numbered about 70-80. The gulls looked like they were using the just planted short tussock as a floor for their nests.



Revisited the site of the largest number of gulls on 14th November. The nest were quite well established. Could make out an egg in one of the nests. The smaller site looked in a very similar stage. Images that were taken and enlarged showed more nests with eggs, two eggs per nest.

This could explain where the missing gulls had gone to. **John Douglas**

Te Anau Weekend Field Trip

Our branch held a field trip to the Te Anau region over Labour Weekend. The weather was clement and contributed to very successful birding. There were between 5 and 7 participants; Mary, Sue, Lesley, Francie and Maree were joined by Neil (Southland RR and expert guide for the weekend). We explored a variety of habitats, recorded 49 species, and submitted 15 eBird entries. On the Saturday, we travelled up the Eglinton Valley; many black-fronted terns hawking over paddocks near the Eglinton River. At Kiosk Creek we were greeted by several friendly S I Robins (banded) and got glimpses of Mohua (80 had recently been released in the vicinity). We staked out the rock fall at the Homer Tunnel (where we also met up with Janet) and eventually, with the sharp eyes and ears of a Spanish birder, a pair of Rock Wren were spotted, showing themselves beautifully on a sunny rock – a first for Lesley and a treat for us all. The keas were meanwhile active on the rubber seals on the cars! Blue duck eluded us at Monkey Creek. The next day we surveyed the waterfowl at the Rakatu Wetlands. The afternoon was spent at the weir at the junction of the Mararoa and Waiiau Rivers watching a 2400 strong colony of Black-billed Gulls on a shingle bank – many birds were sitting on nests. We saw only 5 Black-fronted terns but they appeared to be nesting. On the paddock behind were Pied Stilts and several pairs of Banded Dotterels and South Island Pied Oystercatchers with well-grown chicks. Lesley and Francie detoured via Lake Tuakitoto on the way home and found 200+ Shoveler hanging out there. Sue and Mary counted 15 Harriers on outward and 21 on homeward journey, an average of 1 every 22 km.



On route to Eglinton Valley



Rock Wren territory



Overlooking gull colony at Weir



Black-billed Gull colony



Banded robin at Kiosk Creek

Mary Thompson

Bitterns at Sinclair Wetlands

We have set the automatic digital recorders out at the Sinclair wetlands since August to get an idea of when the peak bittern booming occurs down here compared to the northern wetlands where the most study has been done and which conclude that peak booming is September/October to early November. No booms were picked up during August and a few booms were picked up by 9th September but these were just occasional and not repeated. I was beginning to wonder whether bitterns had deserted this wetland. However, by the recordings on 30th October, there were trains of 3 to 5 booms repeated consistently every 2 minutes. On three successive nights there were 74, 63, and 65 booms during 6 hours of recordings after

sunset and before dawn. The patterns of booms suggest that there might be only 2 or 3 male bitterns present. Hopefully they will attract a female. At this stage it does not seem worthwhile to try to listen for booms from different sites to try to locate the position of booming birds, but will keep you posted.

Mary Thompson

Being in the right place at the right time

How many times have we heard of the bird of a life time and thought; wait a minute I was there on that day? Alternately a friend casually mentions seeing something new and unusual (say a kite at Aramoana) and after making an effort of coordinating the family, you make it to Aramoana and there are no harriers to be seen, let alone something with a forked tail and drooping wings?

The art of the birder is I think overcoming the disappointment and enjoying the unexpected. Recently I spent a week in North Auckland with my father and got to have a bit of both. A drive north of Kaitia got exciting when we pulled off the road at Houhora by a dilapidated tavern and there was a flock of 75 Royal Spoonbill in the estuary; sitting there tucked up looking very relaxed as tide flooded in around them. Further up the road we turned off down the dusty gravel road to Te Pua. The road ends by an old wharf effectively in the centre of Parengarenga Harbour. A walk along the harbours edge showed more Royal Spoonbill, oystercatcher Spur-winged Plover, White-fronted and Caspian Tern.

Then above, a flock of Bar-tailed Godwits dropping in steeply from the North; some 90 birds. Then from another angle, another group dropping in to roost to the shellbanks across the channel. This continued for as long as we observed groups of godwits coming in high from the North. We figured out that the timing was right for these birds to be arriving from Alaska; there is no harbour or wader habitat north of where we were, and they did not look to be hopping from one side of Parengarenga to the other. We could not have planned being at the place to see such a sight!

On the other hand, the DOC sponsored loud speaker system of kiwi calls at Trounson is working well. Next step a clock work kiwi? (No I just made that up)



Bruce McKinlay

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.

Wed Nov. 25 Philippa Agnew "Foraging behaviour of Little Blue Penguins at Oamaru."

This is the last meeting of the year and our esteemed RR, Mary, requests that you bring appropriate festive fare to celebrate another successful year in the long history of Otago OSNZ. (Roast bird is probably not a good idea. ed.)

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: mid January?