



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 3/2016 March 2016



Polaris water sampling transect 14 March 2016

It was generally a very quiet day, high humidity so low overcast dropping to fog at sea-level for the further part of the day. At the end, where usually about a hundred large birds of several species congregate, there were fewer than ten. But an albatross flew in, maybe a wanderer, or was it a juvenile royal with a little cap of brown on its head. It went up to three southern



royals, in turn each sky pointed and it went away. Next to them it was quite small and the beak looked short. But foggy so could not be sure with binoculars that it lacked the black line in the bite of the bill. The photos at home proved it was a wanderer probably of the Gibson sort.

On the return voyage there were ten foggy kilometres without a bird. Then things changed abruptly at 40.3 km from Taiaroa. There were tens of fairy prions wheeling around. The sea temperature stepped up one degree, and we came into an open sky. We had crossed the front and come out of the Southland Current. From then on seabirds again including more soft-plumaged petrels, one dark enough that I had a taiko twinge. But wildlife professionals never see rare birds!

Twenty km from the Light at 5:30 pm we struck a stream of red-billed gulls heading out to sea. Were they heading out to the front for feeding at dusk?

There were several absences. As often, no spotted shags were seen outside Taiaroa, nor any penguins, nor gannets. No giant petrels, no black browed mollymawks but there may have been black-billed gulls among the many red-billed gulls seen.

Full list: Red-billed gull; Southern black-backed gull; White-fronted tern; Smaller dark terns unidentified; Skua from arctic, heavy bodied; Otago shag; Northern royal albatross; Southern royal albatross; Gibson's wandering albatross; Shy mollymawk; Buller's mollymawk; Salvin's mollymawk; Sooty shearwater; Buller's shearwater; Hutton's or fluttering shearwater; White-chinned petrel; Cape pigeon; Soft-plumaged petrel; White-headed petrel; Cookkilaria petrel unidentified 3; Broad-billed prion; Fairy prion; Storm petrel unidentified 3. **Graeme Loh**



This month's ID quiz - 1 of those unidentified storm petrels.

Last month's ID quiz.



Sorry you will have to wait until the next issue of Southern Bird to find out the answers. Suffice to say the photo came from John Allan's papers (stuff he was thinking it was time he threw out?). He is the schoolboy centre front and that's not Peter Schweigman 2nd row right; not unless he nipped over from Holland by boat for the weekend.

Ornithological snippets

A **Snares Crested Penguin** was found injured at Karitane on 9th March, and taken into care; it was later released at Penguin Beach, Otago Peninsula, and present until at least 16th March (BirdingNZ, Ebird). Meanwhile a moulting **Erect-crested Penguin** was near Nugget Point on 11th March (BirdingNZ). Also at Nugget Point Bruce McKinlay picked out a **Black-browed/Campbell Mollymawk** on 6th March. Graeme Loh saw the white **Spotted Shag** fly onto the west end of Quarrantine island on 10 March

On 22nd February Tom Waterhouse came across a **Pied Shag** and also a **Black Stilt**, both at the Kakanui River Bridge. Anna Cooper & Sam Scheibel counted 25 **Coot** at Sinclair Wetlands on 7th February. Richard Schofield saw a **NZ Pipit** flying over suburban Balclutha on 20th February, while parties of **Brown Creepers**; 5 & 7 at Otanomomo and Awakiki respectively on 6th March and 3 in Waitati on 4th were in areas where they are not normally seen. Finally Penelope Gillette & Catriona Gower reported 12 **Tomtits** and 4 **Yellowheads** in 2km of the Catlins River Walk at The Wisp on 25th January.

Please send any reports for the next summary to richard@pconnect.co.nz
Richard Schofield

Tomahawk Times

March at Tomahawk brought juvenile birds trying out their new world, a hawkish mystery drama, and a growing colony of starlings.

A recent afternoon check of lower lagoon outlet included 12 mallards and 10 shoveller ducks, which were all so wary they might have been scared by a predator. A mallard female repeatedly called alarms at the slightest hint of anything, causing the shovellers to lift off, fly around and return again. They were all alert for trouble. There were also more than 400 paradise shelducks, which were not nervous. At least 36 red billed gulls waded about, including two gulls which flew at and harassed a group of four pied stilts. The stilts spread their wings, called and jabbed at the gulls, which quickly left them alone. None of that commotion upset the ducks. Then, five red billed gulls flew over low from the beach, causing immediate panic among the mallards and shovellers which all flew away fast calling loudly. Their behaviour reminded me of ducks afraid of a

falcon, but none were seen, and I wondered what had happened earlier to scare them.

The distant dead tree often has seven or more little shags, and a small sized royal spoonbill, which came to the outlet where it mostly slept. Black swans can total more than 200 some days, more than 300 other days. Lately, when shoveller ducks are at the lower lagoon there are none at the upper lagoon. A tui and a grey warbler call from the macrocarpas behind the horse field. Two juvenile white faced herons, probably siblings, feed together near Raupo Island, not straying more than 10 metres apart. They have brief disputes with each other over the same patch of water, and with two pied stilts. One young heron is more clumsy at wading and stalking, and it runs over to the other heron and the stilts if they catch something. After an inevitable argument, the cycle starts again.

On Friday 11 March morning, the two horses living on the hill above Raupo Cove ran fast out of the tree line at the paddock edge. They were very alert, with lots of head tossing and looking back at where they ran from. The hill is private land, so the viewing is through binoculars. After galloping up the hill, the horses came back and rounded up the sheep and moved them away from the area. After 10 minutes of watching, a dark young harrier hawk came, repeatedly flying and turning along the same place at tree top height, then it dropped out of sight exactly where the horses fled from. Over the next 30 minutes the young harrier was mostly out of sight on the ground at its first landing site, but also repeated flights 40 metres south along the trees edge, where it hovered and dropped there several times. Within the hour, a second harrier arrived, an older much lighter coloured and larger hawk, and it flew and landed in the same ways and places as the younger bird. The dark young harrier left the area for a while, but then returned, and it obviously gave up to the older hawk. Both birds flew over the same short distance of trees edge, and hovered over and landed on the same two places. The two hawks were never both on the ground at the same time, even though the two sites were some 40 metres apart. In brief absences of the older larger hawk, the young harrier returned, but then left again when the older bird glided in. Nothing was seen in their talons. Maybe a mammalian predator killed something where the horses fled from, before the harriers came. Repeated flying and hovering over the same 40 metres of trees edge, and landing at the same two sites by both harriers suggested small animals running in the grass at

the field interface. A local cat, a small black panther type beast named Friday so she can pretend to be relaxed even when mauling dogs and cats of any size, is a dedicated hunter. Lately, she has brought home families of adult and baby mice. So, maybe the two harriers, and something before them which frightened the horses, were hunting mice along the long grass edge of trees and paddock. The activity and scents of a stoat or ferret kill might frighten horses, as it does scare some dogs, possibly involving some scent warning from the mustelid. At the same time, Friday was watching her favourite row of long grass near the street, and she has not carried any horses home, yet.

A single kereru flew fast through the Oval sports ground on Saturday 12 March, 5.35 pm, going west at roof top altitude.

On Wednesday 16 March evening, at lower lagoon outlet there were only 10 red billed gulls. Other birds included: three variable oystercatchers; four pied stilts with two juveniles; four pukeko including two juveniles; four spur winged plovers; and four black backed gulls with two mottled juvenile gulls constantly following adults and begging for food. A lone grey teal was mostly asleep for 30 minutes, until disturbed by pied stilts rushing and calling at each other with open wings and quick hopping jumps, over who had rights on that 60 cm patch of water at that moment. The grey teal fully awakened, called "cuck -- cuck -- cuck" loudly a few times, indicating a female teal, and rapidly flew away low over the water. I watched her for a long distance, hoping to see if she went to any other grey teal, but lost her flying alone over the darkening far away raupo shore. A single wary adult kingfisher flew up from the bush onto power wires, and then away again low over the lagoon shore.

Continuing from late summer, every evening large numbers of starlings move in to a roost of exotic trees across the upper lagoon. There are many more starlings around locally. One summer evening, a large moving ball of probably more than 400 starlings came in from the north east. Every evening, starlings coming from the south have the same pattern. Many starlings fly in loose changing flocks of 12 to 40 birds, and groups stop on power lines, calling loudly, all going to the same roost in exotic trees surrounded by a farm. On Tomahawk streets, they gather on power wires especially, and roofs, numbering in hundreds. Standing outside the front door in the evening you see and hear groups of starlings whir over just

above roofs, sounding like flying quail, all going to the same trees. At sunset the clamouring calling of starlings from there is often the loudest sound. After dark, sometimes two little owls call from the same trees.

There also seems to be more house sparrows around, and there is still a white sparrow with birds near the sports ground, as there was over the last two years. It almost looks like a different bird than previously seen. In one sighting, the white bird looked slightly larger than brown sparrows, but that could be an illusion from its colour. It also looked plumper than the sparrows, but again colour and background could give an illusion of size. Although, assessing the relative size of a round post it stopped on briefly it looked a bit larger than a sparrow. Maybe it is a white canary, although it stays with sparrows. It has black sooty smudges on upper wings and mantle, as if it scraped through something. It is hard to say if the black marks are true plumage, or smudges from a sooty adventure, because the bird moves constantly. **Andrew Austin**

Notices and Business

2016 NZ Bird Conference and Birds NZ AGM

This annual event will be held in Napier (Hawkes Bay) at the Museum Theatre Gallery, Marine Parade, during Queens Birthday Weekend 4-6 June 2016. The conference will comprise two days of scientific papers and workshops, with field trips to local birding highlights on the third day. The AGM will be held on Saturday afternoon. A variety of workshops are planned for the Sunday morning (use of GPS, triangulation methods for locating birds by sound, historical books at Napier Museum), followed by field trips on the Monday (Boundary Stream, Ahuriri estuary or Clive wetlands).

These are excellent get-togethers and a trip to Napier in mid-winter sounds a good idea. The deadline for Earlybird registration (only \$95) is 31 March. Please register online or ask Mary Thompson for a print version if you don't have computer access.

Otago eBird Report

I spotted the following article on the eBird site and thought it was worth bring to your attention

Counting 102—birds at feeders 14 February 2016

A couple years ago we published the Counting 101 and Counting 201 articles, tutorials for how to more effectively and accurately count birds that you're seeing. Counting 101 focuses on the basics—how to keep track of birds throughout a birding outing, and how to count a flock in parts to estimate the total. Counting 201 takes this a step further, dealing with large numbers and flocks of birds in motion. Counting 102 is intended to take these counting best practices and apply them to feeder birding—a slightly different counting problem, but an important one to address. For anyone who has wondered how best to count and eBird the birds visiting you feeder—this article is for you.

Annual Bird Migrations Across Continents

In January the following link was posted on eBird. If you have not already looked, this great migration map it is well worth the time. It gives a graphic representation of the migration patterns for 118 species across the Western Hemisphere. The base for the publication was millions of observations from the eBird citizen-science database.

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/lasortemap/>

Live streaming of northern royal albatross nesting at Taiaroa Head

Another link worth checking out is the live streaming of one of the northern royal albatross nesting at Pukekura/Taiaroa Head. DOC is to be commended on this project, using YouTube to promote conservation to the general public.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gwy2IjA7z-I&IsDlg=1>

Jim Wilson

Programme 2016

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

Wed March 23rd Bird Briefings - – a number of members have offered to give a 5 -10 minute talk about birdy topics that have captured their interest recently: Bruce McKinlay, Derek Onley, Jill Hamel, Alan Baker, Janet Leddingham, Maree Johnstone, Graeme Loh; I think we certainly will have an interesting evening, covering ducks, cirl buntings, spoonbills, kereru, penguins, fairy prions, and more.

Saturday April 8th Sinclair Wetlands Autumn Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 9.00 am. Backup Sunday April 9th. For information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, maryt@actrix.co.nz

Sunday April 24th Lagoon Lookabout - guided birdwatching, 10am-12
Our contribution to the Wild Dunedin Festival.
Meet by the large Tomahawk Lagoon just after the bridge on Tomahawk Road. We aim to have telescopes to let the public see birds close-up and to help identify them etc. Contact Andrew Austin if you can help; phone 454 5830

Wed April 27th John Darby. A personal account of the Great Crested Grebes of the Wanaka Marina.

Wed May 25th Neil Robertson
Birds of China and Tibet (plus fabulous videos)

Wed June 22nd Susan Walker
A report on the state, trends and vulnerability of NZ's endemic birds.

Sun Jun 25-Jul 3 NZ Garden Bird Survey

- Sun July 10th** Bird watching Walks, Dunedin Botanic Garden, 1pm to 4pm; an event offered by us as part of the International Science Festival. If you can help with walks or look after the display in the Information Centre, please let Mary know: 464 0787.
- Wed July 27th** Craig McKenzie. “Birds through the lens.”
- Wed August 24th** Chris Lalas, Population trend in Otago shags – fluctuations or decline?

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: Apr 21st.