

Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 4/2016 April 2016

Report of Field Trip to Sinclair Wetlands for Autumn Count



Photo by Robin Murray.

An absolutely perfect day for this count: sunny, warm and calm.



Ten people turned up to help.

Photo by Mary Thompson

The fernbirds were relatively quiet but responded well to call playback and everyone got splendid views of them, when they came to inspect us. A total of 14 were seen or heard at the count stations, compared to 32 in summer, 6 in the winter and 19 in spring. Andrew, Robin and Graeme did a meticulous count. There was evidence that the call playback could help identify fernbird territory boundaries as at one site a fernbird was heard calling from a nearby bush although did not respond to our playback but when we moved about 10 metres closer it instantly flew in very close to check out the ‘intruder’. Fernbirds were also seen at some of the 5 minute bird count stations.

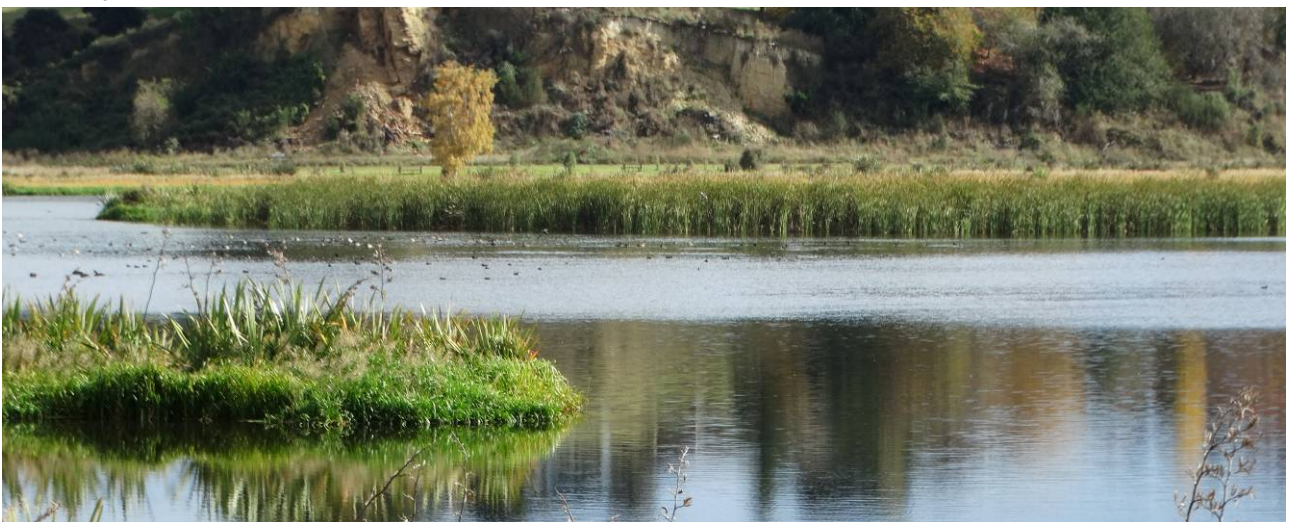
The number of waterfowl evident was increased about 3-fold compared to summer, but paradise ducks were now all but absent. Shovelers were present in large numbers for the first time, and scaup were also present in large numbers.

	Winter July	Spring October	Summer January	Autumn April
Greylag goose	39	5	0	0
Canada goose	31	10	25	83
Black Swan	97	29	27	38
Paradise duck	0	0	87	4
Mallard(hybrid)	299	3	35	43
Shoveler	12	7	2	157
Grey Teal	72	5	0	8
Scaup	617	59	83	386
Coot	0	3	0	0
Black shag	0	0	1	0
Little Pied shag	1	2	1	8
Total number	1168	126	262	728

5 Minute bird counts were done at 6 sites on Ram Island by Lesley, Francie and Maree. Brown creeper were again seen on Ram Island. Counts were highest for silvereeye, although bellbird, grey warbler, and blackbird were seen at most count stations. The coprosmas were covered in fruit so there is no shortage of food. Large patches of broom and gorse have been cleared off areas of Ram Island ready for re-planting with natives.

The total species seen this time was 29. All these counts have been entered into eBird under hotspots, Sinclair wetlands and Ram Island. This count completes one year of seasonal counts and a report will be written for the Sinclair Wetlands Trust. We plan to continue this survey for at least one more year.

Mary Thompson





Last month's ID quiz (above) was even more unfair than the previous month's, for unlike the identities of the participants on the trip to Aramoana during the 1961 OSNZ AGM conference in Dunedin, the ID of a white-rumped storm petrel requires more than a good memory, if you are my age, or good historical research skills and contacts if younger. It could be a Wilson's, Black-bellied, White-bellied or New Zealand Storm Petrel. If you are an especially avid and optimistic twitcher it could be a first for New Zealand: European (usually known as simply Storm Petrel if you British and have no truck with American sensibilities about being late entering the naming game), Madeiran, Elliot's or Wedge-rumped (another late comer to the naming game?). And yes to make things yet more difficult, it could at a stretch be a moulting Leach's. Not that an exhaustive knowledge of the finer points of jizz, plumage and extension of feet beyond tail is really going to help. What you need is to have been there, and not feeling sea sick - or a few more pictures.

So here's one, courtesy of Will Rayment's Marine Science team taken while looking for marine mammals off Otago Peninsula in kilometre deep water.



White underparts with dark marking down the centre (just visible) and white centre to an otherwise darkish underwing identify it as Black-bellied Storm Petrel, which, after all, is what you might expect, along with Wilson's, off Otago. White-bellied is rare south of North Cape and New Zealand has streaky flanks and upper breast. Best to ignore the twitchers and forget about those from the North Atlantic, Galapagos and the Pacific coast of South America. Well maybe not the latter? If you feel you need yet more information see *Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World* by myself and Paul Scofield. Especially plate 45. (Signings arranged for a fee or a decent bottle of red wine)

Will's team also came up with several other photos :





which I'm tempted to use as this month's ID quiz. However I've decided to relent. The first are Mottled Petrels and the second two, Black-winged Petrel.

Instead this month's problem is a heron seen at Tomahawk Lagoon in the last few days and photographed by Bruce Chathro.



Another photo by Lei Zhu is on ebird. Go to "explore data", then "explore a region" and enter Otago NZ.

Derek Onley

Ornithological snippets

will return next month and is replaced this month by a few falcon stories.

While carrying out the Orokonui Bird Counts on 16 April at the control site on Jill Hamel's land on Mopanui, Maree Johnston and Chuck Landis reported the following: We started out seeing two dead birds (really just feather piles) on early parts of the track. This was followed by lots of discussing feather identification, cats, etc. Then, while at the first count, a large and very fast dark bird swooped low right over our heads, continuing on straight down the track at head-height (and less) and moving at very high speed. It happened so quickly that we were 'in shock'....We immediately eliminated kereru and kahu. And soon decided it must have been a falcon. As we worked on down the track, we found two more piles of small bird feathers on the road bed. Later, on the way out (back at the first count, in fact) we caught another glimpse of a large dark very fast-moving bird in the bush just above the track. With the track an enclosed but open corridor, and so popular with bush birds coming in and out from both sides, it seems to form a great avenue for predators to patrol.

On Saturday 16 April Neville Peat saw a falcon swoop past the Yellowhead area of Broad Bay, where he lives, around 9 am. A sleek dark shape against the morning light, it was flying swiftly towards the harbour edge. I glimpsed it for about two seconds before it disappeared behind a tree, and following its trajectory the next thing I saw was an eruption of little shags from their customary roost on a cliffside macrocarpa tree. Some of the shags plunged down to the water, others scattered left and right. The commotion was amazing. The falcon more or less kept on going



after it swept over the macrocarpa, perhaps heading back to its Silver Peaks/Mt Allan home. The colour of the bird would suggest a first year. As you know, they are rarely seen on this side of the harbour.

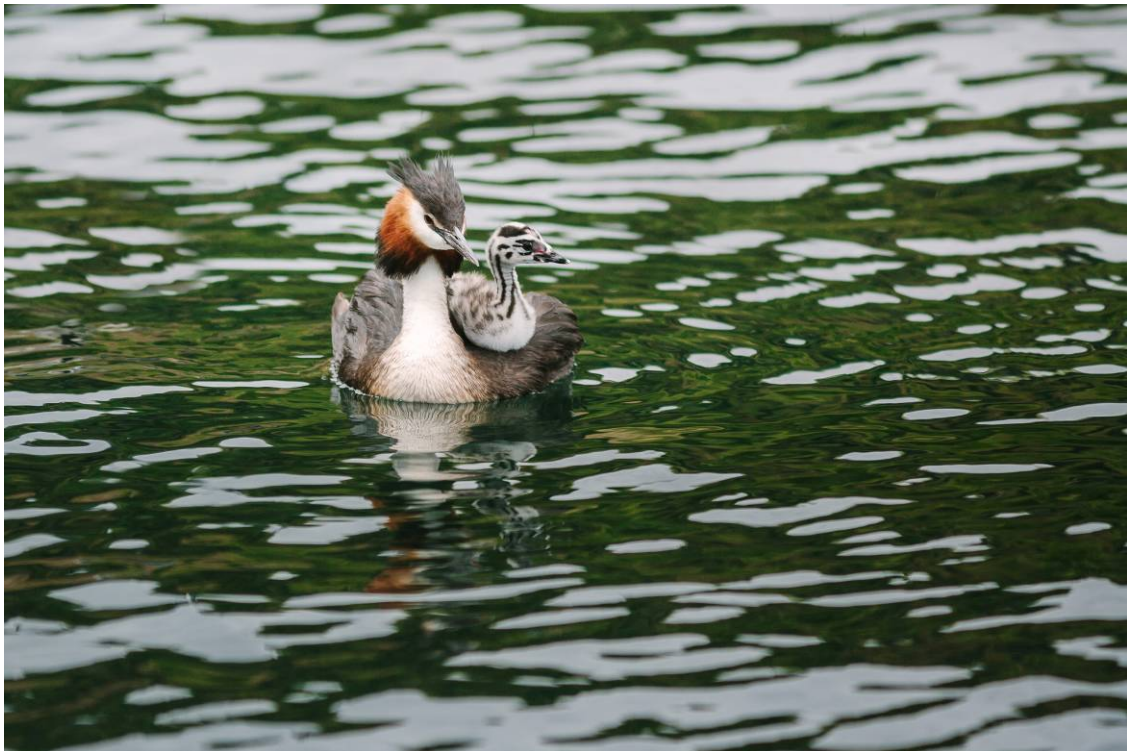
While running the apple press at the Waitati Show on 10 April, Derek Onley saw a falcon cruise low across the crowds at Bland Park. Another, an immature female, hassled by 5 Tui and half a dozen Welcome Swallows, disturbed his gardening and took refuge in a gum tree in Waitati on 23rd.

Notices and Business

Reminders:-



Next Indoor Meeting. Wednesday April 27



Winter wader count Sunday 19 June 2016



High tide Dunedin 1507 hrs. Height 2.0

Contact: peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz

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. Please register online or ask Mary Thompson for a print version if you don't have computer access.

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 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?

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: May 19.