

Birds New Zealand  
PO Box 834, Nelson. [osnz.org.nz](http://osnz.org.nz)  
Regional Representative: Mary Thompson  
197 Balmacewen Rd, Dunedin.  
[maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) 03 4640787  
Regional Recorder: Jim Wilson  
PO Box 6145, Dunedin 9059  
[jim.wilson@actrix.co.nz](mailto:jim.wilson@actrix.co.nz)

*Birds New Zealand*

*Otago Region Newsletter 8/2016 August 2016*

## **Relaxing .(White-faced Heron Watching ) in Fiji**

(Yes I know it's a local newsletter but ..ed.)

It was not as cold or as snowy as we hoped for when we left Dunedin on 21 July but there was a skiff of snow on the Maungatuas as we arrived at the airport. A short hop to Christchurch then an Airbus to Nandi where we arrived after dark. As we walked along the outside passenger gantry I noticed a whole flock of birds huddled up in the half light and approached for a closer look only to observe a large flock of common mynah! The next morning we flew at first light to Savusavu on Vanua Levu and checked in at the Koro Sun Resort.



After settling I started looking around and saw my first Fijian endemic, a female orange-breasted myzomela which is a small common honeyeater. This was followed by the ubiquitous mynah and then a red-vented bulbul. After a couple of strolls around the hotel I was able to see white collared

kingfisher, wattled honeyeater and white-rumped swiftlet. On the coral reef at low tide were a couple of reef heron and a white faced heron. This latter is of interest as according to the book it is out of range on this island (though not unexpected ).



The next morning we headed into town for a wander around. More (or possibly the same) white faced heron on the airstrip. In Savusavu the only observation of merit was a jungle mynah sort of attached to a large flock of common mynah. After lunch along the coral with the tide out, foraging were a white faced heron and along the road pacific swallows (a more scruffy version of the welcome swallow ), a white-collared kingfisher, sitting on a convenient powerline and a scarlet robin. Later, back at the burre with a cup of tea when the local orange-breasted myzomela appeared flitting from flower to flower.



As I lined my camera up there was a large crash in the bush as if a pigeon had arrived but then a grey blur with pointed wings flew out and settled on a nearby coconut play, revealing itself to be a Fiji goshawk. I continued collecting observations and attempting to get an understanding of the calls

A bike ride along the road saw a white necked pigeon sitting in a tree, more white collared kingfisher and another white-faced heron.

That evening while down at the pool a grey phase and a white phase reef heron were observed. The next highlight was watching a frigate bird with its distinctive tail float by on the coastal breeze.

Cyclone damage was still visible around the place, up rooted trees and coconut palms were still present but a lot had been cleared away. Some houses were still wrecked and others were being repaired. But worst impacts were the coral; huge areas of broken coral with little obvious regrowth. Reef fish of a good range of colours were present especially along edges where there were nooks and crannies to hide. But they were mostly small and no big schools were seen.

The tide was out in the afternoons. So this was the time to walk out on the coral looking at the iridescent coloured crabs. As well the herons were out foraging. One evening I noticed a small hunched bird about the size of an oystercatcher poorly lit foraging on the coral. Clearly smaller than a reef heron and very dull in colour. I arrived out on the coral from the right angle to make sure it was not back lit and the bird flew in and started foraging. A jizz of much more run and peck than either a reef heron or a white faced heron, no tail and rufous colouring, bright yellow eye and black crown. After a lot of head scratching and looking at books and websites it was a mangrove or striated heron. This is more a bird of the mangroves but is found on the reefs.

The next afternoon we were out walking and got onto a flock of Fiji white-eye, much like ours but no rufous flanks and distinguished from the silvery by having a lot more yellow on the breast and belly.

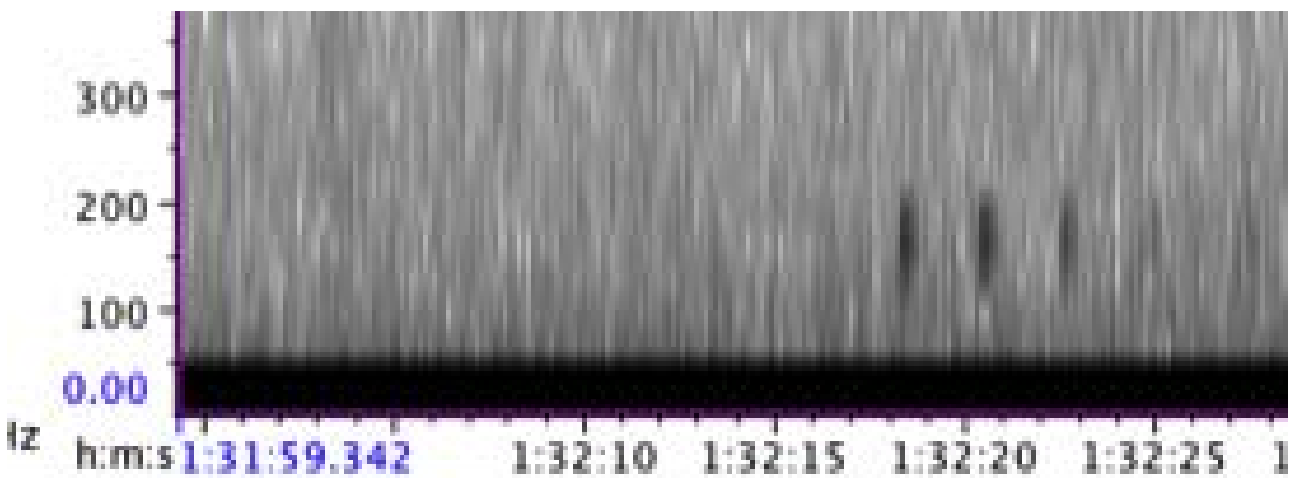
There are a number of pigeons on the Fiji list, but not near where we were staying. We came across a group of barking pigeons on a forest walk behind the resort and the one white necked pigeon seen along the road, nothing else was seen. Also parrots were uncommon in this part of Fiji. Only one collared lory flew overhead while I was in the pool one afternoon. No waders along this part of the coast. On our last afternoon we were back on Viti Levu, the bigger Island and in an area which was a lot more populated and occupied as farmland. Here the Birds were dominated by common mynah and red vented bulbul. One fiji goshawk and another white-faced heron were also seen. Overall a relaxing week with some fascinating bird watching.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## **Bittern Booms 2015; a study by Mary Thompson**

Booming bitterns were picked up with acoustic recorders in the Sinclair Wetlands in 2011, 2012 and 2014, with estimates of up to 4 bitterns present. I wanted to determine when in the year the bitterns began booming, and when was peak booming time.

I put automatic recorders on Lonely Island and on Ram Island set to record for 4 hours from sunset and before sunrise for each month from August through December 2015, for at least 21 days each month. About 70-80 % of nights produced clear recordings.



Part of a sonogram showing one boom train.

A sequence of booms, a ‘boom train’ was usually between 3 and 4 booms long; with about 2 seconds between booms. Boom trains could be sequentially repeated as many as 30 times with about 2 minutes between them.

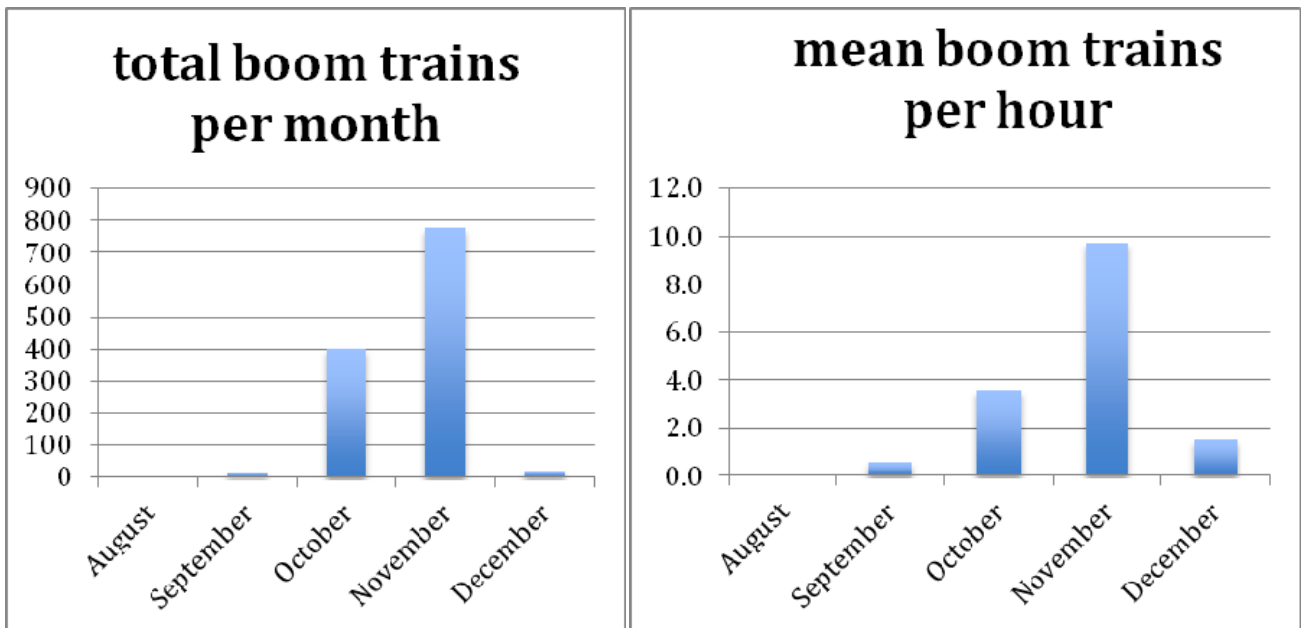
### **When did bitterns start booming?**

No booms were recorded in August. The first boom train was recorded on 8th September and one before sunrise on the 9th September. In September 30% of the nights had booms but only 14 single boom trains were recorded. The number of boom trains peaked in October and November, when about 60% of the analyzable nights recorded booming calls. The number of boom trains per hour in November was nearly 3 times higher than in October. The number of booms in December dropped by about 10-fold from the max. of November. Boom trains began to be repeated in long sequences of up to 30 repeats from mid-October (25 October) and this continued through November. So the peak booming in the Sinclair

Wetlands occurs the last week of October and in November. This is when I think we should aim to try to locate the position (territory) of the booming birds, although my data suggests that booms would not necessarily be expected to be heard every night.

### **At what time of the night are the booms occurring?**

The maximum number of booms (50% of all) occurred from 21:00 to 23:00 i.e. from between 1 and 3 hours after sunset. This is later than in NI and may be due to longer twilight down here.



### **Comparing Lonely Island and Ram Island recordings.**

Lonely Island is more exposed so there were fewer days with usable recordings due to wind and rain interfering. Most booms heard on Ram Island were also heard on Lonely Island although some booms heard on Lonely Island were not picked up at Ram Island, so maybe these were from a different bird. It is very hard to assess how many bitterns were booming, but I would estimate 3. The number of boom in a train did vary; sometimes 3, 4 or 5; does this indicate different birds? At one site there would be loud clear booms followed by faint booms suggesting two birds being picked up, one close and one far away.

### **Further monitoring.**

Suggest placing acoustic recorder on Ram Island from 25th October to 25th November in 2016, set to record for 4h in evening and morning.



Also attempt to listen for booms and determine direction they are coming from to try to pin-point location of bittern territory.. We will attempt to get teams of listeners in place on calm, fine evenings, late October/early November.



### **Ornithological snippets**

This month's summary has a distinct bias towards waterbirds. Firstly, a late report via Ebird of a **pied shag** at Taiaroa Head on 6th March (Jesse Gibson). Bruce McKinlay saw a **little black shag** at the Harbour Basin on 13th August. The **cattle egret** flock on Inchclutha had risen to 21 on 7th August; meanwhile another Ebird report (filed under Canterbury!) was of a **bittern** seen at Corbies Creek near Otematata by Dean Nelson on 28th July. On 11th August Tom Waterhouse found a banded **black stilt** at All Day Bay Lagoon, shortly after discovering 2 **black-fronted dotterel** at Oamaru-Fortification Road ponds. Finally, the compiler screeched to a halt while cycling through Balclutha town centre on 28th July, as 4 **black-fronted terns** passed low overhead, taking a short cut from one stretch of the river to another.



Janet Ledingham has also been out and about, taking a trip up to Glentanner with brief stop at All Day Bay on 17 August. "I went up to Ohau and then Glentanner yesterday and on the way stopped at All Day Bay Lagoon. Huge numbers of **black-backed gulls** on their usual patch and a few waders at the south end, among them 4 **black stilts**. Fortification Road was a disappointment. The small pond where **black stilts** and **dotterels, black-fronted and banded** species, have been in recent years was dry and looks to have been ploughed. Obviously not owned by a bird-lover. (but see above just 6 days beforehand. ed.)

After a lunch at Ohau I went on up to Glentanner to see what was about and found a DOC truck with food plates around it and a gathering of the newly released **black stilts** (just a few days ago I was told). What a treat, even though the sun wasn't helpful for ideal photography. There were also a number of adults, both with them and a short distance away. **Wrybills** and **Banded dotterels** were about in small numbers."



photo Janet Ledingham





yum Janet's lunch

photo Janet Ledingham

The bulk of this summary has been compiled from Ebird reports; however, any interesting observations (not just rare birds, but things in out of the way places, high numbers, interesting behaviour) would be welcome – please send them to [richard@pcconnect.co.nz](mailto:richard@pcconnect.co.nz) **Richard Schofield**

### **Aurora Science Fair 2016.**

Helen Taylor and Peter Schweigman were our judges this year. Thanks to them both for offering to do this job. They report that they were very impressed with the work the students had done and felt the standard was much better than the previous time. There were four projects on birds.

The winner was Tessa McConachi from year 8 at St Hilda College. Her project was called Birds of Dunedin - a bird biodiversity study. Tessa had conducted surveys in summer and winter in 7 different sites across Dunedin encompassing locations with an without vegetation. She then compared species abundance at those sites and identified trends in species



occurrence. It was a very well thought through study - lots of forward planning and some nicely presented results and conclusions. Plus it fits right in with the work that BirdsNZ does, so it was a great choice for a prizewinner. She received a fabulous bird book, so hope this will encourage her to continue her interest in birds.

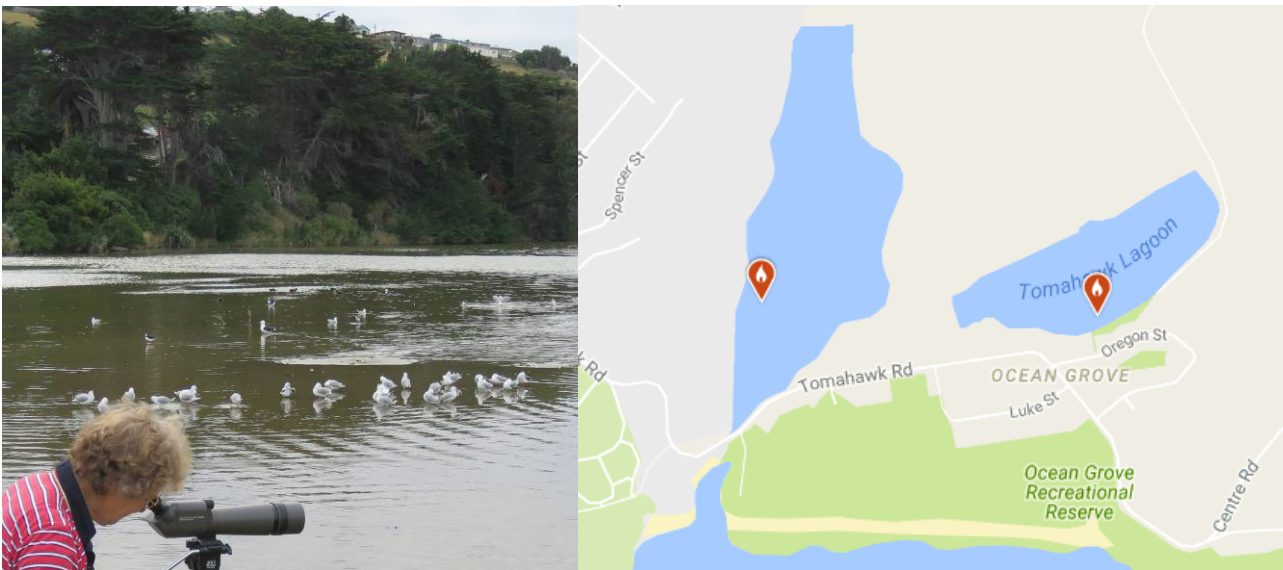
Our highly commended went to Benjamin Tucker, a year 7 student who did a study on what colour food the birds in his garden preferred to eat. He was inspired by them eating all the blue grass seed his parents put out on the lawn. Another very well presented study.

The other studies were on cats being attracted to bird calls and on colour as a food attractant.

**Mary Thompson**

## Notices and Business

### Tomahawk Lagoon Survey Methods



We have decided that the Tomahawk Lagoons should be fully surveyed for at least one year to provide a good idea of the species and number of birds using the lagoons, and when they are present during the year. With the data entered on eBird it will be available for analysis for years to come and contribute to knowledge of changes of bird numbers and distribution over time, and provide data to inform management decisions for the lagoons.

This is a birding area that is close enough to visit often and count the waterbirds present and enter the observations on eBird. So whenever you

find you have time, the weather is nice, and you want to do some birdwatching, head to Tomahawk; the large lagoon can easily be observed from the road (Tomahawk Road just past the bridge) and the smaller lagoon is reached down Oregon Street (further along on the left), then down a driveway to “Walkway” the parking area is reached overlooking the water. Counting can be done with binoculars although a telescope does make it easier. It is really important that your counts are entered in eBird. All counts will be entered at the same location and tagged with “Birds NZ survey”; follow the instructions below. If you have difficulty just let me know and we can help. Please keep your notebook count records safe until entered.

Occasionally we will organize group trips to the area and perhaps invite the public as well, but in the meantime start your own counting project.

### **How to enter your bird observations on eBird.**

**Go to eBird NZ website** <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand/>

**Submit Observations.** You will need to create an account (if you haven't yet registered)

### **Sign In**

**Identify the Location.** Find it on a Map. Enter New Zealand (NZ) (choose from drop-down box). A map of NZ appears; Where did you bird?

Enter Tomahawk Lagoon. Select Tomahawk Lagoon, Dunedin, Otago from Drop-down box

A map showing Birding Hotspots at lagoon will appear (you may need to zoom in or out to get a good view. Click on the Birding Hotspot in the middle of the large lagoon. Chosen location: Dunedin –Tomahawk Lagoon

[OR Click on Birding hotspot in middle of smaller lagoon;\Chosen location Upper Tomahawk Lagoon]

{For subsequent submissions you will find Dunedin Tomahawk Lagoon in the drop down box in your Choose from Your Locations}

Click Continue



**Complete Date and Effort**

(usually stationary count for a set amount of time for a total count of all waterbirds). Put Birds NZ survey in the comments box. Click Continue

**Complete checklists** with numbers of all the species you saw.

You are asked, "Are you submitting a complete checklist of all the birds you were able to identify? Click Yes (or No if there were a lot of ducks miles away or you didn't count everything). Click Submit. Make any corrections or additional information as prompted)

This data will now be available for analysis for years to come and contribute to knowledge of changes of bird numbers and distribution over time.

**Mary Thompson**

**Help us tweet out the word on birds!**

In case you haven't heard, Birds NZ is now using twitter as another way to engage with people around New Zealand (and further afield) and get them interested in our birds. For those of you who aren't familiar with twitter, it's an online social media platform where we can "tweet" our news snippets to anyone who's following our updates. The account has only been running for a couple of months and we already have over 200 followers, which is a great start and shows how popular bird related news can be.

One of the key routes to success on twitter is making sure you have a steady stream of news to tweet out to your followers to keep them interested. And that's where you can all be involved without even setting foot on twitter if you don't want to! We would like to be able to tweet out interesting bird sightings to illustrate the knowledge and expertise within the society, and to encourage our followers to get out there with a pair of binos or a scope and track down some exciting species. So, if you see something interesting or unusual, please email Helen Taylor as soon as possible at [helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz](mailto:helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz). Helen is on the council and is also running the Birds NZ twitter feed. She can take your news and tweet it out to all our followers.

If you are interested in finding out more about twitter, or even setting up your own account, feel free to contact Helen and ask her about it. It would be great to have more Otago members tweeting along. Twitter is an open platform – you can view the Birds NZ tweets without joining twitter. If you want to see what it's all about, just google @OSNZBirdsNZ and you'll be able to click through to our page. We'll also be posting news on there regarding events and meetings, so it's a great way to stay up to date with what's happening in the society on a daily basis, both in Otago and all over the country.

At this year's Birds NZ conference in Napier, Helen tweeted regular updates with news from the meeting from her own twitter account under a special hashtag marker called #BirdsNZ2016. This hashtag proved so successful that the conference was the third most popular topic on twitter in New Zealand that weekend, and news about the conference was seen by hundreds of thousands of people. It's a fantastic way to get the great work of Birds NZ out there and being talked about by members and those new to the society. We'd be very grateful if you could help us make it even more successful by sharing some of your exciting bird-related news with us!  
**Helen Taylor**

## **Notes of AGM discussion, 27th July.**

### **Finances**

Running expenses of photocopying, postage, refreshments, gifts, are covered by \$350 capitation payment. Income from supply of Harbour Survey data to consulting firm, travel grant from Sinclair Wetlands and project funds are available for new projects-ideas to RR, please.

Newsletter-is highlight of the month. Please send contributions to Editor. A huge thank you to Derek for compiling it.

Refreshments for meeting looked after by Francie and Pat; thanks so much and also the chocolate biscuits much appreciated.

### **Projects**

Completed Beyond Orokonui.

Provided events for Wild Dunedin Festival and Science Festival.

Completed one year of Sinclair Wetlands survey.

Wader counts-on-going (P Schweigman)



### **Possible New Projects discussed.**

Town Belt Survey in conjunction with Amenities Society. Much support for the idea. Working on a plan of 8 counting stations and web-based reporting system of presence/absence of species. The main aim is to raise awareness and enthuse more general public about birds and value of Town Belt. With new initiative of pest-free NZ, getting neighbours of Town Belt on board would be good. The data would be collected in a format that could be entered on eBird and analyzed.

Mary, Francie, Jill and Alan are on the working group liaising with Paul Pope, etc.

### **Tomahawk Lagoon Monitoring**

We thought Otago Birds NZ should plan a systematic survey of the lagoon.

This would complement water monitoring, etc.

Any personal records of birds in the area should be entered on eBird.

See details of project elsewhere in newsletter.

### **Waikaia/Piano Flat area.**

This area was surveyed in 1km squares on 15th/16th September 1995 (1994 was a mast year). Some of our members remember being involved; parakeets were the most common bird recorded; I doubt whether this is the case now.

A re-survey (22 year later) would likely provide some interesting data on trends.

Enthusiasm for this project to go ahead in Sept 2017 as a joint project with Southland Branch. Offers of help with planning to RR, please.

### **Introduction to Bird Study.**

This course of 7 powerpoint lectures to be offered to public in 2017.

### **Mopanui Survey**

Since the AGM another possibility has presented; Jill Hamel's property on Mopanui is undergoing pest control and Jill is keen to have the area surveyed at this stage to get baseline data. Robin from Orokonui appear to be establishing themselves in the forest and it might be interesting to follow this up. Jill will enlarge on this project at the next meeting.

## **Publicity**

Helen Taylor (Council member and new local member) is tasked with increasing the profile of Birds NZ. Members are encouraged to contribute to Twitter by emailing Helen [helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz](mailto:helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz) with any interesting sightings in our area, and she will Twitter them.

## **Field Trips**

Seabirds off St Clair Coast.

Graeme Loh offered to guide an evening expedition to the predator-proof area above St Clair to watch for sooty shearwaters, fairy prions, nesting spotted shags and gulls.

Date in November 2016 when Moon is in New phase, is to be advised.

## **Okia Reserve**

Thanks to Lala Frazer, who offered to lead a trip to do two 1 km transects for the on-going Peninsula Biodiversity project. We will also look for fernbirds. Bird NZ surveyed this area before it became a reserve.

Date in February 2017 to be advised.

## **Indoor Programme**

Suggestions and offers of topics for next year's programme to RR, please.

One suggestion: an update on using eBird.

## **Sharing the pleasure of watching birds and getting Birds NZ name out there.**

Any interesting bird sightings or observations? Please email **Richard Schofield** <[richard@pconnect.co.nz](mailto:richard@pconnect.co.nz)> Who compiles the Ornithological Snippets for our newsletter.

**Helen Taylor** [helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz](mailto:helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz) Who will spread the word via Twitter

**Bruce McKinlay** <[bruce.mckinlay@osnz.org.nz](mailto:bruce.mckinlay@osnz.org.nz)> Who will post it on Facebook

Other ways to find out what is being seen in our patch (or where you may be going on holiday): Use eBird; Birding NZ Forum <http://www.birdingnz.net/forum>

Remember also that Regional newsletters and events can be found on our Birds NZ website <http://www.osnz.org.nz> **Mary Thompson**



## **Birds New Zealand Research Fund**

This important national fund is managed by Birds New Zealand on behalf of a New Zealand Charitable Trust. We invite applications from individuals or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of New Zealand birds or their environment. This year's closing date is 1 September 2016. For details visit [www.osnz.org.nz/Birds-New-Zealand-Research-Fun](http://www.osnz.org.nz/Birds-New-Zealand-Research-Fun)

## **Request for Dead Seabirds**

Lauren Roman from Tasmania is visiting NZ in September, having finally got her permit to dissect seabirds to check for plastic ingestion for her PhD. Can I request people finding reasonably fresh seabirds – petrels, shearwaters, mollymawks, storm petrels, prions – to freeze them? For larger birds, it may be possible to freeze just the crop and gizzard. Nearer the time I can arrange for either Lauren to visit you or for the specimens to be freighted to Invercargill. Thanks very much for your cooperation in this important research project. Plastic ingestion is an issue of growing concern and any data we can get is valuable. Contact me if you can help.

A reminder about beach patrol records. Keep looking and keep sending me your information.

**Lloyd Esler ph 032130404**



This month's mystery photo perhaps?

## 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 August 24<sup>th</sup>** Chris Lalas, Population trend in Otago shags – fluctuations or decline?
- Wed Sept 28th** Lei Zhu, on "a guide to the birds of China"; Janet Ledingham, "Birds of the Scottish Isles."
- Sat October 15th** Sinclair Wetlands Spring Survey.
- Wed October 26th** Murray Efford on "Urban tui, bellbirds and more."
- Wed November 23** Nic Rawlence and Martyn Kennedy. "Identification of the Otago Shag".
- Sun November 27th** Summer Wader Count. High tide 15.27 at 2m.  
Contact Peter Schweigman  
<peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz>

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: Sept 22.