

Birds New Zealand

Birds New Zealand
PO Box 834, Nelson. osnz.org.nz
Regional Representative: Neil Robertson
PO Box 65, Te Anau, Southland 9640 0211526275
Regional Recorder: Phil Rhodes
44 Dunns Road, RD9 Invercargill 9879 0272314953

Southland Region Newsletter – May 2016



Top Photography Award for Southland Member Glenda Rees

This stunning image of a New Zealand dotterel feasting on a crab has won Southland BIRDS NZ member **Glenda Rees** a Gold medal at the Photographic Society of New Zealand's national exhibition. Selectors viewing images submitted in the 64th Photographic Society of New Zealand's National Exhibition were unanimous the New Zealand Dotterel with crab taken by Glenda was the best digital image illustrating nature.

The southern New Zealand Dotterel is "nationally critical" in conservation terms. They

breed on Stewart Island but some visit the expansive southern estuaries during the winter, which is where this image was taken" Glenda said. "I photographed it on a winter's day, around midday having spent several hours lying in very cold, wet and muddy conditions, but this is normal for my preferred genre of nature photography. The light on a beautiful winter's day in Southland enhances the colours of these birds - I managed the shot just as the bird turned its head showing it had grabbed one of the crab's legs, and also the resulting splashes of water."

PSNZ president Murry Cave said the image impressed the selectors with its strong but simple composition and they liked the way the image captured the character of the bird, catching its prey.

Although Glenda was a seasoned nature photographer, she was in “absolute shock and disbelief” at her image receiving the top award. “I received the email really late at night and I had to keep re-reading it several times to make sure I was not dreaming - to receive such an award amidst the calibre of so many experienced nature photographers is the pinnacle of my photography success to date.”

The national exhibition represents an opportunity for photographers to submit their work for an exhibition, which forms part of the society’s annual convention. This year, 344 people submitted over 1600 photographs in four categories, all vying to be included in the nearly 550 images selected for display.

I am sure all Southland members will wish to join me in offering our warmest congratulations to Glenda for capturing such a wonderful image and winning such a prestigious award.

Neil R

Alloo Bequest committee

In 2015 OSNZ Southland received a very generous bequest from Mrs Dorothy Alloo a former member of the society and keen conservationist. Due to a tight timeline to fit in with the breeding season it was decided to make a grant of \$24K to DOC Stewart Island to put towards a banding programme for the Southern New Zealand Dotterel which, after increasing from 52 birds to 189 has seen a dramatic decrease in recent years to around 120 birds. This banding is currently underway.

It has been decided that in order to maximise the outputs from the remaining money that no further grants will be made until a formal process for considering applications is in place. A committee consisting of Pete McClelland (chair), Neil Robertson, Wynston Cooper, Phil Rhodes and Lloyd Esler has been set up. They now agreed the terms of reference for the committee which include criteria under which future applications will be considered – the criteria include benefits to Southland birds and involvement of Southland OSNZ members.

Now that the Terms of References are completed members are welcome to submit projects for consideration. If any members have any ideas they would like to discuss please contact one of the committee members. Projects may be large or small but the more members that can be involved the better.

Pete McClelland

Spoonbill sightings

On the 5th of April I spent a morning at Rakatu Wetland just south of Manapouri from first light. It was a cool day with a stiff breeze blowing down the valley. A decent total of 37 species were present during my time there however the surprise of the morning, and the last species of the day, was a Royal Spoonbill which flew into the area from the south and landed on submerged sticks in the middle of the Speight Ponds. I was able to shoot a little video while it was there and take a couple of distant photos. During this time it invaded a group of branches occupied by a flock of Grey Teal and sent them scattering from their favoured perch and into the water. I eventually left around midday and on returning to the same location 2 days later found that it had moved on.

On later days I was made aware of other sightings in the Te Anau Basin possibly of the same bird.

Shawn Herron

BIRDS NZ Conference 2017

Southland will be hosting next year's Birds New Zealand National Conference, to be held in **Te Anau** over Queen's Birthday weekend, Saturday and Sunday 3rd -4th June 2017. The favoured venue for the conference is the Te Anau Hotel and Villas, and it is hoped that a good number of members will head south to experience Fiordland in winter.

As usual the conference will include two ‘Scientific days’ with educational workshops, and, on the Monday, various field trips. We are currently working on both the workshop and field trip programme, and if Southland members have any suggestions, or have particular workshop events or field trips they would like to lead, then please let Neil know as soon as possible.

neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz

Recent Sightings in Southland

In early February, just before our summer wader count Lianne and Marco took a canoe around the Invercargill estuary shell banks and spotted a Cattle Egret, White Heron and Whimbrel, unfortunately they were not seen during the official count so we are thinking this may be a better way of getting a more accurate count as long as the weather plays its part.

It looks as though we have three small populations of Red-crowned parakeets with four birds seen or heard at both Otatara Scenic reserve and Omaui reserve, the numbers at Bluff Hill are not known but several birds have been seen and we think they are breeding which is a real bonus.

In March a sick juvenile Yellow-eyed penguin was found off Omaui Beach well out on a sandbank which made it too difficult for the finder to carry back to his vehicle. Unfortunately the bird was found washed up dead a few days later.

On 5th April a Royal Spoonbill was reported, by Shawn Herron, from the Rakatu Wetlands between Manapouri and the Borland Road this was a first from this wetland and well inland for this species. A further Spoonbill sighting, possibly the same bird, in the Rainbow Downs area between Manapouri and Te Anau was reported

Also in April, Phil Rhodes and Neil Robertson, while conducting New Zealand Dotterel counts at Bandy Pt. and Cow Island, discovered a Grey-tailed Tattler. As the tide came in at Bandy Point it pushed the Tattler towards the observers who were given splendid views of this scarce but regular visitor roosting with the Dotterel flock. The Tattler was still present in early May.

A visit to the head of Awarua bay on the same day produced two Sanderlings, a Wrybill and three Golden Plovers. Another visit the following week also added three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

Matt Jones reported 3 Cattle Egrets and a Reef Heron from Stewart Island and there were further reports of Cattle Egrets during April, two birds in the Thornbury area and, astonishingly, a single Cattle Egret was spotted feeding amongst New Zealand Fur Seals on the Nee Islets in Doubtful Sound.

A visit to Pleasure Bay Lagoon in the Invercargill estuary turned up at least 3 Little black shags; this was the second report of this species at this lagoon and is well worth a visit for any local or visiting birders. It's proximity to the airport and the Invercargill CBD is also a bonus.

Phil Rhodes

New Zealand Dotterel banding at Awarua Bay

From the 9th to the 11th of May The Department of Conservation undertook to band New Zealand Dotterel at Awarua Bay as part of the Southern New Zealand Dotterel research project that is being supported by OSNZ Southland with a \$24,000 grant from the Dorothy Alloo bequest. Fortunately a number of Southland OSNZ members were able to participate. Phil Rhodes, Lianne Kooiman and Pete McClelland from the society took the opportunity to observe the attempts to catch the birds using noose mats along with DOC colleagues Sarah Crump and Rose Collen (also an OSNZ member).

For those who aren't familiar with Awarua Bay, the most common roost site for NZ Dotterels is Bandy Point about half way along the bay on the south side. There are several other less used sites around the bay. Fortunately, while the weather was highly variable during this period with rain each day, it was fine and reasonably calm at the crucial time each evening. This was as the tide was nearing its peak pushing the birds onto their high tide roost. A total of 45 birds turned up each day including up to 4 banded birds. Only two birds were caught, one of which was already banded; this was in part due to the limited catching window as the tide comes in rapidly. While the dotterel were reasonably cooperative allowing themselves to be herded over the mats, they were easily startled by other birds flying past and each evening they were disturbed and flew over to the nearby Cow Island roost which is inaccessible at high tide.

As there was limited opportunity to help with the capture/banding, group members made the most of being there by checking out the other birds present including the usual waterfowl, godwits, stilts, pied and variable oystercatcher, banded dotterel, red-necked stints and up to 38 knots, as well as the Grey-tailed tattler which looks like it may over winter. For those that haven't been to the bay on an incoming tide it is well worth the walk to just watch, and listen as the tide comes in.

Pete McClelland

Grey-tailed Tattler at Awarua Bay

The waders (birds of the Order Charadriiformes, suborder Charadrii) on Awarua Bay have been recorded by ornithologists for more than fifty years. Major assessments were made in 1962, 1969 and 1987 by ornithologists from throughout New Zealand during field study weeks organised by the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (now Birds New Zealand). Most years since 1976 Southland members of Birds New Zealand have undertaken twice-yearly counts of wading birds on the bay.

Awarua Bay is a nationally important site for waders. The bay consistently supports the second highest population of waders in Southland. It is also noted for the fact that up to about 30% of the southern subspecies of the New Zealand dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus obscurus*) winters.

In total, 28 species and subspecies of waders, 21 of which are trans-equatorial migratory species, have been recorded on the bay. Among these are a number of uncommon visitors to New Zealand, notably Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), Grey-tailed tattler (*Tringa brevipes*), Greenshank (*T. nebularia*), Marsh Sandpiper (*T. stagnatilis*), Terek Sandpiper (*T. terek*), Lesser and Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus* and *Ch. l. leschenaultii*), and Grey Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*).

The Grey-tailed Tattler is a regular visitor to the bay in low numbers. Between 1976 and 2000 it was recorded in all but two years and since then it has been reported in 2006, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2016. There are two records of birds over-wintering, one bird in June 1992 and two in August 1998.

Of the 91 tattlers recorded in the national summer censuses 1983 – 1993 (Sagar *et al* 1999), 28 (30.7%) were on Awarua Bay (a point unfortunately not made by Sagar *et al*).

Highest counts:

Summer – 5 in February 1999; Winter – 2 in August 1998; Others – 5 in March and April 1985

While Grey-tailed Tattlers generally favour the roosts at the eastern end of the bay, they have also been recorded at 'Bandy Point' on the south side of the bay.

Wynston Cooper
19 May 2016



Reference: Sagar, P.M.; Shankar, U.; Brown, S. 1999. Distribution and number of waders in New Zealand 1983 – 1994. *Notornis* 46: 1-43.

Trip to Miranda, Manukau Harbour and Bay of Plenty, February 2016

Earlier this year I took advantage of a 6-day break from work to visit some of my favourite North Island birding spots. Basing my stay at the Miranda Shorebird Centre, I also took the opportunity to visit my good friend Tim Barnard and spend a day birding with him in the Bay of Plenty. On arrival at Miranda I found that it had been fully booked by DOC, who were running a kiwi-dog handlers course; however Keith Woodley very kindly offered me his spare room for the week.



Curlew Sandpiper



Pectoral Sandpiper

Miranda did not disappoint with a fantastic selection of shorebirds. Indeed, when I arrived on a falling tide and scanned the exposed mud in front of the hide almost the first bird I noticed was the Little Whimbrel. A couple of visitors approached me and asked a few questions about the birds and I did my good citizen bit and pointed out a selection of the waders that were in view.



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper



Whimbrel with South Island Oystercatcher

Unfortunately a Swamp Harrier flew over and put up most of the birds; when they resettled the Little Whimbrel was nowhere to be seen, and I hadn't even managed to open my camera bag. Serves me right for being helpful to visitors when I should be concentrating on the job in hand!!



Two Pied Stilts (or is it four?)



Wrybill

The rest of the week turned up more good birds and I managed to capture video of most of them. I also managed a number of sequences capturing the many and varied feeding techniques adopted by the shorebirds; hopefully I might be able to make a short film focussing on how waders feed as an aid to their identification (watch this space).

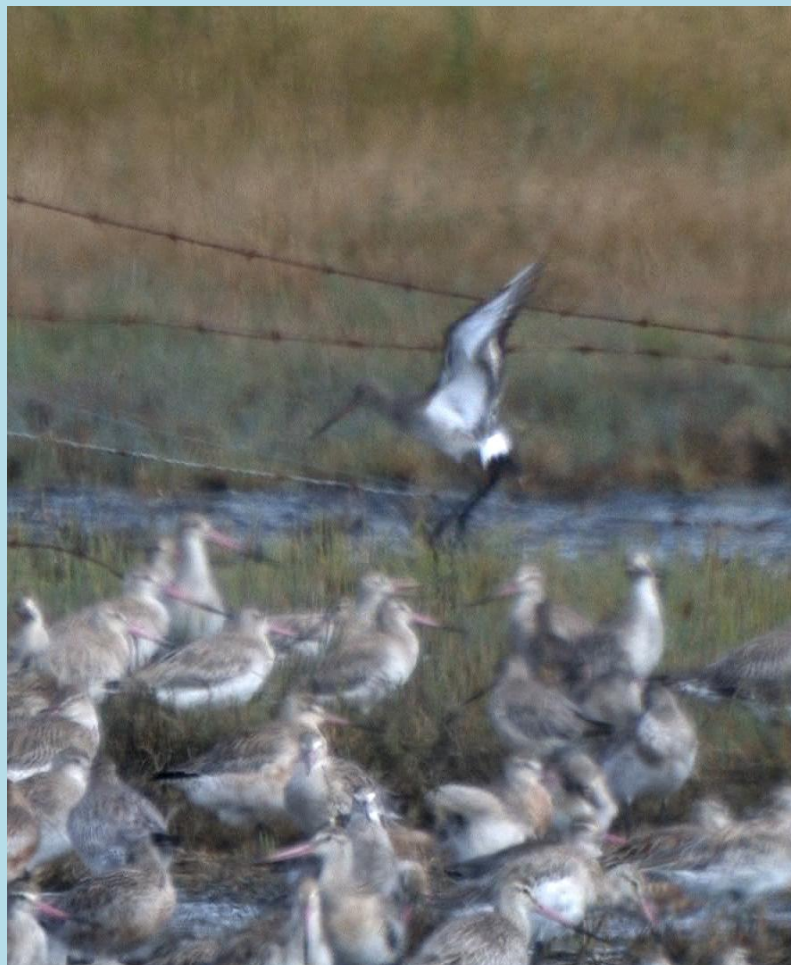


Marsh Sandpiper



Pacific Golden Plover

Key shorebirds seen at Miranda included: Little Whimbrel, Marsh Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Eastern Curlew, Asiatic Whimbrel, Black-tailed Godwit, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-necked Stint, NZ Dotterel, Banded Dotterel, Wrybill, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, South Island Oystercatcher, Variable Oystercatcher, Masked Lapwing, Pied Stilt and Pied/Black Stilt hybrid.



Black-tailed Godwit taking flight

At the end of the week David Lawrie very kindly offered to accompany me and a couple of other birders from Miranda to look for the Broad-billed Sandpiper. We spent the afternoon at Kidd's Shell Banks on the south side of the Manukau Harbour, wading across to the shell banks just before high tide. We ended up sharing quite a small area with hundreds of Red Knot and Godwits, but were also treated to close views of at least five Little Terns, a Shore Plover and a Wandering Tattler – what a treat.



Shore Plover



Wandering Tattler

As the tide started to go out we explored a further section of the shell banks to the east, but no sign of the target bird. We did however find two Eastern Curlews, with huge long bills, and also a number of Red-necked Stints and Wrybills feeding on the newly exposed mud.



Far Eastern Curlews



Little Terns

On our return, and just when we were beginning to give up hope, David finally spotted the tiny wader we had been seeking, and we were treated to stunning prolonged close views of a Broad-billed Sandpiper.



Broad-billed Sandpiper

The final leg of the trip took me down to area just north of Rotorua, where I stayed with Tim Barnard. The following morning we headed to the eastern end of the Bay of Plenty, and Ohiwa Harbour, just east of Whatakane. Approaching the harbour we had brief views of a North Island Weka on the side of the road. Arriving at the harbour we found a selection of shorebirds, with good numbers of Wrybill, Banded Dotterels, New Zealand Dotterels and Bar-tailed Godwits. After a brief walk along the beach we found our target, a superb male Oriental Plover, just coming in to breeding plumage – what a result! We spent a good hour photographing, filming and just generally enjoying being in the presence of a very special shorebird.



Oriental Plover

Later in the day we headed west along the bay to another of Tim's local birding hot-spots, Little Waihi Estuary. I had been here with Tim just a few months earlier and had been very impressed with the range of species here. Once again the site came up with the goods when we found a Grey-tailed Tattler feeding in amongst a group of roosting Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knot. A fitting end to what had been a remarkably successful trip.

Special thanks are due to Keith Woodley, David Lawrie and Tim Barnard for their generous and kind hospitality during my visit.

Neil Robertson

Wader Census - 20-22 February 2016

The summer shorebird count was conducted over the weekend of 20-22 February 2016. A total of six members took part, Lianne Kooiman, Lloyd Esler, Wynston Cooper, Pete McClelland, Phil Rhodes and Neil Robertson. The combination of a very high tide and strong winds on 20th made counting difficult at some sites, in particular, the eastern end of Awarua Bay, so Neil Robertson did a second visit on 22 February when conditions were more favourable.

A total of 4691 birds were counted of 18 different species.

Haldane Estuary

South Island Oystercatcher - 9
Variable Oystercatcher - 3
Pied Stilt - 23
Masked Lapwing - 1
Bar-tailed Godwit - 81
White-faced Heron - 12
Royal Spoonbill - 7

Waikawa Harbour

South Island Oystercatcher - 300
Variable Oystercatcher - 12
Pied Stilt - 89
White-faced Heron - 1
Royal Spoonbill - 14

Fortrose Estuary

South Island Oystercatcher - 204
Variable Oystercatcher - 2
Pied Stilt - 98
Bar-tailed Godwit - 123
Black-fronted Tern - 36
White-faced Heron - 3
Royal Spoonbill - 68

Tiwai Smelter Grounds

South Island Oystercatcher - 425
Variable Oystercatcher - 2
Masked Lapwing - 2

Riverton Estuary

South Island Oystercatcher - 435
Pied Stilt - 36
Masked Lapwing - 21
Ruddy Turnstone - 58
Bar-tailed Godwit - 447
White-faced Heron - 22
Royal Spoonbill - 48

Shell Banks, Invercargill Estuary

South Island Oystercatcher - 480
Pied Stilt - 20
Masked Lapwing - 11
Ruddy Turnstone - 10
Bar-tailed Godwit - 620
Caspian Tern - 15
White-fronted Tern - 1
White-faced Heron - 8

Awarua Bay, South

South Island Oystercatcher - 3
Ruddy turnstone - 3
Bar-tailed Godwit - 134

Awarua Bay, Head of Bay

South Island Oystercatcher - 71
Variable Oystercatcher - 8
Pied Stilt - 28
Banded Dotterel - 145
Wrybill - 1
Pacific Golden Plover - 5
Ruddy Turnstone - 82
Red Knot - 4
Bar-tailed Godwit - 429
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper - 2
Red-necked Stint - 23
Sanderling - 3
White-faced Heron - 2
Australasian Bittern - 7

The Winter Count will be held on the weekend of 4-5 June 2016. Please contact Phil Rhodes on 0272314953 if you want to take part.

Neil Robertson

Events

Birds New Zealand National Conference and AGM in Napier	3-6 th June 2016
Winter Wader Census contact Phil Rhodes	4-5 th June 2016
NZ Dotterel Banding Mason's Bay kcarter@doc.govt.nz	24 th May - 1 st June 2016
NZ Dotterel Banding Awarua Bay kcarter@doc.govt.nz	7 th - 10 th June 2016
Garden Bird Survey	25 th June - 3 rd July 2016
Southland Field Club meeting (tba) contact Lloyd Esler	9 th June 2016