

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

October 2011

www.osnz.org.nz and www.notornis.org.nz

Congratulations to Julia White, a Wellington member, for volunteering as national membership secretary of the Ornithological Society – and a big thank you from us all!

Programme from October 2011 to July 2012

3rd October: *“Auckland Island merganser - an unraveling tale”*. Dr. Murray Williams, OSNZ Councillor. Murray will describe his recent research in Europe on some aspects of the biology of the extinct Auckland Island merganser.

Change of speaker and topic for 7 November!

7th November: *“The great prion wreck of 2011”*. Mr. Graeme Taylor, Dept of Conservation, Wellington. Graeme will review the large and extensive wreck of several species of seabirds, mainly prions, in June and July of this year. How extensive was the event, why did it happen, what species of birds were most affected and what does the wreck mean for seabird conservation? These are some of the questions that can be examined.

5th December: *“An overview of bird watching in UK, New Zealand and Australia”*. Mr. Jim Murray. A keen Wellington member/birdwatcher. As the year ends Jim will provide a colourful and light-hearted review of some of his bird-watching adventures in New Zealand, Australia and in the UK. As is customary we will arrange for a social beginning to our evening with drinks and Christmas cake.

January 2012: No local meeting.

13th February: **A delay of one week is proposed caused by Waitangi Day falling on the first Monday of the month.** Short presentations by Wellington members on spring and summer bird watching, bird study and bird conservation activities. Please let the RR know if you wish to make a presentation.

5th March: *“What do we know about the NZ populations and ecology of shag species of the Wellington region, and how have they been coping recently?”* Dr. Ralph Powlesland. Former DOC ornithologist. Ralph has studied the dynamics of the shag populations in and near Wellington for many years and will review some conclusions of his studies in his talk to us.

2nd April: To be advised.

7th May: *“Are endangered kiwi in-breeding? A review of recent genetic studies on in-breeding depression in Okarito brown kiwi (rowi)”*. Dr Kristina Ramstad, Post-doctoral Fellow, Conservation Genomics, Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology & Evolution, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington. Kristina will

review what has been learned from her genetic studies on Okarito brown kiwi (rowi) and examines the question – are already endangered kiwi even more at risk due to inbreeding?

June – no local meeting. The national society conference and AGM is being held in Tauranga from Friday 1st June to Monday 4th June.

2nd July: “*Studies on Kereru and their role in Forest Ecology (or a related title)*”. Ms. Monica Awasthy, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington. Monica will discuss aspects of her recent post-graduate research on kereru / wood pigeon and the important role of this species in forest ecology.

Offers to lead or assist with field trips and suggestions and ideas for evening meetings would be appreciated.

Field activities:

1. “*Mist-netting and passerine banding*” at Wellington Zoo and elsewhere in Wellington. Sessions are usually held on a Saturday, or on Sunday if the weather is too wet on Saturday.
2. “*Monitoring of shore plover*” on Mana Island and at adjacent mainland sites, especially Plimmerton, Whitireia Park, Titahi Bay and Green Point. Regular monitoring of the movement of birds will continue during the year. Contact Barry Dent for details.
3. “*Kapiti Island Bird Survey*”. Led by Dr. Colin Miskelly. A long-term survey of forest birds on parts of Kapiti Island will continue until mid-2012. Overnight stays on the island are necessary – always comfortable and with pleasant company. The next survey is planned for mid/late-October, then in January 2012. More volunteers are welcome.
4. “*Little Penguin studies on Matiu/Somes Island*”. Led by Reg. Cotter. Breeding success and tagging studies to better understand the biology of little penguins in Wellington Harbour are conducted.
5. “*Caspian tern surveys at Onoke, Wairarapa*”. Although banding work is no longer carried out counts of Caspian terns and of other species will continue in spring-early summer along the length of the Onoke Spit. OSNZ Wairarapa has once again invited Wellington members to participate. The second of three counts is proposed on **Saturday 15th October**, but this and later count dates are dependent on the weather. It is planned that another count will be on **5th November**. If anyone is interested in joining in please let me know and I'll assemble a list that can be passed to Peggy Duncan, Wairarapa RR. Meet at the southern end of the Western Lake Road, about 40 km south of Featherston. The walk is about 6 km (3 km to the end of the Onoke Spit and return, on stony ground).
6. “*Pauatahanui Inlet Bird survey*”. It is proposed that the Pauatahanui Inlet re-survey of birds will recommence in June 2012 and run until mid-2014. Wellington members have surveyed the birds in the Pauatahanui Inlet of Porirua Harbour over a 30 year period commencing in 1982, in three two-year blocks, 1982-84, 1992-94 and 2002-04. The fourth survey will extend the data set over a period of 40 years. More details will be advised closer to the time.
7. “*National Royal Spoonbill Survey*”. A national survey of Royal spoonbills will be held next year, probably on Sunday 12 August 2012. It is being coordinated by the RR Dunedin and builds on earlier surveys in 1991, 1996 and 2000. More details later.

Monthly Meetings in Wellington City

Wellington Region meetings are at Turnbull House, Bowen St, Wellington.

Access to Turnbull House through the front door is available from 7 pm and meetings commence at 7.30 pm. The digital screen in the entrance hallway will guide you to the room. The society now needs to pay for room hire so as a matter of regular practice we would appreciate all members and visitors attending making a **gold coin donation** to cover the \$70 cost of room hire. A collection basket will be on the front table. Car parking and bus stops are nearby.

Emperor penguin on the Kapiti Coast

One of the most spectacular birds to have been seen in the Wellington Region for many years, and by far the most publicized, was a juvenile **emperor penguin** (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) that arrived on Pekapeka Beach on the Kapiti coast in mid-June. Many members, especially Kapiti coast members, saw the bird – often more than once – and others visited from various parts of New Zealand. All were astonished and thrilled to see such an unusual and rare species on a local beach. Needless to say, an ‘usual bird report’ has been filed for consideration by the Records Appraisal Committee. The emperor penguin (later named “Happy Feet”) made news headlines all over the world and continued to capture the attention of many once it was taken to Wellington Zoo for care and its release recently in the Southern Ocean.

The *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand* (2010) notes (page 53) that there is only one earlier mainland New Zealand record for the emperor penguin, on Oreti Beach, Southland in April 1967. The species seldom ranges north of the Antarctic pack-ice.



“Happy Feet” as a healthy bird on Pekapeka Beach on 21 June 2011; Kapiti Island is in the background.

Photo: Alan Tennyson

Shore plovers at Plimmerton

Numerous observers, including several members on a post-OSNZ conference field trip (6th June), were lucky enough to see a flock of 14 **shore plovers** (*Thinornis novaeseelandiae*) on the intertidal foreshore and beach adjacent to the Plimmerton Fire Station, Porirua City. Several members revisited the site a day later and counted 24 birds. On Wednesday 8th June 34 shore plovers were present, perhaps 20% of the total New Zealand (and World) population of the species! Several releases of captive bred shore plovers have been made on Mana Island since 2006 and breeding now occurs regularly on the island.

Although some shore plovers have been seen from time to time on the Plimmerton shoreline for more than a year we are unaware of an influx as large as 34 birds. One pair attempted to nest near the Plimmerton Sailing Club last year. From June 2011 until about August 20 or more plovers remained, coming and going to Mana Island, and staying mostly on and near the rock platforms adjacent to the Plimmerton Fire Station. They have often roosted overnight beside the fire station (where they are vulnerable to attack from domestic cats)! Several members have recorded colour band combinations of the birds present and these have been passed on to Mana Island Dept of Conservation (DOC) staff. The Plimmerton locality is a very accessible site.

The birds are mostly feeding on the tide-line and in the washed up kelp. They move quickly when feeding but also spend time roosting and sleeping in the sun and some periodically bath in rock pools. From time to time there have been some amazing flock flights such as the photo below of 27 shore plovers in flight. One photo taken shows 33 birds in flight, a picture that is probably unique for shore plovers on the New Zealand mainland. There is no interaction with other nearby birds that are sometimes present (red-billed gulls, white-fronted and Caspian terns, variable oystercatchers, little black and little shags, white-faced herons, house sparrows).

Offers to help monitor the presence and band combination identity of the plovers are welcome. In late September there were no shore plovers at Plimmerton and most are now on Mana Island but monitoring is still important. Some pairs now appear to be scouting for breeding sites. Please send your records to the RR, or to Barry Dent (barry.dent@bdq.co.nz) who coordinates observations with Mana Island DOC staff.



27 shore plovers in flight at Plimmerton, 8 June 2011.



17 shore plovers at rest on a Plimmerton foreshore rock platform, 8 June 2011. Photos: Ian Armitage

OSNZ Submission about Wetland Birds to the Porirua Harbour Strategy and Action Plan

On behalf of the society a submission about wetland birds has been made to the Porirua Harbour Strategy and Action Plan that is under public consultation presently. Part of a summary of the submission reads as follows:

The society has surveyed the birds in the Pauatahanui Inlet of Porirua Harbour over a 30 year period commencing in 1982, in three two-year blocks, 1982-84, 1992-94 and 2002-04. The inlet has long been recognised by ornithologists as being a valuable habitat for many species of wetland birds in the southern North Island. Valuable data has been collected through the voluntary efforts of society members over this 30 year period that illustrate changes in the occurrence, distribution and numbers of several species of marine and freshwater birds that primarily depend on the water, rocks and mudflats as their primary feeding habitats. The survey will recommence in mid-2012 for the 2012-14 period thereby providing a 40 year data set.

The OSNZ submits a summary of survey data of predominantly marine and freshwater wetland birds recorded in the Pauatahanui Inlet for your consideration. The society hopes the data will be helpful for sound ecological management decision-making in the formulation of the Porirua Harbour Strategy and Action Plan and will be relevant, in particular, for Chapter 3 of the draft plan – *Action Plan for Ecological Restoration*. Information is provided in two annexes to this submission comprising (a) a list of predominantly marine and freshwater bird species (35 species) recorded between 1982 and 2004, together with a summary of their conservation threat ranking, and (b) trends in bird counts between 1982-4 and 2002-04 for several species having conservation threat rankings.

In providing this information we note that 18 (51%) out of 35 wetland bird species recorded in Pauatahanui Inlet have conservation threat rankings (under the New Zealand Threat Classification System) of 'Threatened' and 'At Risk' and accordingly they deserve special recognition in conservation planning.

Three notable species recorded as casual observations in the harbour but not counted during the surveys are white heron, shore plover and greenshank. Two of these (white heron and shore plover) have a 'Threatened' conservation threat ranking and the greenshank is a rare Northern Hemisphere migrant.

Twenty-four species of birds that are predominantly dependant on land habitats have been recorded on or near the shoreline of the inlet but are not included in this submission. None have a conservation threat ranking.

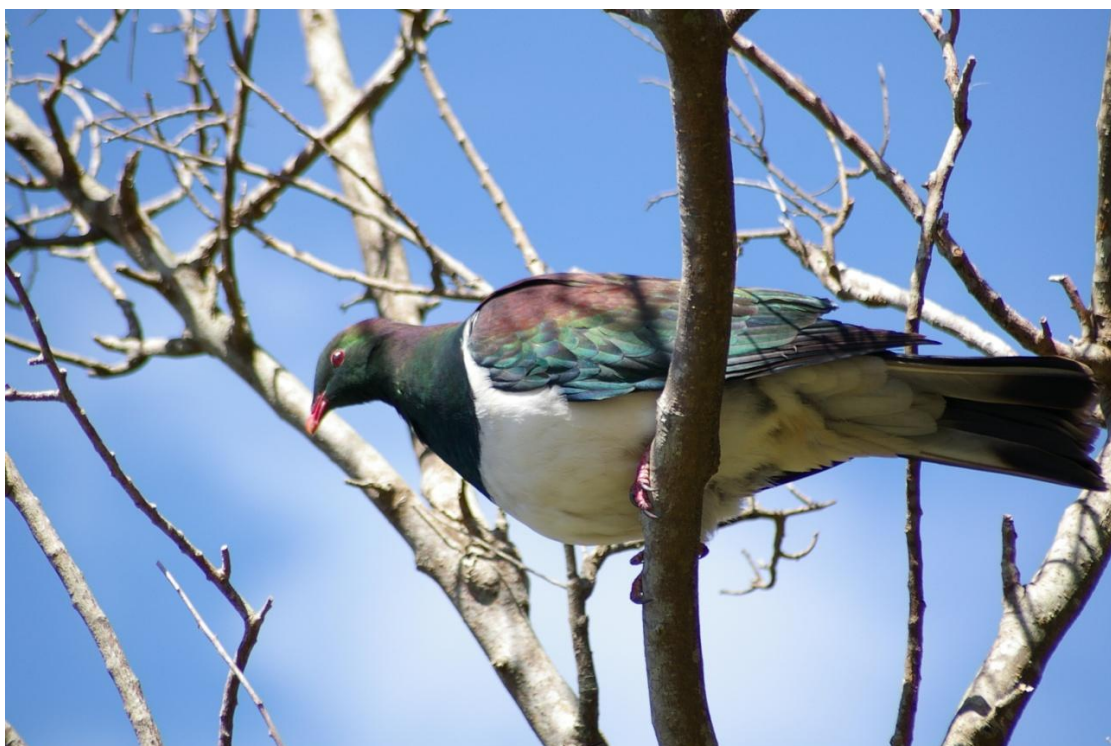
A full copy of the submission can be provided by email upon request to the RR.

First-Aid Kits, Telescope and HANZAB for Loan

The region has some first-aid kits if members want to use these during OSNZ field trips. The telescope belonging to the region is stored by Ian Armitage for safe-keeping; it is always available to be borrowed by members. We have five volumes of the “Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds” – Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks; Volume 2: Raptors to Lapwings; Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons; Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbirds; Volume 7: Passerines (divided into two books); these can be borrowed for a while by members. Contact the RR if you wish to use of any of these items.

Wellington Region Contacts

<u>Regional Representative</u>	Ian Armitage (04) 232 7470 ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz from January 2012. Dr. Susan Waugh susan@closeburn.org
<u>Regional Recorder</u>	Delia Small (04) 475 7526 delia@paradise.net.nz
<u>Southern Bird Regional Roundup</u>	Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop (04) 527 0929 geoffrey.delisle@agresearch.co.nz
<u>Mist-netting and passerine banding</u>	Peter Reese (04) 387 7387 ruth.peterr@actrix.co.nz
<u>Kapiti Island Bird Counts</u>	Dr. Colin Miskelly (04) 381-7301 hakawai@paradise.net.nz
<u>Little penguin studies, Matiu/Somes Is</u>	Mr. Reg. Cotter (04) 568-6960 reganne@clear.net.nz
<u>Wellington Region Newsletter production</u>	Sally Truman (04) 388 2242 sally2001@hotmail.com Ian Armitage (04) 232 7470



Wood pigeon / kereru in Rimutaka Forest Park. An increasingly common bird in Wellington and the Hutt Valley