

# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

## Wellington Region Newsletter

### OSNZ—Birds New Zealand

March 2016

<http://osnz.org.nz/> and <http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/>

#### Greetings

The March newsletter is notable for the contributions from members and Nikki McArthur's Regional Recorder's Annual Report deserves special mention. The recording of observations is an important role of Birds New Zealand and provides a valuable and ever increasing database of birds. The Wellington / Wairarapa regions have been at the forefront of entering checklists on ebird with over 10,000 being submitted. Your observations are important and should be entered into ebird or submitted to the Regional Recorder.

Four local newsletters are produced each year. Contributions for the newsletter are most welcome, especially those relating to birds in our region.

Geoff de Lisle

Regional Representative, OSNZ (Birds New Zealand), Wellington

#### Upcoming Monthly Meetings

##### WHERE and WHEN

Meetings are held at Te Papa's collections building, 169 Tory Street. Go up the steps/ramp and across the carpark.

First Monday of the month, 7.45pm.

##### April Meeting, Monday 4<sup>th</sup>

Understanding animal intelligence: should 'bird-brain' be a compliment?

Rachael Shaw, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University

*As humans, our mental abilities are often presumed to be unique within the animal kingdom. However, recent studies with birds have challenged some commonly held assumptions about the evolution of intelligence. In particular, experiments with members of the crow family suggest that these birds may in fact share some of our cognitive abilities. Closer to home, research on North Island robins has also revealed*

*some surprising similarities with human intelligence. This talk will discuss this research in an attempt to convince you that we shouldn't be so dismissive of the abilities of bird brains.*

There will be a short AGM prior to the talk.

##### May Meeting, Monday 2<sup>nd</sup>.

An Indian [Ocean] summer

Conservation and research on Reunion, Crozet and Kerguelen Islands, and Mauritius

Colin Miskelly, Curator, Terrestrial Vertebrates, Te Papa

The **2016 NZ Bird Conference** will be held during Queen's Birthday weekend, 4-6 June. The deadline for early bird registration is the 31<sup>st</sup> of March.

There will be no Wellington OSNZ (Birds New Zealand) meeting in June.

#### Report of Monthly Meetings

##### February Meeting.

**The Young Birder Programme, Sharon Alderson.** In this talk Sharon reviewed recent activities of the Young Birder Programme as well as future plans. In 2015 Sharon organised the youth camp on Mitiu/Somes and Mana Islands, a trip to Pencarrow lakes and a behind the scene visit to the Te Papa collection which was hosted by Colin Miskelly.

Further activities are planned for 2016. Members wishing to help with the Young Birder programme should contact Sharon.

**Top 10 pictures of a young birder, George Hobson.** A good knowledge of birds is an essential requirement for taking excellent pictures of birds. George's selection of 10 of his pictures demonstrated his ever increasing knowledge of birds and his skills as a photographer. Some of George's pictures can be seen at the following website. <https://500px.com/georgeh2>

**Progress in the establishment of brown kiwis in the Rimutaka Forest Park, Melody McLaughlin** gave an excellent summary of the Rimutaka Forest Kiwi Project which began in 2008 with the first introduction of birds. Eight years later the kiwi population has reached a 100. Over the years a large amount of effort has gone into the ongoing battle with predators which has allowed successful breeding of kiwi. However, in 2014/15, a mast year, all 9 monitored chicks were lost. Kiwi aversion training for dogs is an important component of this conservation programme. Previously a considerable amount of effort has gone into the monitoring of kiwi. Currently the amount of monitoring has been reduced – presently 13 birds are being monitored.

**Bird Observations from Kapiti Island, Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop.** For over a year Dallas and Geoff have been volunteers on Kapiti Island. Their principal activity has been helping with the supplementary feeding programme of hihi. While on the island there has been lots of opportunities to observe and photograph birds. Examples include brown teal at Rangatira, close views of kokako, long-tailed cuckoo and takahe with a very young chick.

#### March Meeting.

**Westland petrel demography and foraging – why this bird is a Wellington native.** Susan Waugh, Senior Curator Sciences, Te Papa gave a summary of her recent studies on the Westland petrel. Te Papa studies on the Westland petrel extend over a period of 42 years and have revealed a small, annual growth (~2%) of bird numbers. Susan's recent studies included the use of GPS tags (<25g) to track bird movements. Cook Strait, an area off the West Coast of the South Island and Haast have been identified as the major feeding areas for this bird. A side line to her studies has been documenting the effects of cyclone ITA (April 2014) on the Westland petrel colonies. High levels of damage were observed in 4 of the 6 colonies assessed. Landslips have destroyed significant areas of the breeding habitat. Ongoing studies will assess the impacts of the storm on breeding success and population numbers.

Waugh SM et al. (2015) Storm damage to Westland petrel colonies in 2014 from cyclone Ita. *Notornis* 62:165-168.

### **Pelagic Birding Trip – Cook Strait**

The proposed Pelagic Birding trip on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions – high winds and rough seas. A new date has been set for this trip – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> of May. There are still a couple of places available for this trip. If you wish to come or want further information, please contact Geoff de Lisle, [osnzwelly@gmail.com](mailto:osnzwelly@gmail.com)

Regional Representative: Geoff de Lisle (04) 527 0929 or [osnzwelly@gmail.com](mailto:osnzwelly@gmail.com)

Regional Recorder: Nikki McArthur [nikki.mcarthur.101@gmail.com](mailto:nikki.mcarthur.101@gmail.com)

Birds New Zealand Regional Roundup: Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop (04) 527 0929 [osnzwelly@gmail.com](mailto:osnzwelly@gmail.com)

Shag Survey - Geoff de Lisle

Mist netting – new arrangements to be announced.

## Bird Snippets - Wellington

**Common tern Waikanae estuary, Wellington, Alan Tennyson** » Tue Dec 29, 2015

There was a common tern with the white- frontend flock at the Waikanae river mouth this evening. It was in non-breeding plumage moulting its outer primaries. BirdingNZ.net

**NZ dotterel at Pencarrow Head, Wellington, Nikki McArthur** » Thu Jan 07, 2016

Jono Walter from Greater Wellington Regional Council has reported spotting a NZ dotterel at Pencarrow Head near Wellington yesterday. This is the first record I know of for this site since one was reported in November 1998, although Joanna McVeagh spotted two at nearby Baring Head in Nov 2014.

Joanna's also reported an influx of 4 birds at Riversdale Beach recently, so Jono's bird may be part of this same 'event'. BirdingNZ.net

**Island Bay, George Hobson** » Sun Jan 10, 2016

Just been at Island Bay with my scope for a couple of hours with some nice finds...

Red-billed Gull X  
Black-backed Gull X  
VOC 2  
Reef Heron 1  
House Sparrow X  
Fluttering Shearwater 100-200  
WF Tern 4  
NZ White-capped Albatross 2 (both gave very nice views!)  
Little Shag 1. BirdingNZ.net

**Kakariki at Khandallah Park, Olwen** » Fri Jan 15, 2016

My daughter and her children saw a pair of Kakariki in Khandallah Park/Mt Kaukau today. I haven't seen a record of them having been seen here but its not far from Otari/Wilton Park. BirdingNZ.net

**North Island kaka, Wainuiomata Water Collection Area, Nikki McArthur** » Thu Jan 14, 2016

This'll be of interest to Wellington-based birders only I imagine, but Ian Flux has reported encountering a North Island kaka in the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area (between Wainuiomata and the Rimutaka Forest Park) on January 6th.

This is the first time kaka have been recorded in this area for several decades, although we have had a couple of recent records from the nearby East Harbour Regional Park,

behind Eastbourne. This bird is probably most likely to have travelled across the harbour from the large and steadily-expanding kaka population in Wellington City, so is hopefully an early sign of things to come.

The part of the water catchment where this bird was seen is a 1300-ha block of unlogged, mature podocarp-broadleaf forest in which Greater Wellington Regional council has been carrying out intensive predator control for the past decade, so there should be a good chance that kaka will recolonise this habitat of their own accord provided enough birds make the trip across the harbour. BirdingNZ.net

**Dabchicks breeding at Queen Elizabeth Park, Kapiti Coast, Nikki McArthur** » Thu Jan 07, 2016

Kim Broad from Greater Wellington Regional Council has reported that a pair of dabchicks have bred on the pond at the Marines Wetland in Queen Elizabeth Park on the Kapiti Coast (McKay's Crossing) and currently have a couple of young chicks in tow. They're showing well from the little footbridge across the pond, so it might be a good opportunity for local photographers to get a few photos. BirdingNZ.net

Note; Also reported by Allan Munro and other members.

**VOC family Eastbourne, Wellington, andyf** » Sun Jan 11, 2015

I was surprised to see an adult variable oystercatcher and 3 chicks on rocks between Point Howard and Sorrento Bay this afternoon. I've always assumed there's too much traffic (vehicles, people, pets, predators) for birds to nest on Eastbourne's beaches.

I watched them for about 10 minutes. At one point the adult flew away to the next set of rocks, leaving the chicks behind. They kept still for a while but then wandered around a little on their own. The adult returned after a few minutes with food.

I hope they manage to fledge successfully and will keep an eye out for them in the next few weeks. BirdingNZ.net

**Botanic Garden birds, SomesBirder** » Tue Feb 02, 2016

Today I visited the Wellington Botanic Garden to investigate the current state of the avifauna there.

Most notably, I saw four red-crowned parakeets and three kaka. Other endemics were some tui, a grey warbler, a fantail, and a kereru.

Non-endemics were many sparrows, several blackbirds, rock doves, and mallards, <10 silvereyes, three greenfinches, two chaffinches, and a goldfinch, and I'm sure that I heard a kingfisher at one point as well.

Not seeing any dunnocks was a surprise, as I remember them being easy to see there not long ago. Perhaps the sparrows have muscled them out. BirdingNZ.net

**Dabchicks breeding at QE2 Park, Kapiti, rogerandmavis »**  
Mon Feb 22, 2016

A second pair of dabchicks have just hatched two chicks at the QE2 Wetlands pond. Great viewing of parents and chicks is available from the pondside hide. BirdingNZ.net

**NZ Falcon, Lower Hutt, George Hobson »** Mon Feb 29, 2016

Saw a Falcon fly over Moera, today at about 1:15pm, gave a very nice views too! BirdingNZ.net

**Cook Strait seabirds, 23rd February, Nikki McArthur »** Sun Feb 28, 2016

Had an interesting trip across Cook Strait on the evening of the 23rd on the Interislander ferry *Kaiarahi*.

Instead of entering the sounds via Tory Channel the ferry continued right around to the northern entrance of Queen Charlotte Sound, giving passengers great views of The Brothers Islands and White Rocks.

Sea conditions were pretty calm most of the way across, so there wasn't a huge diversity or number of birds around in Cook Strait (fluttering shearwaters, several W-C albatrosses, Westland petrels and one very distant *Diomedea* albatross).

## Diving petrel transfers – Mana Island

A notable feature of the ecological restoration of Mana Island has been the translocation of seabird chicks to establish new nesting colonies. In 2002 the first series of fairy prion chicks were transferred from Stephens Island (Takapourewa) to Mana Island. The transferred birds were housed in artificial burrows and fed at regular intervals until fledging. Further transfers occurred in 2003 and 2004. While a small population of nesting fairy prions established on Mana Island, it was decided that the colony should be augmented by the translocation of further birds. Another 100 birds were transferred in 2015 and a further 100 in 2016. Once again all translocated birds successfully fledged. Since 2002 a total of 440 birds have been transferred.

This is a remarkable achievement and a credit to the team carrying out the transfers. The transfer programme was organised and led by Friends of Mana Island (FOMI), with support from DOC and Te Papa with sponsorship from OMV in 2015-16. The transfer team included volunteers, some of whom were OSNZ (Birds New Zealand) members.

Acknowledgements, Colin Miskelly for information on transfers and David Cornick for the photographs.

However, the highlights of the trip were all associated with the unusual detour that the ferry took - we got quite close views of several dozen diving petrels on the water as we passed The Brothers, and good, but distant views of the king shag colony on White Rocks. Just past The Brothers we entered a patch of rough water & strong currents with bit of associated bird activity - lots of flutterers, a couple of sooty shearwaters and a few more Westland petrels. BirdingNZ.net

**Possible White winged black tern at Hutt Estuary, Shane Cotter »** Sat Feb 27, 2016

Just seen a possible White winged black tern at Hutt Estuary. Hawking over the river edge then landed on a sand bank in the middle of the estuary before being chased away by a red billed gull. Last seen heading down the river and into the harbour. This was at low tide at 3.50pm this afternoon. Sorry no photos. Small bird in comparison to red billed gull, black bill, reddish legs, black eye patch, grey upper wings with noticeable white rump. When feeding appeared to pluck things from the top of the water rather than diving in. BirdingNZ.net

Note, this post generated some correspondence with the suggestion that the bird Shane saw was a black-fronted tern.



Top, fairy prion chick  
Bottom, Sue Freitag and Ros Batcheler tube feeding a translocated chick.



## Red-billed Gulls - feeding on taupata berries



"On several days during the first week of March I noticed red-billed gulls feeding on the Taupata berries which are abundant at this time of year. This was on the Pukerua Bay coast walk. Some were sitting in the trees, others using their wings to try to balance briefly. When I posted this on the NZ Garden Bird Survey Facebook Group I got responses from people in Island Bay, Lyall Bay, Paekakariki, and Westport saying they were observing the same thing." Gillian Candler. (photo – Gillian Candler).

## The Otago Shag – a new species

A recent study by Nicolas Rawlence and colleagues (2016) reported their findings on their investigation of the two regional groups of the Stewart Island shag, *Leucocarbo chalconotus*. One group is present in Otago and the other in Foveaux Strait. The Stewart Island shag has two forms – pied and bronze plumages. There are differences between the two regional forms in the frequency of the plumage forms, the extent and colour of the facial



outgrowths, body size and breeding season. An analysis of DNA sequence data demonstrated that the Otago group of shags is most closely related to the endemic Chatham Island shag, *Leucocarbo onslowi* rather than the Foveaux Strait group. As a result of their investigations, Rawlence and colleagues have proposed that the two groups of Stewart Island shags should be considered as separate species, the Otago shag *L. chalconotus* (G.R. Gray 1845) and the Foveaux shag, *Leucocarbo stewarti* (Ogilvie-Grant, 1898). The Checklist Committee of OSNZ (Birds New Zealand) have yet to consider whether or not to accept these taxonomic changes.

Photo: "Otago shags", Tairoa Head, showing the two plumage forms.

Rawlence NJ, Schofield RP, Spencer HG, Lalas C, Easton LJ, Tennyson AJD, Adams M, Pasquet E, Fraser C, Waters JM, Kennedy M. (2016) Genetic and morphological evidence for two species of *Leucocarbo* shag (Aves, Pelecaniformes, Phalacrocoracidae) from southern South Island of New Zealand. *Journal of the Linnean Society* Epub, Feb, 2016.

Rawlence NJ, Kennedy M, Anderson CN, Prost S, Till CE, Smith IW, Schofield RP, Tennyson AJ, Hamel J, Lalas C, Matisoo-Smith EA, Waters JM. (2015) Geographically contrasting biodiversity reductions in a widespread New Zealand seabird. *Mol Ecol*. 24(18):4605-16

## Regional Recorder's annual report

**Nikki McArthur**

Over the past twelve months, Wellington and Wairarapa Birds New Zealand members have made a substantial contribution to our collective knowledge of the birds of the Wellington & Wairarapa regions.

Our two branches maintain a shared database of regional bird observations which are stored as part of the New Zealand eBird database, an online and publicly-accessible database of bird records maintained by Birds New Zealand and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

By this time last year, some 9,700 bird checklists had been submitted to eBird from locations in the Wellington and Wairarapa regions, describing the occurrence of 170 bird species. By mid-March 2016, this treasure trove of data had more than doubled in size to 20,000 checklists describing the occurrence of 176 species, making ours the largest- and fastest-growing regional database in the country.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, Joanna McVeagh (our Wairarapa Regional Recorder) had the good fortune to be the person to submit the 10,000<sup>th</sup> Wellington eBird checklist following a visit she made to Riversdale Beach (see *Birds New Zealand* No. 7, p5). On the 14<sup>th</sup> February this year, Rose Walker pushed the “submit” button on our region’s 20,000<sup>th</sup> eBird checklist, submitting a checklist she compiled as part of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s “Great Backyard Bird Count”. The remarkable thing about these two events is that whereas it took almost seven years for us to accumulate our first 10,000 bird checklists in eBird, (the New Zealand eBird database was launched back in May 2008), it has taken us less than a year to accumulate our next 10,000 checklists – a hugely impressive effort!

Another measure of the progress we’ve made at constructing this large regional bird database is the increasing number of uses that this data is now being put to. As well as being a useful source of information for both local and visiting birdwatchers, these eBird data are now being regularly used by local city, district and regional councils to make better-informed decisions regarding the management of birds and bird habitats in the Wellington and Wairarapa Regions. During the past 12 months for instance, eBird data have been used to help assess the environmental impacts of several resource consent applications affecting sections of foreshore in both Wellington and

Porirua Harbours. eBird data have also been used to help draft regional-scale Threat Classification System rankings for the region’s bird species, and to identify and prioritise coastal and freshwater sites for protection under Greater Wellington Regional Council’s Proposed Natural Resources Plan. In this regard, those of you who have taken the time to report your bird observations to your local Regional Recorder, or have reported them on eBird or BirdingNZ.net, have made an indirect contribution towards regional efforts to conserve indigenous birds and their habitats.

As the Wellington Regional Recorder, one highlight for me from the past twelve months was the inaugural “Global Big Day” event run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology on May the 9<sup>th</sup>. The Global Big Day is a worldwide challenge to birders to get out and record observations of as many of the world’s bird species as possible on a single day, and to enter those observations into eBird. Although the event had a fairly low-key following in New Zealand, at least 16 Wellington and Wairarapa members made the effort to get out birding on the day, and between us we managed to encounter 74 of the 172 bird species recorded in the region up to that time, or 43% of our regions’ bird species – in a single day! It was a great deal of fun, and serves as a great motivator for members to have a go at learning how to use eBird. The Cornell Lab have announced that they’ll be running a second Global Big Day on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2016, so I encourage you all to mark it down in your diaries and to visit <http://ebird.org/globalbigday/> for tips and ideas on how to participate.

Another one of the interesting things about being a Regional Recorder is dealing with all of the unusual bird reports that get sent in from both local members and the general public. 2015 had its fair share of unusual records, and was particularly notable for the number of wayward seabirds that were found onshore, usually following periods of strong winds associated with low-pressure weather systems to the south of New Zealand. A special thank you to Angelina Martelli and Lisa Argilla from Wellington Zoo and to Colin Miskelly from Te Papa for reporting a number of these very notable seabird records.

Here is my pick of the top 10 most interesting or unusual Wellington Region bird records received during the past 12 months:



1. March – July 2015: A single **brown teal** took up residence on the Korokoro Dam in Belmont Regional Park, Lower Hutt and was seen on-and-off for at least four months. This could well have been the same bird that was recorded on the duck pond in nearby Percy Scenic Reserve between June and July 2014.

**1<sup>st</sup> record for this site;** reported by various observers via BirdingNZ.net



**Brown teal on the Korokoro Dam, Belmont Regional Park (Photo: Nikki McArthur)**

2. April 2015: A single **black-bellied storm petrel** was found ashore on the Wellington waterfront. It was cared for at Wellington Zoo for a short time before being successfully released by zoo staff at Moa Point.

**1<sup>st</sup> (live) Wellington Region record for this species;** reported by Angelina Martelli via Colin Miskelly



**Photo of the first live black-bellied storm petrel recorded in the Wellington region (Photo courtesy of Angelina Martelli)**

3. May 2015: An **Antarctic Petrel** was found alive in Avalon, Lower Hutt and was taken to Wellington Zoo, where it unfortunately later died.



**Photo of the first live Antarctic petrel recorded in the Wellington Region, albeit looking decidedly less lively by this point... (Photo courtesy of Angelina Martelli)**

4. June 2015: A **Kerguelen Petrel** was found alive in Porirua City and was taken to Wellington Zoo for treatment. This bird recovered and was subsequently released.

**2<sup>nd</sup> (live) Wellington Region record for this species;** reported by Angelina Martelli via Colin Miskelly



**Photo of the 2<sup>nd</sup> live Kerguelen Petrel recorded in the Wellington Region (photos courtesy of Lisa Argilla)**

5. September 2015: A single **ruddy turnstone** was spotted by Shane Cotter at the Hutt Estuary. This bird likely only stayed a matter of hours as it was not observed by other birders visiting later in the day.

**1<sup>st</sup> record for this site;** reported by Shane Cotter via BirdingNZ.net

6. October 2015: A **white-headed petrel** was found blown ashore at Waikawa Beach and was taken to Wellington Zoo for treatment before being released.

**2<sup>nd</sup> (Live) Wellington Region record for this species;**  
Reported by Angelina Martelli



**Photo of the 2<sup>nd</sup> live white-headed petrel recorded in the Wellington Region (photo courtesy of Angelina Martelli)**

7. December 2015: In a red-letter day on the 18<sup>th</sup> December, a **whimbrel** was found and photographed at the Waikanae Estuary by three different observers. One of those observers, Imogen Warren also managed to spot a single **pomarine skua** on the very same day (see below).



**Whimbrel at the Waikanae Estuary (photo courtesy of Gavin Klee/BirdingNZ.net)**

8. December 2015: In addition to being one of three birders lucky enough to encounter a **whimbrel** at the Waikanae Estuary on the 18<sup>th</sup> December (see above), Imogen Warren also managed to find and photograph a **pomarine skua** on the same day.

**1<sup>st</sup> (live) Wellington Region record for this species;**  
reported by Imogen Warren



**Photo of the 1<sup>st</sup> live pomarine skua recorded in the Wellington Region (Photo courtesy of Imogen Warren/BirdingNZ.net)**

9. January 2016: A single **New Zealand dotterel** was spotted at Pencarrow Head by Jono Walter, a Biosecurity Officer at Greater Wellington Regional Council. This is the first record of this species at this site since November 1998 when another single bird was reported by Brian and Biz Bell.

**2<sup>nd</sup> record for this site,** reported by Jono Walter

10. February 2016: Shane Cotter had the honour of adding a second new bird species to the Hutt Estuary bird list in the space of 12 months when he spotted a single immature **black-fronted tern** here in February 2016.

**1<sup>st</sup> record for this site;** reported by Shane Cotter via BirdingNZ.net



### How you can contribute:

- We need the help of all of our local Birds New Zealand members so that we can continue building our regional bird sightings database on eBird. All bird observations are important, from the birds you notice visiting your garden to those you count during a trip to your favourite estuary, bush reserve or offshore island. To contribute your observations to our regional records, please report them to our Regional Recorder (Nikki McArthur) by either email or phone ([nikki.mcarthur.101@gmail.com](mailto:nikki.mcarthur.101@gmail.com); ph: 022 647 6735). Alternatively, you can register with the New Zealand eBird database and submit your observations online at: (<http://ebird.org/content/newzealand/>)
- Do you have older bird records or data filed away in notebooks or on your computer that you would like to see added to our regional records? Adding these older records to eBird is extremely useful as this will help us to build an increasingly-detailed picture of the changes that have occurred to our local bird populations over time. To find out how to contribute historical observations to our regional database, please contact the regional recorder, Nikki McArthur, by either email or phone (contact details above).

### Taupo Swamp –spotless crane

Taupō Swamp (30 ha) is located alongside SH1 between Plimmerton and Pukerua Bay. It comprises the largest remaining harakeke (*Phormium tenax*) swamp in the Wellington Region and provides habitat for uncommon indigenous species of plants and fauna. Taupō Swamp was purchased in 1986 by the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust and has formal protection under an Open Space Covenant. During September and October Delia Small carried out a bird survey of the Taupō Swamp for the Queen Elizabeth II Trust. This was a baseline survey of bittern, fernbird, spotless crane and marsh crane. A total of 10 different locations spread throughout the swamp were used for the survey. Each site was surveyed at least once at dawn and at 3 to 5 times as dusk. The survey was based on the presence / absence of the target species using call play-back to determine which wetlands birds were present in the Taupō Swamp. From the 9 surveys, 3 responses to the spotless crane call playback were heard at the same survey site. No responses from bittern, marsh crane or fernbird were detected.

Delia reports, *“Taupo Swamp is significant in that it shows that the wetlands ecosystem has been restored to a level of health that provides suitable habitat for the survival of a wetland bird species which has, in the past, suffered major negative impacts due to the drainage of many lowland wetlands such as Taupo Swamp. The spotless crane has a conservation status*

*of a 'protected native' and knowing that Taupo swamp is possible a refugee site for this rarely seen bird adds to the significance of this finding and the need to protect this site to ensure the spotless crane habitat is not lost.”*



Photo – Dallas Bishop

The failure to detect bittern, fernbird or marsh crane does not preclude the presence of these species, at least at some times during the year. Historical records of Taupo Swamp include the presence of bittern.

Delia recommended that further bird surveys be carried out to continue the search for bittern, fernbird, spotless crane and marsh crane as well as other bird species. Such a comprehensive data set is needed to determine whether any future nearby developments have any adverse effects.

Thanks to Delia Small for the information.

## Kakapo Breeding

2016 is proving to be a good breeding season for kakapo. The following are selected extracts from the Kakapo Recovery Facebook page which is providing up-to-date information on the breeding season. <https://www.facebook.com/KakapoRecovery/>

*January 26, We have nests! One each on Codfish Island/Whenua Hou and Anchor Island, with Pearl currently on two eggs on the former and Tiwhiri (tee-fee-ree is close) on the latter.*

*January 31 So far 21 females have mated - 15 on Anchor Island and six on Codfish Island/Whenua Hou and we're expecting plenty more action to come!*

*There are three nests on Anchor - Tiwhiri, Kuia and Hine Taumai - and one on Codfish belonging to Pearl*

*February 14, Our marvellous Matriarch Nora, age unknown, has mated, 35 years after she last successfully raised chicks on Stewart Island!! She teamed up with Blades and has also received artificial insemination, with contributions from Sinbad, Gulliver and Luke. Nora is the matriarch of the 'wind dynasty', which includes her daughter Zephyr and grandson Sirocco*

*February 21 Here's the latest news! Kuia's second egg has hatched AND she has mated again so another clutch is possible! Hine Taumai also has a chick on the nest, bringing the total to four!*

*AND, to date, we have had 30 confirmed fertile eggs, with more nests still to be discovered...busy, busy, busy*

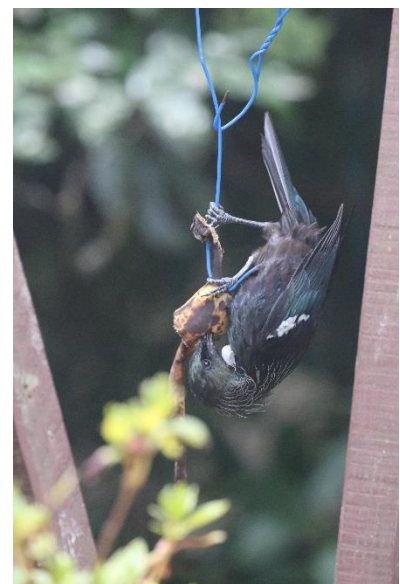
*March 6, Kākāpō breeding season is in full swing: 43 females mated, 43 nests, 106 eggs across 3 islands, with around 50% fertility." (Codfish, Whenua Hou; Anchor Island, Little Barrier)*

*March 9, Kākāpō breeding seasons take their toll: we found Tiaho, a 7 year-old male, dead on Whenua Hou a few days ago. Cause of death uncertain at this stage. Smoko's death a few weeks ago probably due to a fight.*

*March 10. Kākāpō on Whenua Hou (and probably Anchor) are breeding in response to rimu, which masts (mass fruiting) every 2-3 years. We rarely see them feeding on it, but nesting females eat it almost exclusively to feed to their chicks. Here's Tumeke browsing in a large rimu last night, which she fed to her chick shortly after. Ripe rimu fruit is extremely high in vitamin D; yet adult kākāpō have very low vitamin D levels. We're currently running a study to resolve this contradiction, and to better understand the role of vitamin D in kākāpō health and fertility.*

*March 10, Our crack team on Anchor Island report that Kuia, the only surviving female kākāpō of Fiordland descent, has 3 more fertile eggs. She mated 3 times with Kumi.*

Backyard bird feeding, california quail feeding on bread & a tui on banana. Dallas Bishop & Geoff de Lisle, Blue Mountains road, Upper Hutt.





## Three new Wellington bird monitoring reports available online

**Nikki McArthur**

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) has recently published the results of three local bird monitoring projects that have been carried out with the help of *Wellington Birds New Zealand* members.

The first report summarises the results of an annual series of five-minute bird counts that have been carried out in Wellington City parks and reserves since 2011. Jointly funded by Wellington City Council and GWRC, these counts aim to monitor changes in both the abundance and distribution of native birds throughout the city. Local *Birds New Zealand* members Annette Harvey and Ian Flux have been assisting in carrying out bird counts at 100 randomly-selected locations throughout Wellington each year and in the process have become experts in finding their way around some of the 'wilder' parts of our city. Over the past four years, Annette and Ian have helped to document several re-colonisation events, including both whiteheads and red-crowned parakeets re-colonising Trelissick Park, and bellbirds and red-crowned parakeets re-colonising Khandallah Park. Their latest bird monitoring report also attempts for the first time to combine GWRC's five-minute bird count data with bird distribution data sourced from the [New Zealand eBird database](#), providing the most detailed bird distribution maps yet compiled for Wellington City.

For those interested in reading the full report, it can be found online at:

<http://wellington.govt.nz/~media/about-wellington/research-and-evaluation/natural-environment/2015-bird-monitoring-report.pdf>



**Photo: NI kaka feeding on kowhai nectar, Kelburn, Wellington. Image courtesy of David Brooks/NZ Birds Online ([www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz))**

The second report summarises the results of a very similar project designed to monitor trends in the abundance and distribution of native birds in Upper Hutt City parks and reserves. Jointly-funded by Upper Hutt City Council and GWRC, this project involves carrying out 90 bird counts each year at randomly-selected locations in Wi Tako Reserve, Keith George Memorial Park and several other Upper Hutt reserves. *Wellington Birds New Zealand* member Delia Small, and Wairarapa member Joanna McVeagh have both battled their way up and down steep slopes and bashed their way through thickets of gorse and bush lawyer to help carry out these counts. Key results from this project include documenting the local fantail population crash (and subsequent recovery) that occurred following the 2011 snowfall events, and showing that certain portions of both Keith George and Wi Tako reserves provide particularly important habitat for native bird species such as tomtits, whiteheads and bellbirds.

The full report can be found online here:

<http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Our-Environment/Environmental-monitoring/Environmental-Reporting/UHCC-bird-monitoring-report-2015-Final.pdf>



**Photo: A New Zealand falcon perched on the edge of a trampoline in suburban Upper Hutt (Image courtesy of Sarah McAlpine)**

The third report describes the results of a series of shorebird surveys carried out along the lower reaches of the Hutt, Waikanae and Otaki Rivers. Each summer between 2012 and 2015, GWRC staff members and *Birds New Zealand* member Delia Small walked 50 km along the lower reaches of these three rivers to map



the distribution and abundance of shorebird species including banded dotterels, black-fronted dotterels and pied stilts. While both the Hutt and Waikanae Rivers were found to support very few shorebirds upstream of their respective estuaries, the Otaki River supported much higher shorebird densities, including an estimated 8% of the regional populations of both banded- and black-fronted dotterels. The results of these surveys have led to GWRC's Flood Protection Department making a number of changes to their "Code of Practice" in order to minimise any negative impacts that their activities may have on resident shorebird populations.

The full report can be found online here:  
<http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Our-Environment/Environmental-monitoring/Environmental-Reporting/Baseline-monitoring-of-the-birds-of-the-Otaki-Waikanae-and-Hutt-Rivers-2012-2015.pdf>

**Aerial Image of the Otaki River showing the relative densities of banded dotterels, black-fronted dotterels and pied stilts in each 1 km survey section.**



## Te Papa Blogs

### Life and death among the Barau's petrels of Reunion Island

20 January 2016 by Colin Miskelly  
<http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2016/01/20/life-and-death-among-the-baraus-petrels-of-reunion-island/>

Note: Colin Miskelly has produced a series of blogs on his recent trip to the French islands of the Indian Ocean. Colin will be talking about his trip at our May meeting.

### The Great Penguin Nest Box Challenge – a DIY design project

6 January 2016 by Susan Waugh  
<http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2016/01/06/penguin-nest-box-challenge/>

### 9000 images on New Zealand Birds Online

26 February 2016 by Colin Miskelly & filed under Biodiversity, Birds, Penguins, Photography  
<http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2016/02/26/9000-images-on-new-zealand-birds-online/>

### A new bird for New Zealand – northern fulmar

15 March 2016 by Colin Miskelly  
<http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2016/03/15/a-new-bird-for-new-zealand-northern-fulmar/>

## Red-billed Gull Survey – Wellington Region (2015/16).

The following data was collected as part of the national survey of red-billed gulls.

OSNZ Region	Site Name	Latitude	Longitude	Relative Size (pairs)	Notes
Wellington	Kapiti Island – North 1	40 49' 09.1S	174°56' 17.6E	31 nests	Listed by Gurr/Kinsky. Surveyed 2/12/2015 Dallas Bishop & Geoff de Lisle This sites was not used for nesting in 2014/15
Wellington	Kapiti Island North 2	40°49'13.69 S	174°56'22.60 E	2 nests	Listed by Gurr/Kinsky. Surveyed 2/12/201 This site was used for nesting in 2014/15. Bishop & Geoff de Lisle.
Wellington	Pukerua Bay – Wairaka point	41°01'49.11 S	174°52'13.52	283 nests* This site was surveyed by Peter Frost on the 8/11/2015	Not listed by Gurr/Kinsky. Note white-fronted terns on the same rock stack as the red-billed gulls. Also surveyed by Ian Armitage, Dallas Bishop & Geoff de Lisle. More nesting terns on an adjacent rock which did not contain nesting red-billed gulls. 41°01'49.11 S 174°52'12.35 E
Wellington	Mana Island  Multiple sites on the North – West side of Mana Island			210 – 260* nests	Listed by Gurr/Kinsky. Surveyed by Emma Rowell & Mel Cameron.
Wellington	Breaker Bay	41°19'54.4 S - 41.3317896S	174°50'16.9 E 174.8380244E	5 nests	Not listed by Gurr/Kinsky. Surveyed by Peter Hodge and Alan Tennyson

\* The number of nests was determined by examination of photographs.

Mana Island: Emma Rowell counted 61 white-fronted tern nests on the northern and western sides of Mana Island while she was surveying the gull colonies.

Breaker Bay: Surveyed by Peter Hodge, 25/11/2015. See his ebird submission for details and photographs.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/newzealand/view/checklist?subID=S25934742>

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following who helped in the survey; Ian Armitage, Dallas Bishop, Peter Hodge, Alan Tennyson, Emma Rowell and Mel Cameron. Thanks to DOC staff Jeff Hall (Mana Island) and Genevieve Spargo and Nick Fisentzidis (Kapiti Island) for their support and assistance.

Special thanks to Peter Frost and Graeme Taylor for their patience and organising the survey. Peter's help with surveying the Wairaka Point (Pukerua Bay) and Mana Island colonies is gratefully acknowledged.