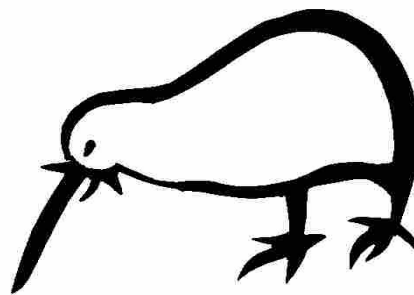


# APTERYX

Issue 22

December 2008



## NEWSLETTER OF THE FAR NORTH REGION OF THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



Blue Penguin  
(Codfish Island)  
Nov 08

PHOTOS  
BY  
DETLEF  
DAVIES  
(unless  
otherwise  
stated)



### EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Now that Christmas is over, we have found time to squeeze the preparation of the Newsletter into the lull period before the New Year and include some recent material & photos. We welcome Val Ryan from Okaihau and Graham & Lynn Gillett from Opua as new members in our region. General OSNZ news includes the resignation of Richard Holdaway as President because of outside pressures; David Lawrie, the Regional Rep for South Auckland region has taken over. Next year's Annual Conference & AGM will be at Orewa and hopefully there will be a good turn-out from the Far North as the venue is not too far away.

I often circularise news by email such as programme changes, confirmation of times and meeting places of events, etc. If you do not have email, please give me a phone number so I can contact you with this information.



White-faced Storm Petrels – up to 10 seen in outer Bay of Islands recently (photos from Hauraki Gulf, Dec 2008)

**The Far North Regional Officers are:**

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<b>Regional Recorder</b> Laureen Alston, 48a Riverview Road, Kerikeri 09 407 8747 <a href="mailto:lm.alston@actrix.co.nz">lm.alston@actrix.co.nz</a>	<b>Secretary &amp; Publicity</b> Carol Davies, 180 Landing Road, Kerikeri 09 407 3874 <a href="mailto:carolanndavies@yahoo.com">carolanndavies@yahoo.com</a>

**RECENT EVENTS**

**27 – 28 Sept Waima Forest**

In spite of a less than perfect weather forecast, 9 of us enjoyed an overnight camp in the forest this weekend, listening to the rain on our tents in the night but birding in the dry. We were in Kokako territory, the area kindly mapped out for us by Matt Calder. We heard at least 4 birds and one gave a brief view to 2 of us. As Tuis were common, it was a challenge to distinguish the calls; Tomtits were also in good song, along with commoner forest birds; Redpolls were seen on route.

**16 Oct Indoor Meeting, Coopers Beach**

17 of us came to hear Kevin Matthews' update on last year's unusual arrival of 3 Barn Owls on farmland close to Kaitia, one of which is now in captivity with its injured wing removed. There are signs that the other 2 birds are attempting to breed and in the longer term there is no reason why the Barn Owl (which has a very wide world distribution) should not become established in New Zealand. A paper is being prepared on the occurrence of Barn Owls here. Detlef gave a short presentation afterwards on some birds from the Buenos Aires area of Argentina.

**1 Nov Field Trip, Waipu**



Hochstetter's Frog



Fairy Tern

8 members from the Far North & 4 from Northland joined Tony Beauchamp for a trip to look for the rare endemic Hochstetter's Frog in forest inland from Waipu. After a short 'quarantine' session in the carpark in Waipu town, we set off into the forest where Tony found 3 of these very small dark frogs for us and explained their unusual life history. Later some of us went to the estuary near Waipu Cove and had excellent views of Fairy Terns.

**15 – 16 Nov Wader Count**

Our regular count in Parengarenga & Rangaunu Harbours, Kowhai Beach & East Beach produced good numbers of waders at the high tide roosts. Results & details are set out on page 7.

## 12 Dec Indoor Meeting, Kerikeri

Detlef & Carol gave a talk to 17 members & guests on their experiences in north Peru earlier this year, showing scenery, birds, general wildlife and local people of the Huallaga River area south of Tarapoto. Ian Wilson then followed with an update on the attempts to find a mate for Puketi Forest's lone male Kokako. A full account can be found in Puketi Forest Trust's latest newsletter.

### RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

Laureen Alston & Detlef Davies

This covers the Far North region from August 2008. Contributors include the authors, Bill Campbell, Pat Gardner, Carol & CJ Ralph, Kevin Matthews, Anthea Goodwin, Arnold Lenton, Tim Robinson, Russell Thomas, Bill Schwass, Gay Blunden, Heather & Robb Campbell, Ray Wiblin, Heather & Ray Peat.

**Brown Kiwi** A male heard calling on Dec 2, at 10.05pm at Te Kuihi, Taipa Est. Also heard & occasionally seen at usual sites at Aroha Island, Moturoa Island & Purerua.

**New Zealand Dabchick** One on Lake Waiporohita 25 Oct, one L Rotokawau 25 Oct & 26 Dec.

**Australian Little Grebe** 4 Lake Rotokawau 6 Oct, prob more on 25 Oct.

**Buller's Shearwater** 20+ just off Cape Reinga 26 Dec, probably few with the Flutterers 25 Oct.

**Flesh-footed Shearwater** One near Moturua Is on 3 Dec.

**Fluttering Shearwater** 100s offshore from Cable Bay & from Henderson Beach on 25 Oct, 30+ in the Bay on 3 Dec.

**White-faced Storm Petrel** c.10 between Black Rocks & Moturua on 3 Dec on flat calm sea; 3 seen in outer Bay of Islands, 22 Dec.

**Blue Penguin** Several sightings in the Bay

**Australasian Gannet** 3 seen at East Beach, Rangaunu on Nov 4.

**Shags** 2 Little Blacks Awanui Wharf 25 Oct, Black Shag Lake Waiporohita same day.

**Reef Heron** One on East Beach on 4 Nov, 1 Taipa 1 Dec, 1 Mangonui 26 Dec.

**Australasian Bittern** One in swamp by Herekino Hall Bridge during August; one at Rangiahua on Sept 20, one flying over paddocks S of Pakaraka, SH10 on 20 Oct.

**Royal Spoonbill** c.50 in fields by Unahi Wharf on 6 Oct; none found in the area on 25 Oct, 22 at Low Clyde Dam 15 Nov.

**Canada Goose** 5 on Lake Gleeson on 6 Oct, 1 on Lake Waiporohita 25 Oct.

**Grey Teal** 4 Lake Waiporohita 25 Oct, 2 there on 1 Dec.

**NZ Scaup** 5 on lake beside Henderson Beach Road 25 Oct.

**Brown Quail** Few seen on Moturua Island on survey on 3 Dec.

**Bobwhite Quail** One seen and heard at Rangitane on 29 Nov.

**Variable Oystercatcher** 3 fledged at Tauranga Bay early Dec. 75 on East Beach 15 Nov, 23 Kokota Sandspit 16 Nov. 1 or 2 pairs at many beaches around the region.

**New Zealand Dotterel** 2 pairs on Rangihoua Beach, Mountain Estate, on 30 Sep, 1 pr with 1 egg nest at Waiau Bay, Kauri Cliffs, 1 pr at Matauri Bay, 2 prs at Te Ngaere Spit, metal band & mate with 3 egg nest at Tauranga Bay on 1 Oct, 3 egg nest on Beach House Bay, Mataka Station on 2 Oct, YR-BW seen on long beach Otaio Bay, Urupukapuka on 20 Oct, M-WOK seen on Karikari Beach on 4 Nov. Tauranga Bay report – 3 eggs hatched on spit & a nest at Butterfly Bay in Oct. Chicks disappeared in Labour Weekend storms, also nest. Metal band & mate hatched 3 chicks in early Dec but now only 2. Another nest fledged 2 chicks later in Dec. 10 on Kokota Sandspit 16 Nov. One Waipau Bay, Moturua Is 3 Dec.

**Wrybill** 7 on Kokota Sandspit on 16 Nov.

**Turnstone** 59 at East Beach on 4 Nov, 230 there on 15 Nov. 227 Kokota Sandspit 16 Nov.

**Lesser Knot** c.100 at Walker Is, c.250 at East Beach on 4 Nov, c.400 East Beach 15 Nov, c.887 Kokota Sandspit 16 Nov.

**Far Eastern Curlew** One on East Beach on 15 Nov.

**Whimbrel** At least 2 at Paua on 26 Dec

**Bar-tailed Godwit** c.900 on Walker Is, c.2,250 at East Beach on 4 Nov. c.3,500 East Beach & 410 on Kowhai Beach on 15 Nov, c.2,800 Kokota Sandspit 16 Nov.

**Arctic Skua** One in the Bay near Black Rocks on 3 Dec.

**White-fronted Tern** 40 to 50 at East Beach, Rangaunu on 4 Nov, several in Bay on 3 Dec, few in many other places.

**Little Tern** 5 on East Beach on 4 Nov, 9 there on 15 Nov.

**New Zealand Pigeon** Several in garden in Landing Rd for a few days in October.

**Shining Cuckoo** Regularly around Kerikeri in Sept, Oct. Photographed in Landing Rd on 27 Oct. One near entrance to Aroha Is. 1 Dec & a juv there being fed by a Grey Warbler end of Dec.

**Dunnoek** At least 12 heard & 3 seen on Moturua Island on 3 Dec.

**New Zealand Pipit** Recorded from Karikari Peninsular, Ninety Mile Beach & Cape Reinga.

**Fernbird** Difficult to locate at Aroha lately but seen well along Kawakawa River on 25 Dec.

**Tomtit** A male seen in Herekino State Forest, Pukepoto on 12 Dec. A family seen near summit of Waipoa to Otupoho Bay track, Moturua, Dec 21. First record of breeding here.

**New Zealand Robin** 3 seen &/or heard on waterfall track and Army Bay valley, Moturua on 3 Dec

## PROGRAMME

All Far North OSNZ indoor meetings take place at Detlef & Carol's house at 180 Landing Road, Kerikeri unless otherwise stated, 7 pm for 7.30. We provide soft drinks & nibbles but contributions welcome. From now on we hope to make these meetings at least bi-monthly but cannot really make the day consistent, it will usually be Thursday or Friday; we appreciate Bill Campbell's offer to use his home in Coopers Beach as an alternative venue for some of our meetings.

**Friday 23 Jan Indoor Meeting, Cooper's Beach** Lynda & Evan McGrory-Ward from the DOC office in Kaitia will give us a talk about Raoul Island in the Kermadecs where they have been working. Venue is Bill Campbell's house at 21 Spicer Road, Coopers Beach (off Cable Block Road) at 7.30 pm.

### 14 – 15 Feb Wader Count

Another chance to visit the Far North estuaries in what we hope will be fine weather. This is the last count of this particular 6 year census but we will continue the project for our region. Contact Detlef for details, more info will follow by email.

**ALSO . . . .** A possible repeat visit to Waima Forest in January & a late Feb or early March indoor meeting in Kerikeri are to be announced by email. Suzi Phillips, who is a former Auckland OSNZ Regional Rep & leads Kaipara Region Forest & Bird, has agreed to give a talk either in this period or later, so watch this space.

We are also considering a meeting in Russell for which the Russell DOC office has been offered as a venue. Suggestions for a speaker would be welcomed.

## NEW ZEALAND BEACH PATROLS

(Adapted from 'Bird Studies Canada')

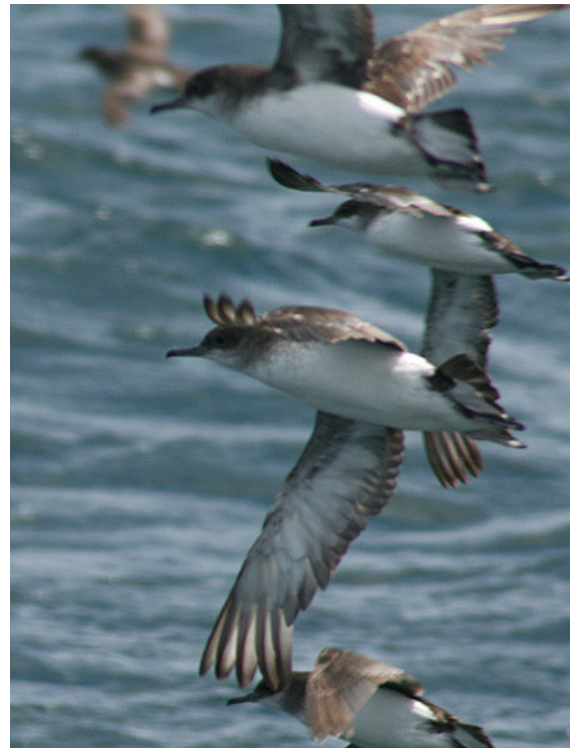
What is like to walk beaches looking for beached birds? In the Far North region, a few OSNZ members have been participating in this project for a long time – since the early 1960's. We have one patroller who started as a young boy when amongst other beaches he was put at one end of East beach and collected at the other - about 17 kms. We mainly patrol about 30 kms of 90 mile Beach and in the summer, beaches on the Karikari peninsula.

New Zealand is surrounded by vast areas of ocean and is often referred to as the "Seabird Capital of the World". There are still many species whose breeding sites are unknown. Many of these birds never hit land as they spend most of their time a long way out to sea. Most years a surprise species turns up as a beach corpse. Isabella Godbert et al, found the first record of Stejneger's Petrel on a beach patrol. This specimen is now in Te Papa Museum,



Wellington. Many ships pass through the waters off the New Zealand coast daily. This traffic can create a real problem for birds. Some of the vessels may illegally dump waste or can be a problem to seabirds when they become entangled in their nets. Dolphins in the Far North can become entangled in these nets.

In a recent report from Southland, oil spill accidents can be a problem. They pose a great threat to pelagic seabirds, the bodies of which are separated from near zero-degree water by a natural "survival suit" of feathers. Like a pinhole in a diving suit, a drop of oil the size of a coin sentences the bird to a slow, painful death from hypothermia and starvation. The bird also tries to preen itself clean of the toxic oil, ingesting it in the process. Poisons in the oil can lead to delayed death. Either way, an oiled bird is usually a dead bird. The first sign of impact from an oil spill is often the appearance of dead and dying birds on beaches. Storms are a regular occurrence in the Far North and as a result many birds can be washed up onto the beach. Blue Penguins are frequently recorded as beached corpses. In the Far North region beach patrol program is a part of a bigger network of bird surveys around New Zealand and increasingly around the world. The data gleaned from beach surveys can be revealing and is very useful. Similar surveys are carried on both coasts of North America, and also in Europe. In Atlantic Canada, a beached bird survey has been in place in south-eastern Newfoundland since 1984



Above: **Fairy Prion** & top right: **Fluttering Shearwaters** – Hauraki Gulf, Dec 08 These common seabirds are often found on beach patrols.

## How can you get involved?

We are looking for keen volunteers to conduct monthly surveys year-round in the Far North region. If you would like to volunteer, you will be asked to walk a stretch of beach once every month, keeping an eye out for beached birds. You do not have to have a working knowledge of bird identification, do not worry, as an ID booklet is made available to participants. The time it takes to survey a beach section depends on the length of beach you wish to survey. The weather will not always be pleasant (!) and the numbers of birds found varies greatly.

If you are a keen birder or beachcomber or enjoy walking and would like to get involved with this project, or would like to learn more about it, please contact **Isabella Godbert** on 09 407 8058.

## FAR NORTH BEACH PATROLS

**Isabella Godbert**

These take place every 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday at 90 Mile Beach and less frequently on Karikari Peninsular. Anyone finding bands on beach-wrecked birds should inform **Laurie Howell** on 09 430 2287.

The 2008 results for both areas are set out on the next page & update the charts in the August issue of Apteryx. The 90 mile beach chart contained an error. Thanks to **Sav Saville** for promptly pointing out that we surely hadn't found 8 White-tailed Tropicbirds in a year, let alone in a day! This resulted from a slip in the lining up & editing from a previous chart.

**90 mile beach patrollers:** J Dawn, B Couper, I & D Godbert, C MacDiarmid, P Gardner

**Karikari beach patrollers:** J Dawn, C MacDiarmid, P Gardner, I Godbert, M Aslund, D Calvert, R Thomas

## 90 mile Beach

MONTH	Jan 28th	Feb 24th	Mar 23rd	Apr 25th	June 1st	Aug 10th	Sept 8th	Nov 9th	Dec 7th	Totals
DISTANCE	23 kms	21 kms	21 kms	21 kms	19 kms	21 kms	21 kms	32 kms	32 kms	211 kms
Wandering Albatross						1				1
Buller's Albatross						1				1
Shy Albatross					1			1		2
Cape Petrel			1				1			2
Huttons Shearwater								1		1
Buller's Shearwater	1			1			1	7	1	11
Sooty Shearwater		1			2			11		14
Fluttering Shearwater	1	5			1	17	4	6	2	36
Flesh-footed Shearwater								1		1
Blue Petrel						1				1
Common Diving Petrel		1		1	1	5				8
Fairy Prion						3	1			4
Thin-billed Prion						16		1		17
Prion sp.		1								1
Mottled Petrel								1		1
White-chinned Petrel	1									1
White-headed Petrel						1	4			5
Blue Penguin	17	8	2	6		5	51	1	2	92
Australasian Gannet	3	4	1		1	1	23	10	3	46
Sthorn Black-backed Gull	4	5	2	1	1			1	1	15
Black-b Gull Juv		4	1							5
Red-billed Gull		2								2
White fronted tern		1								1
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>268</b>
Duck sp.		1								
White-faced Heron			1							
Variable Oystercatcher			1							

## Karikari Peninsular

2008	9th Feb	27th Feb	27th Feb	3rd Mar	6th Mar	17th Aug	1st Oct	5th Oct
	Karikari	Taupo Bay	Mautauri Bay	Karikari	Tapuaetahi	Karikari	Tauranga Bay	Karikari
Grey-faced Petrel								1
Little Blue Penguin	1	1	1	5	1	3		36
Red-billed Gull	1							
Black-backed Gull				1				
Fluttering Shearwater						4	3	1
Fairy Prion						1		1
Common Diving Petrel						1		
Little Shearwater						1		
Australasian Gannet								1

## SPRING WADER COUNT, NOVEMBER 2008

Laureen Alston, Anthea Goodwin,  
Kevin Matthews

### Kaimaumau carpark / Walker Island – preliminary count on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov.

Kevin Matthews and Anthea Goodwin counted birds through telescopes from c. 2 hours before high tide as they flew from Walker Island to 1.5 km west of Green Beacon on East Beach.

**Godwit** 3150 **Knot** 350 includes c.1000 birds which remained on island

**Turnstone** 59

**White-fronted Tern** 40 – 50; **Little Tern** 5

**Reef Heron** 1; **Gannet** 3

**Red-billed Gull** c. 35

A flock of red-billed gulls were feeding on some very small prey close inshore.

The little terns mostly kept above them but occasionally came down to feed.

Twice we saw them chased off by the gulls.



Bar-tailed Godwit on a mowed lawn, Okarito, Nov 08

The results of the main count over the weekend 15 – 16 Nov are shown below.

**Ornithological Society of New Zealand - WADER CENSUSES 2004 - 2009**

OSNZ REGION

**FAR NORTH**

Parengarenga, Rangaunu, Kowhai, East Beach

YEAR

**2008**

COMPILER

**LAUREEN ALSTON**

MONTH

**November**

CENSUS DATE

**15 - 16**

Tide Height, Time, Weather etc

Large high tide 11 am, moderate N - NE wind, cloud, sun

DATE >  
TIME >  
PRINCIPAL COUNTER >

LOCAL SITES >

SITE TOTALS >

SPECIES TOTALS >

Pied Oystercatcher	60
Variable Oystercatcher	112
Pied Stilt	
New Zealand Dotterel	15
Banded Dotterel	5
Black-fronted Dotterel	
Wrybill	7
Pacific Golden Plover	
Spur-winged Plover	
Turnstone	462
Lesser Knot	c.1,517
Curlew Sandpiper	
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	
Pectoral Sandpiper	
Red-necked Stint	
Far-eastern Curlew	1
Whimbrel	
Bar-tailed Godwit	c.6,710
Black-tailed Godwit	
Grey-tailed Tattler	
Marsh Sandpiper	
Terek Sandpiper	

				60	
75	8			6	23
2	1		2		10
	5				
					7
230	5				227
c.400	230				c.887
1					
c.3,500	410				c.2,800

**OTHERS (not in Main Site Total)**

Black-backed Gull	3
White-faced Heron	15
Royal Spoonbill	22
Caspian Tern	4
Little Tern	9

				3	
			15		
		22			
				4	
9					

**MAIN SITE TOTAL > c.8,889**

COMMENTS

Adrian Riegen

[riegen@xtra.co.nz](mailto:riegen@xtra.co.nz) Phone/Fax 09-814-9741

231 Forest Hill Rd, Waiatarua, Auckland 8

Counters: Anthea Goodwin, Laureen Alston, Kevin Matthews, Mike Bryan, Isabella & Derry Godbert, Paulla-Jean Pridham, Maggie Aslund.



## PROMOTION

Detlef & Carol Davies

In October, Carol arranged for another promotional display over a period of 2 weeks in the entrance to the Proctor Library in Kerikeri; surely an excellent way to draw attention to our Society.

Detlef has produced an illustrated booklet on the birds of Aroha Island which is for sale at the information centre there, price \$7.50. There is also a smaller version in the form of a Checklist for \$3.00.

Carol will write in more detail about promoting the region's activities in the next issue of "Apteryx".

## HOME AND AWAY

Janet Snell

This time we are 'at home' and Northland member, Janet Snell has sent us an account of her visit to our area with her husband, Lloyd, in May this year. Here is an abbreviated account of their birding experiences.



*"We enjoyed our stay in Pukenui recently and continued our interest in bird-watching. On 5<sup>th</sup> May it was a calm day and armed with binoculars and telescope we walked on Henderson Beach to the southern end and counted 12 **New Zealand Dotterels**. Next day we went to the southern end of Rarawa*

*Beach to check on a Pied Shag colony in a large old Pohutukawa tree in which we had counted many **Pied Shags** 3 years ago but the colony has gone from that tree. We saw 8 birds sunning*



Henderson Beach looking south

## ***The Birds of Aroha Island***



*Compiled by  
Detlef C.S. Davies*





themselves on a dead branch up the river a little but could not find another colony. Shag colonies often shift from tree to tree over the years; we feel there is still an active colony in the vicinity which we didn't see.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May we counted 86 **Variable Oystercatchers** at the northern end of Henderson Bay in the late afternoon; we had counted a similar number on other occasions.

On 12<sup>th</sup> May we set off for Paua for the 12.30 high tide, hoping to see birds roosting and feeding in the paddocks in the vicinity of the old manure shed and wharf down Te Pua Road. We saw about 380 **Pied Stilts**, 38 **White-faced Herons**, 15 **Cattle Egrets**, 550 **South Island Pied Oystercatchers**, all roosting in the paddocks waiting for the tide to drop so that they could feed on the shoreline.

On 27<sup>th</sup> May we headed up to Paua again on a high mid-morning tide and were rewarded with an amazing number of birds during an easterly blow after heavy rain. The birds were sheltering behind a row of trees in a paddock well down Te Pua Road. I have never seen such a variety of birds in such a small area. I was able to count some of them: - about 420 **Banded Dotterels**, 46 **Spur-winged Plovers**, 8 **Golden Plovers**, many **Wrybills** & **Turnstones**, some **NZ Dotterels**, c.340 **Pied Stilts**, hundreds of **South Island Pied Oystercatchers**, lots of **Variable Oystercatchers**, some **Skylarks** & 18 **Black Swans**. In the Paua area I counted 170 **White-faced Herons**; they were everywhere in the Far North and seem to have increased greatly. I also counted 300 **Red-billed Gulls** at the northern end of Rarawa Beach.

We went on to Tapotupotu Beach to check the entry in our Shag register of a colony of Pied Shags there many years ago. We checked the map co-ordinates but we saw nothing there. Other campers / trampers we spoke to (members of Forest & Bird) had no idea where the colony had moved to. They had seen a **NZ Dotterel** here & a couple of **NZ Pipits**.

At Te Hapua the same day where the tide had started to drop a little, we saw an amazing sight. The sun was shining on 300 **Royal Spoonbills** standing on the beach with another 100 or so in a large old macrocarpa tree nearby, with c.25 **White-faced Herons**. 400 **Spoonbills** shining white in the sun is a sight to see.

On the Te Hapua Road we counted 8 **Brown Quail** on the side of the road, reluctant to move; they are rather shy birds and usually scuttle away to the shelter of the nearby scrub. These were the only ones we saw in the Far North. Another bird we saw once was the **Bittern**, in a paddock close to the road in the Waihopo area.

Another day we went to Whangape Harbour to check on another Shag colony reported a few years ago in trees on the north side of the harbour. The tide prevented us from going far but we spoke to a local gentleman who fished there on a regular basis and he has not seen any evidence of a colony for many years; another colony has presumably shifted. Likewise a former colony at Lake Rotokawau could not be found.

One day we saw 2 **Black Shags** (freshwater birds) at Henderson Bay; also 8 **Little Black Shags** on a sand bank in Houhora Harbour & a flock of them over Lake Waiparera. There were 46 **Canada Geese** at the ponds along Henderson Beach Road, an increase on numbers I can remember a few years ago. On the lake in Kimberley Road we counted 6 **NZ Dabchicks**, 8 **Grey Ducks**, 12 **Pukeko**, lots of **Swallows** & several **Harriers**; these were numerous in the Far North.

One evening near the Houhora Tavern there were 380 **Pied Stilts** in the sun on the grassy edge, looking very smart & colour-co-ordinated with their black & white feathers, red legs & black bills.

Altogether we saw 34 species between Tapotupotu & Kaitaia. We covered a lot of ground & drove many kilometres, but we enjoyed every moment of our re-visit to the very interesting Far North, and we hope to come again sometime."

You should note that Northland region have a register of Pied Shag breeding colonies & are interested in hearing of any changes or new records of these colonies.

**E BIRD Preserving your observations. Try eBird New Zealand!**

**C.J Ralph**

It's summer, and you're enjoying your evening at your bach, or at home. You have been out wandering around the yard for a half hour and wrote down the birds you saw. Casual as this may be, this information can provide critical information on the status of New Zealand birds.

You can join hundreds of other birdwatchers in New Zealand and revolutionize the way that bird observations of any kind can be preserved and accessed. A few minutes of your time on the computer, when you come back into the house, will make the count that you made of the birds in that 30 minutes part of a rapidly-growing effort to augment our Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ.

OSNZ has joined in a ground-breaking effort with Cornell University, Bird Studies Canada, several bird observatories, and organizations in many countries to provide a truly unique experience. Just type in [www.ebird.com/nz](http://www.ebird.com/nz), and you're away!

Take a few minutes to get started and log into a world where you can store and retrieve your observations, as well as explore others' observations on what, where, and when they see birds. To get started, just register at the completely private site that will not share your email address with anyone. Then, click on "Submit your observations" and provide some information on where, how, when, and what species you saw in a very easy form to fill out online. Be a bit patient, especially if you don't have broadband coverage. Once you are set up, the process takes about 5 minutes per count. One of the really great features is locating with the aid of Google maps, the precise location of your backyard, or favourite forest patch!

There is an excellent discussion of this in Southern Bird by Paul Scofield (March 2008). That issue hasn't yet been posted on the OSNZ website, but I'll check with them and let you know when it is. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me, and I can guide you through the process by phone or email.

Right now, you can see on the web site that the Northland area has only a few hundred censuses so far this year. Let's at least double this over the summer holidays, and see what we can find out about our birds.

**Loose Fishing Line Entangles Little Shag**

**C J Ralph**

We have often heard of the dangers to our coastal seabirds from set nets that entangle many species, especially the declining Little Blue Penguin. There are several reasons that care should be taken with other fishing equipment, as well, particularly cast-off bits of fishing line.

I am conducting a preliminary study to estimate the numbers of birds washed ashore on Moturoa Island, in the Bay of Islands, with special note of penguins, as set nets, despite their toll, are still commonly used by people desperate, I presume, for fresh fish. While searching a beach, I found a mostly mummified Little Shag on the beach wrack line on 16 December 2008.

When recording the standard data that the COASST (Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team [[www.coasst.org](http://www.coasst.org)]) programme in northwestern U.S. entails, I noticed a short length (about 1.5 metres) of blue nylon line wrapped around the neck, at one point fairly tight, apparently causing the bird's death.

The line had no hook attached. It appeared that the bird encountered a discarded length of line in the water, and the line eventually became wrapped around the bird's neck. As is often the case with nylon line, this had become curled, creating a series of loops, apparently effectively noosing the bird.



Photo: Judit Szabo

Part of this study is to determine the length of time that a body remains visible on the beach. Therefore, each body found is marked with coloured cable ties (shown at the yellow arrow), with 10 colours representing numbers, in this case, from "01" to "99." It is possible to identify individuals easily, so that the bird can be identified when the beach is again surveyed, as well as any changes in its condition. In this case, the colours were white (zero) and red (one), read from the centre of the body outward. Standard measurements are also taken to enable species identification, such as tarsus and beak, and also status of the body, such as parts missing, pliability of feet, and

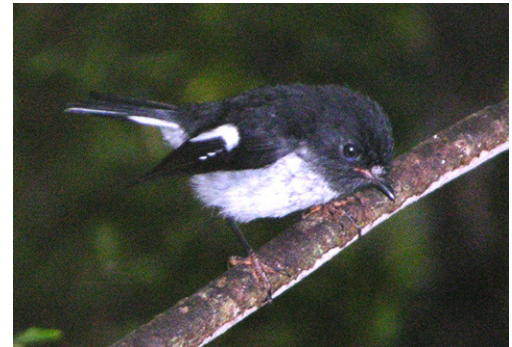
condition of the eyes.

It was instructive to me to find that even a small piece of line can have as destructive effect, and I would urge that this potential danger of long-lived material be made known so that caring people can avoid this source of mortality. I would greatly appreciate hearing of similar entanglements.

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### **Tomtits Confirmed Breeding on Moturua Island, Bay of Islands**

Moturua Island, in the Bay of Islands, is well known for having the longest-standing breeding population of North Island Robins in Northland. These birds are hanging on in apparently low numbers since their introduction in 1986, and we await the scheduled pest control this coming winter to boost their numbers.



In contrast, the robin's relative, the Tomtit, has only been recorded a few times on the island, but, as is the case with the other islands in the Bay, no breeding has yet been confirmed to our knowledge. On 21 December 2008, we went ashore on Moturua (courtesy of Laureen Alston) in the late afternoon prior to surveying Okahu and Waewaetorea islands the next day. In the tea tree forest atop the island on the track between Otupoho and Waipao bays, we saw a male Tomtit feeding a young bird which had a prominent and yellow gape. Between here and the waterfall, we eventually saw about 5 Tomtits, involving what appeared to be two pairs, one of which was obviously successfully breeding.

The closest breeding populations are just 10 km away in the Russell State Forest, and the self-colonization of the island and resulting breeding is good news indeed for the pest control efforts to come this winter, and indicates that the forest on the island is maturing to a good degree.

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(New readers should note: MOTUROA Island (home of the Ralphs); MOTURUA Island (where Tomtits are breeding).)



After nearly 3 years of waiting to be chosen, we finally had the opportunity to go to Codfish Island for 2 weeks of voluntary work for the Kakapo Recovery Project. More than 70 of the 90 remaining Kakapo are on this 1400 hectare island just to the west of Stewart Island and in return for the hard work involved in the supplementary feeding of the birds, we enjoyed the pristine forest, the native forest birds & photo opportunities. We were also lucky enough to see Kakapo (6 birds between us), as they occasionally visit

their feeding stations during the day. These included 'Sirocco', the bird which was taken to Ulva Island for a brief period of public viewing but had now returned 'home' and 'Richard Henry', the only pure Fiordland bird left, captured there in 1975 when already an adult, and still going strong.



The forest was alive with Tuis, Bellbirds, Red & Yellow-crowned Parakeets, Kaka, Riflemen & Tomtits. We only saw 4 introduced species the whole 2 weeks. Looking out to sea from Sealers Beach we could see flocks of Sooty Shearwaters, White-capped Albatrosses, 3 penguin species (just 2 Fiordland Crested), Cape & Giant Petrels & Stewart Island Shags. At night breeding seabirds were noisy & Yellow-eyed Penguins had burrows under the huts. We managed to spot a couple of South Georgian Diving Petrels coming in to their beachside burrows late at night & Short-tailed Bat & Hooker's Sea Lion were on our mammal list.

It was a privilege to be able to assist with the recovery project of such a special bird.

Photos:  
Yellow-eyed  
Penguin,  
South Island  
(‘Yellow-breasted’)  
Tomtit &  
‘Rooster’, the  
Kakapo

