



THE
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OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 4/2008 May2008

Local News Penguin Escapes to Canterbury

Graeme Loh and Graham McArthur continue to explore the avian world while seated in a sea kayak -

“On 18 May 2008 we made an intrepid kayak foray across the mouth of the Waitaki to the shingle clad land of Canterbury. We were dressed brightly in case we needed to be rescued. (Or to avoid being misidentified as geese?) This allowed us to get closer to the water fowl than those men in green with noisy iron sticks. Even so, only a rough count was able to be made and the birds progressively marshalled themselves in a great raft over the shingle bank offshore. The Waitaki does not really have an estuary nor a proper lagoon. Even at the top of the tide everything is still flowing towards the sea which the river enters at a gradient I didn't want to get sucked down. There is deep water against the coastal high shingle spit but only 200 metres away is a complex of channels, shingle and mud flats with stranded hulks for small willows, gorse and other woody debris that has floated down the river. Some water weeds and some didymo, so next kayak trip will be in the sea. This "delta" is almost a kilometre wide, but the channel runs another 1.5 km north to the outlet which is now a little north of Andrews Road at grid ref 642 859. Whitney's Creek comes into a lagoon from the north.

Birds are found in abundance in the delta run-out, at the spit end and on top of the spit. 6 Caspian terns, 38 feral geese, ~ 100 Shoveler, ~ 500 Mallards,

24 Grey Teal, 10 Black-fronted Terns, 8 White-fronted Terns, 6

Little Shags, 1 White-faced Heron, ~50 Red-billed Gulls, ~50 Black-backed Gulls,



some Black-billed Gulls, 9 Pied Stilts, 31+ Banded Dotterels, 12 Variable Oystercatchers (one pied VOC), 9 Black Shags. At the tip of the spit several, maybe 300 Spotted Shags roosted and were actively engaged in washing in the river. 14 Stewart Island Shags stood in their midst. The shags would be swept down to the sea as they washed, a constant procession that would regroup and return. There was sign that much larger numbers of shags and black backed gulls regularly roosted on the spit. One lone juvenile Yellow-eyed Penguin stumbled around the tide wrack on the mainland shore.”

Graeme Loh

Good breeding season for Grebes in Otago?

“Early on 16 March 2008 we left Dunedin for Twizel with the aim of finding some Crested Grebes. Our first sighting was of a pair feeding four juveniles at the head of Lake Aviemore; then on to the Ahuriri Arm of Lake Benmore where a pair with one noisy juvenile begging for food from one parent which refused to feed it and tried to drive it away by pecking at it; then on to the bay with the willow islands opposite Benmore Holiday park where we saw a pair with two juveniles out in the lake and one adult feeding a juvenile closer to shore. There was also one adult out in the water at the north end of Lake Benmore opposite the Ohau River delta. Two adults at Lake Middleton and the best for last with fourteen plus including 10 adults, three juveniles and one downy chick at Wairepo Arm and one adult and one juvenile on Kellands Ponds opposite. And to finish the day, a feed of fish and chips whilst watching the sun set on Aoraki and a Black Stilt feeding nearby on Lake Poaka. Total Grebes – 34, 21 adults and 13 juveniles.

On 6 April we headed for Central Otago on a cold misty morning, stopping first at Lake Waiholo where a White Heron was flying over the lake. The first Grebe was seen on Lake Dunstan near Jacksons in the Cromwell Gorge, a second at McNulty Inlet by Cromwell yacht club and a third in a bay half way down the lake towards Tarras – all adults. At the Bendigo Reserve** at the head of Lake Dunstan 20 plus including some juveniles were present. At Lake Hayes 50 plus including at least 20 juveniles, most being fed by adults. Some had single young but two pairs had four juveniles each and two other pairs three juveniles. At Lake Johnson there were three adults and four juveniles and at Lake Wakatipu near the Fernhill turnoff there was one adult and one juvenile. Total grebes – 82+ and a combined total of 116+.”

Janet & Dave York

**Graham Loh also had a quick look at the Bendigo Wildlife area as he came back from Central on Anzac weekend. “I hadn't been there since the flooding and was amazed at just how good a waterfowl area it was. Kayaking around the area was nice and did not seem to upset the ducks much, but a very noisy jet boat on the other side put every bird into the air. Things returned to calm 20 minutes later. I only saw one

grebe from the water but there is a great spot to overlook the birds at map ref 2217040 5578644, one of the rock towers on the west side of the road, just south of the Crippletown Dunnies. 13 grebes were seen from there.”

Fernbirds in the Orokonui Sanctuary

Back in summer, Elton Smith, operations manager at the Orokonui, found a small bird fluttering against the newly finished predator proof fence, obviously trying to get in to the safety of the sanctuary. It turned out to be a juvenile Fernbird and later that day Elton heard another inside the fence. A subsequent search with taped calls did not elicit any responses but Fernbirds have turned up in the last month inside the fence at the top, Mopanui Road end of the sanctuary. Valerie Fay confirmed their presence on 13 May. The habitat there is low regenerating scrub with many small leaved coprosmas and a few marshy areas similar to that of the nearest known, permanent population that extends along the ridge top from Flagstaff, through Swampy summit to the Silverpeaks . There have always been a few records from outside that area including low down in gullies on the recently cleared forestry blocks on the east side of the Silverpeaks and along Blueskin Road and around Mopanui trig. The swift arrival of the birds into suitable habitat inside the sanctuary suggests that the breeding population may be more widespread than previously thought. Hopefully they will learn how to climb inside, or fly high enough to clear, that fence.

Derek Onley

Ornithological Snippets

Compared to last month, things seem to have quietened down at sea. Off Warrington Beach on 16 May there were only “1000’s” of **Spotted Shags** feeding with “100’s” of **Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns**. There were also a couple of adult **Gannets**, the usual number for this time of year, several **Buller’s Mollymawks**, also not unusual and a single **Black-fronted Tern**. The **Sooty Shearwaters** appeared to have left. Closer in there were 20 **Caspian Terns** feeding along the breakers or roosting, a high number for this time of year. (Derek Onley.)



Valerie Fay reports a **Falcon** at Derdan Hill, Waikouaiti on 8th May and a total of 7 Tui in her garden above Waitati.

Sue Heath wrote from Purakaunui:

“Morepork

We have been hearing two **Moreporks** regularly over the last 6 weeks. They are calling early in the evening, not long after dark, and then again around 5am in the morning. One calls from inside or close to the cemetery at Purakaunui and the other is very close to us at the top of Station Road on the slopes of Mopanui. One bird frequently responds to the other. There may be others in the neighbourhood. I will keep listening. We have heard them regularly every one of the 14 years that we have lived there.

Little Owl

We used also to hear **Little Owls**, but over the last 6-7 years I have not heard them. However, I thought I heard one again recently and I would like to know of anyone with a tape or CD of their calls as I feel I need a refresher of their repertoire of sounds to be certain I am not just hearing Morepork mumblings. (Derek Onley has heard Little Owls regularly this autumn in Waitati and Chuck Landis has reported what sounds like their calls from Warrington recently.)

Tui

We also have a young male **tui** in residence close to our house. It has been calling regularly throughout the spring, summer and throughout this autumn and was also there last year, only disappearing for a short period over winter. We are convinced it is the same bird because it has a very distinctive and limited repertoire of calls and we have followed his song development as new calls have gradually been added. The bird comes very close to the house and always visits the same trees so we are able to stand right underneath and listen very carefully to the range of his calls. I am quite confident it is the same bird. We plan to entice him to a feeder shortly in the hope that he will stay around for longer.



Spur-wing Plovers chasing White-faced Heron on wing

On 19 April I saw a group of seven Spur-wing Plovers chasing a White-faced Heron in air on and off for over 15 minutes.

White-faced Herons nest regularly on Osborne side of Purakaunui inlet.

These birds have nested in gum trees at the top of Station Road just below the old station and also in macrocarpa trees on the Counsell's farm property at 30 Purakaunui Station Road every year over the last 5 years (at least).

Rosellas

We have a flock of 11 **Eastern Rosellas** that frequent our trees. Their group has grown in number over the past 2-3 summers from an original group of 5. These birds love our gum trees and our fruit trees. They have wrecked havoc with our apple and cheery plums but we are pretty lenient as we enjoy their calls and their very interesting social behaviour. They are round most days and also spend the spring, summer and autumns at or around our place. I will be keeping an eye out to see whether they stay round over winter.

I am starting to write down much more of what I see now because I am inclined to think I understand patterns of bird behaviour - but maybe my memory is not really as accurate as I think it is!"

Sue Heath

World News

Hamish Spencer was the only foreign correspondent to check in this month.

"I did not see lots of birds in Italy. The highlights were Cory's Shearwaters and Mediterranean Shearwaters off Elba and a pair of copulating Hoopoes in Bolgheri in Tuscany. I'm now in Boston, where it is early spring and rather wet and muddy."



Notices and Business

Copies of Notornis

Jennifer Bannister asks if anybody would like copies of Notornis dating from 1995 to 2007, including 'Wader Studies' and 'Kakapo'.

Contact Hamish Spencer: h.spencer@otago.ac.nz for details.

Trial of Email Newsletter

Many of you will have received a pdf copy of this Newsletter by email as well as mail. It is quite a big job to photocopy, collate, address and post the newsletters so if you are happy to receive the newsletter **only by email**, or if you would like to but didn't, please send your email address with your request to mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

NOTORNIS Good News of a sort

The June 2007 issue of Notornis is with the printer and will be posted before the AGM. The September and December issues will follow over the next 2-3 months, and the March and June 2008 issues will follow shortly thereafter. Jim Briskie has taken over as editor. So all going well, the September 2008 issue should be on time.

SOUTHERN BIRD

Please also note that the SEPARATE problems with generating postage stickers and mailing lists which have led to people missing out in December and March Southern Birds, occasioned by computer-incompatibilities during the change in Membership Secretary, are being sorted.

E-BIRD Good News

A beta version of the New Zealand eBird link is up and running! So members can play with it to their heart's content and get all those records electronically databased, analysed and made available. More at the AGM.

Ingrid Hutzler

Executive Officer

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www.osnz.org.nz

Film Premiere

The August indoor meeting will feature the NZ premiere of Sandy Crichton's film "Karearea: The Pine Falcon" starring George Chance. Hamish Spencer says "I have had a sneak preview and it is a wonderful film, a moving tribute to George"

You may like to look at the Karearea Film Website www.karearea.com For information on how the film is faring festival-wise please check out the 'latest news' and 'screenings' sections.

Date Change **Otago Harbour Winter Wader Count**

Far too many regular wader counters are going to the OSNZ AGM in Kaikoura on the original date of Saturday, 31 May so the count has been postponed until Saturday 14 June. High tide is around midday.

Please give Ken Gager a call on 487 6670 if you can help with this count.



Mystery Photo 1



Yes I know it's not a good photo, but in many ways it contains more information than you would get when watching from the end of Aramoana mole where the bird would be out of sight around Taiaroa Head in a few seconds. Answer next month. Have you any mystery photos you would like included here? Contact the editor.

Programme 2008

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street at 8 p.m.
Please be on time: the door will be locked after 8 p.m.

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| Wednesday, 28 May | Indoor Meeting Topic: Genetics and Conservation of Yellow-eyed Penguins | Speaker: Sanne Boessenkool |
| Saturday, 14 June | Winter Wader Count. Back up day, Saturday 28 June. High tide around midday. Contact Ken Gager, ☎ 487 6670 | |
| Wednesday, 25 June | Indoor Meeting Topic: Return of Campbell Island Teal | Speaker: Bruce McKinlay |
| Saturday 28 June | Winter Survey of Hawkesbury Lagoon | |
| Wednesday, 23 July | Indoor Meeting Topic: TBA | Speaker: Bryan Rhodes |
| Wednesday, 27 August | Indoor Meeting This meeting will feature the NZ premiere of Sandy Crichton's film "Karearea: The Pine Falcon" starring George Chance. Hamish Spencer says "I have had a sneak preview and it is a wonderful film, a moving tribute to George" | |
| Labour Weekend 24-26 October | Glenorchy Weekend Fieldtrip. Contact Louise Foord, ☎ 467 5041 | |

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Final date for copy for next newsletter: 18 June