

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

August 2009

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

Monthly Meetings in Wellington City

We meet on the first Monday of each month (January and June excepted) at the Head Office of the Department of Conservation (DOC) ("Conservation House" – Te Whare Atawhai), 18-32 Manners Street, Wellington (located between Manners Mall and Willis Street). Please wait outside the glass entrance doors for a DOC staff member / OSNZ member to admit you through the entrance security system and to the meeting room on the 4th floor. Access is available between 7:20 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. Meetings commence at 7:45 p.m. If you are late please telephone (027) 230-8454 and someone will come to the door to let you in.

Periodic Meetings in Kapiti Coast District

Four meetings are held annually (the dates are flexible) at the Paraparaumu Public Library Meeting Room, 179 Rimu Road, Paraparaumu, commencing at 7.30 pm. Ample car parking is available. Tea and coffee are served before the meeting. If you are late please telephone (027) 230-8454 and someone will come to the door to let you in.

Programme from August to February 2010

- 3rd August:** *"Fossil Bonanza in Otago's Miocene Opens a Window on New Zealand's Past Birdlife"*. Dr. Alan Tennyson, Scientist, Te Papa Tongarewa – Museum of New Zealand, will present an account of recent research on the rich fossil bird finds in central Otago.
- 10th August (Monday) at Paraparaumu:** *"South Atlantic sojourns: birds of the Falklands, South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha, the Antarctic Peninsula and southern South America"*. Dr. Colin Miskelly, Conservation Scientist, DOC, Wellington Conservancy, will present a fascinating account of birds of the southern Atlantic Ocean.
- 7th September:** *"Some Results of Translocation Efforts of Fairy Prions on Mana Island"*. Dr. Colin Miskelly, Conservation scientist, DOC, Wellington Conservancy. Colin will present and discuss the results gained so far of translocation efforts of fairy prions on Mana Island.
- 5th October:** *"Birds of Feather Flock Together To Count - The Feeding Behaviour of the NZ Robin"*. Dr. Kevin Burns, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, will talk about research into the cognitive ability of the NZ robin to count when feeding.

2nd November: *“Risk Assessment for Fisheries Interactions in the New Zealand and Wider Pacific Area, Including Reference to Birds”*. Dr. Susan Waugh-Filippi, consultant ornithologist, will speak on the results of some recent bird conservation studies in the ocean fishing industry and will show how data sharing is contributing to good conservation outcomes.

7th December: *“Results of Recent Studies on New Zealand Parakeets”*. Dr. Geoff Chambers, Research and Teaching Fellow, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington will speak about some aspects of the evolution of our parakeets gained through using molecular biology technologies. This is also our end-of-year meeting and we can share some Christmas cheer beforehand.

1st February 2009: *“Member’s Evening.”* An opportunity for members to make short presentations on their summer bird watching, bird study and bird conservation activities.

Field activities:

1. *“Mist-netting and passerine banding”* at Wellington Zoo and elsewhere in Wellington. Sessions are usually held on Saturdays or on Sunday if the weather is too wet on Saturday. Please contact Peter Reese for details.
2. *“Monitoring of shore plover”* on Mana Is. and at adjacent mainland sites, including Green Point. Regular monitoring of the movement of birds will continue during the year. Contact Barry Dent for details.
3. *“Monitoring of birds at the Pencarrow lakes”*. Periodic weekday field trips to monitor populations of wetland and forest birds on the Pencarrow lakes and in adjacent forest and scrublands will resume in the spring, with emphasis upon species having a ‘threat classification conservation status’. One or more overnight visits may be made commencing in the week on 21 September. Please contact the RR for details.
4. *“Wellington Harbour Bird Survey, 2008 – 2010”*. First Sunday of each month (excepting January and June, second Sunday), 1 pm to 3 pm. Interest in participating in the bird survey from more volunteers, including new members or visitors, would be very welcome. Contact Ian Armitage for details.
5. *“Kapiti Island Bird Survey”*. Led by Dr. Colin Miskelly, DOC. A long-term survey of forest birds on parts of Kapiti Island will continue in October and again in the summer, probably January 2010. Overnight stays on the island will be necessary. Society members have been undertaking forest bird counts on Kapiti Island since the 1970s. Colin will advise of details including specific dates to members who will participate. More volunteers are welcome but remember the work is physically demanding.
6. *“Rimutaka Forest Park 5-minute Bird Counts.”* A new long-term programme of 5-minute bird counts will commence in August (8th or 9th) in the forests in the Catchpool-Five Mile Track zone of the Rimutaka Forest Park, in conjunction with the Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust. The field work requires a moderate level of fitness and will take most of a day to complete. Volunteers are welcome. Contact Ian Armitage for details.
7. *“Onoke Spit Caspian tern and Black-backed Gull banding”* – late December or early January, conditions permitting. A day trip in association with the Wairarapa Region of the society. Further details to be advised.

Notable and Recent bird Sightings

At the end of February an **Arctic Skua** was spotted chasing a **Red-billed Gull** at the Waikanae River mouth by Janice Woon. Peter Reese also spotted two **Arctic skuas** near Matiu/Somes Island in the late summer.

Enfys Graham reports that during the last summer no **Little Black Shags** were seen between Rona Bay and Eastbourne, but in April about 31 were often present in Lowry Bay.

Also in April, Geoff de Lisle recorded about 130 **White-fronted Terns** during the Wellington Harbour Survey beside the Hutt motorway.

Graeme Taylor saw about six **Gannets** between Petone and Ngauranga recently, an usually high number seen together in Wellington Harbour.

Cape Petrels (pigeons) have been seen at Miramar Wharf and near Cape Halswell recently.

A **Giant Petrel** was recorded in Lyall Bay in July by Peter Reese during the harbour survey.

Viola Palmer reports seeing two **red-crowned parakeets** at her home at Otaihanga (near Paraparaumu) in July when making a Garden Bird Survey, and one **red-crowned parakeet** was seen and photographed at Kelson by Kyle Bland (a non-member). One or two **red-crowned parakeets** continue to be regularly seen or heard in the Porirua Scenic Reserve.



Stuart Nicholson has often reported **kakas** flying near his home in Brooklyn but was surprised to find three **kakas** perched on the railing of his deck when he looked out one morning in June.

Ian Armitage reports a **Falcon** in Tawa, the first seen here in over 25 years.

An **Australian Coot** was reported in March at Paraparaumu, another unusual record.

About 40 **Black-fronted Terns** were observed by Mary McEwan in Wellington Harbour in early May. Hugh Robertson recorded the first occurrence of

Black-fronted Terns in the Harbour Survey in May. Several hundreds of **Southern Black-backed Gulls** were recorded in the harbour survey in May.

Bellbirds are often heard and seen in Linden and in nearby reserves confirming the gradual spread of bellbirds near Wellington. The accompanying photo is of a bellbird at Linden taken by Paul Guiniven (a non-member) of the 'Friends of Tawa Bush'.



Moreporks continue to be heard calling from Tinakori hill, in the Eastbourne area and in Tawa.

Also in the autumn, two **Reef Herons** were seen in the harbour by Stuart Nicholson.

Spotted shags are frequently seen over much of the harbour and continue to nest in numbers on Somes Island / Matiu. Reg. Cotter has provide the accompanying photograph of an adult with a chick.

Colin Miskelly remarks that **Little owls** may now occur in the Wairarapa and possibly on the Kapiti Coast as calls strikingly like little owl calls have been reported by observers who know this species that is only recorded in the South Island. Keep a good look out!



An albino **house sparrow** was seen and photographed in Tawa by Christine Newman (non-member).

Found weak and underweight on a Wellington beach in early June a juvenile **Giant Petrel** was cared for at Wellington



Whiteheads now seem to be established in the Battle Hill Regional Reserve, near Pauatahanui, seen and photographed by Duncan Watson (a non-member).

New Zealand Dotterels seem to be spreading southwards on the East Coast. This attractive species is now breeding at Cape Kidnappers and may also be breeding near Castlepoint. Perhaps they will continue to move southwards towards the Wellington coastlines so keep a good look out when walking on local coasts, including visits to the Wairarapa, during the harbour bird survey and when on beach patrols.



Zoo for three weeks before being released on Somes Island / Matiu recently. The accompanying photograph (with acknowledgments to Wellington Zoo) shows the giant petrel shortly before departure.

Recent Wellington Region talks

Monday 2nd March 2009: Our Wellington Region Annual General Meeting was held prior to our guest speaker's talk for the evening. Ian Armitage presented his Annual Report for the region, noting that the number of Wellington members has declined slightly. Ian stood for re-election as our Regional Representative for one more year, and was re-elected. Stephen Sharp presented his Treasurer's Report and explained that funds are available to be used for bird study projects by our members. Stephen was re-elected as Treasurer. Geoff de Lisle and Dallas Bishop now write notes for the 'Regional Roundup' column in *Southern Bird*. Stuart Nicholson continues to be the Regional Recorder.

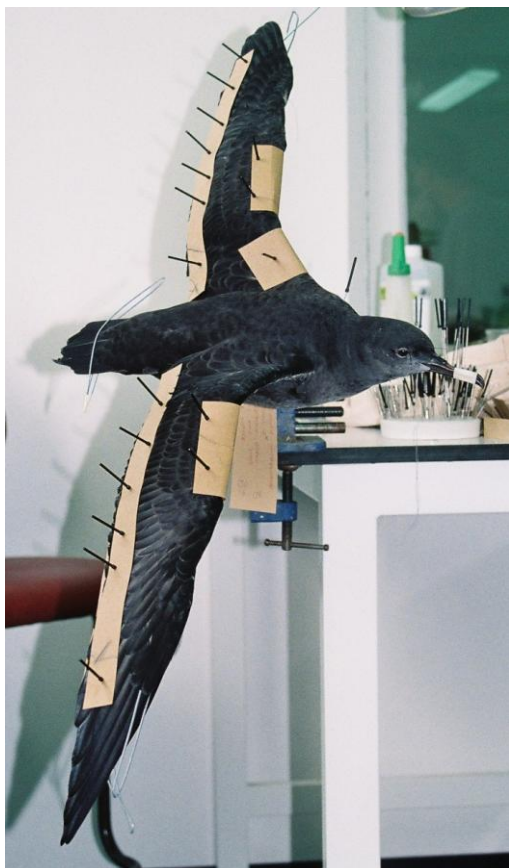
Our guest speaker for the evening, David Melville, a consultant ornithologist from Nelson, spoke to us about Avian Influenza (bird flu) and wild birds. The H5N1 virus which causes Avian Influenza first appeared in 1996 in domestic geese in eastern China. In 1997 an outbreak of the disease in poultry in Hong Kong resulted in over 1 million ducks and every chicken being slaughtered. The outbreak in late 2003 has caused 407 cases of infection in humans and up to January 2009 there have been 254 human deaths, a 62% mortality rate. Spread of the virus by wild birds is considered unlikely; the most likely factor is by human travel. David noted that biosecurity of the country's borders is vital. Thank you David for visiting and speaking to us.

Monday 4th May: Colin Miskelly described his voyages last summer on a cruise ship that took in southern South America, the nearby sub-Antarctic islands and the Antarctic peninsula. Using spectacular photography Colin showed a range of bird species that included King, Gentoo, Adelie, Chinstrap, Rockhopper, Macaroni, Humbolt and Magellanic Penguins and Wandering, Northern Royal, Black-browed, Grey-headed, Yellow-nosed and Sooty Albatrosses. Other prominent species shown were:

- Northern, Southern and white phase Southern Giant Petrels,
- Cape Pigeon, Southern Fulmar, Antarctic, Juan Fernandez, Spectacled, Snow, Blue, Westland, and White-chinned Petrels.
- Antarctic Prion, Pink-footed Shearwater,
- Peruvian Pelican; Imperial, Rock, and South Georgian Shags; Antarctic Cormorant,
- Black-crowned Night Heron, Upland, Ashy-headed, Ruddy-headed and Kelp Geese,
- Crested and Steamer Ducks and South Georgian Pintail,
- Variable Hawk, Condor, Turkey Vulture, Southern Crested and Striated Karakaras,
- Rhea with young and three species of Coots,
- Magellanic Oystercatcher, Double-banded Plover, Hudsonian Godwit, Lesser Yellowlegs, Magellanic Snipe, White-rumped Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope.
- Sub-antarctic and South Polar Skuas and hybrids, Chilean Skua, Kelp Gull; Antarctic and South American Terns,
- Magellanic Woodpecker; Giant Hummingbird; Grass Wren; Dark-faced Grand Tyrant; Pipit and Long-tailed Meadowlark.

Thanks Colin for such a comprehensive talk.

Beach Patrols



Over late summer that an unusually large number of **Australasian Gannets** and **Fluttering Shearwaters** were washed up along the Horowhenua coast. During autumn Colin Miskelly reports that two **White-capped Albatrosses** were brought in to the Department of Conservation, picked up from Lyall Bay and in Island Bay. Jean Luke found a **Hutton's Shearwater** and a **Fluttering Shearwater**, both in fresh condition, on the Waikanae coast and sent both specimens to our monthly meeting to show comparative views of the two species.

Reg. Cotter collected several **Sooty Shearwaters** from Petone Beach recently and the best of these were passed to Alan Tennyson at Te Papa for use as mounted specimens at the National Museum. One was sent to Scotland where it will feature in an exhibition (see the accompanying photograph).

Members are encouraged to let others know when a bird 'wreck' is found so that more effort can be put into recording birds over longer stretches of beaches. The RR is happy to coordinate this and let members know when wrecks occur. [For members who don't know a 'wreck' is an usually large number of birds on a beach often occurring during or following stormy weather].

Wellington Harbour Bird Survey

The 4th Wellington Harbour bird survey continues and will run until December 2010. The aim is to describe the seasonal and geographic distribution of birdlife in Wellington Harbour and along the southern coastline and to investigate how modifications to the harbour have affected the numbers and distribution of birds.

Counts are made on the first Sunday of each month, between 1 pm and 3 pm (excepting January – second Sunday). As in earlier surveys, it is important that all 17 sections be counted simultaneously to minimise multiple counting of birds. A Recent observations are summarized in the following table.

SPECIES	March	April	May	June	July
BLACKBIRD, European	1	4	1	20	48
CHAFFINCH	1	5	9	15	17
DOTTEREL, Banded		6			
DUNNOCK	1		8	6	3
FANTAIL, Pied				2	
GANNET, Australasian	4		12	2	10
GOLDFINCH			4	8	10
GOOSE, Feral	8	9		4	0
GREENFINCH	42	1	62	15	12
GULL, Black-backed	1,365	1,260	1,144	1,107	617
GULL, Red-billed	1,452	633	525	785	705
GULL, Black-billed		232		1	
HERON, Reef		1	2	1	2
HERON, White-faced	2		2	2	0
KINGFISHER, Sacred		2	2	2	1
MAGPIE, Australian			2		
MALLARD x Grey Duck	132	83	88	127	115
OYSTERCATCHER, Variable	113	88	74	112	80
OYSTERCATCHER, Pied	1		28	1	30
PETREL, Giant					1
PIGEON, Feral / White Dove	33	50	57	30	34
PIBIT		1	1	4	2
PLOVER, Spur-winged		5	2	3	4
QUAIL, Californian	6				1
SHAG, Black	18	36	14	45	28
SHAG, Little	42	59	115	91	147
SHAG, Little black	1	55	31	49	110
SHAG, Spotted	20	28	42	11	5
SHAG, Pied		27	3	15	22
SHEARWATER, Fluttering		260		215	6
SHELDUCK, Paradise	2	2			2
SILVEREYE	7			6	39
SPARROW, House	164	73	70	53	100
STARLING, European	42	48	26	148	222
SWALLOW, Welcome	4	4		5	1
SWAN, Black	12	10	17	9	4
TERN, Black-fronted			7		
TERN, White-fronted	153	307	129		

SPECIES	March	April	May	June	July
TERN, Caspian	1	1	1	2	1
THRUSH, Song	1		1	9	1
TUI	1				1
YELLOWHAMMER					1
No. Species Recorded	28	28	30	34	34

Mist-Netting and Banding of Passerines

Peter Reese continues to lead mist-netting and passerine banding work at Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery. Since Peter commenced banding passerines in 2000 over 6,000 birds have been banded. Peter encourages members to join in and reports that the most frequently caught species is Silvereye (except for the first year), with 1,760 individuals banded. Following Silvereyes the most frequently captured and

banded species are (in order): House Sparrows, Greenfinches (which are the most mobile of all the species), Starlings (of which 325 have been banded, and includes the “oldest” bird to date), Chaffinches, Blackbirds, Fantails (118 birds banded, mainly caught in the late afternoons / evenings), Goldfinches, Dunnocks, Yellowhammers, Tui, Song Thrushes, Grey Warblers, Kingfishers and Magpies.

2009 AGM and Conference

There were over 140 participants at the AGM and conference held at Orewa at Queen’s Birthday weekend. The new President of the society is David Lawrie of South Auckland Region. The presentations at the Scientific Day were varied and interesting and will be summarised in a future issue of *Notornis*. Two popular field days were arranged, to Tawharanui Regional Park, east of Warkworth, and to Tiritiri Matangi Island.

Several Wellington members enjoyed a bus trip to Tawharanui Regional Park (550 hectares) located on a peninsular north of Kawau Island and managed as an open sanctuary through the construction of a 2.5 km fence between the northern and southern shores. It was a chance to view New Zealand Dotterels closely that are only rarely seen in the southern North Island.



Pied fantails are numerous and many surrounded us when we enjoyed lunch on a warm grassy slope overlooking a beach where several pairs of NZ Dotterels were present (see the accompanying photograph. Little Barrier Island in the background). Whiteheads, Brown kiwi, North Island robins and Pateke have been released and Bellbird and Kaka have self-introduced recently from Little Barrier Island.

The AGM and conference next year will be in Nelson, and in 2011 it will be held again in Wellington.

Wellington Region Contacts

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Injured bird hotlines: Ms. Karin Wiley, Native Bird Rescue Wellington Trust (04) 479-2936 Department of Conservation 0800 362-468

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