



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

July 2008

CONGRATULATIONS. We congratulate Ros Batcheler on the award of a Meritorious Services Award (MSA) by the President, Prof. Richard Holdaway, at the recent conference at Kaikoura in recognition of her significant contribution to the life of the society over many years, including as a Councillor, Regional Representative and Book Reviews Coordinator.

Monthly Meetings

Wellington: We meet on the first Monday of the 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.

Paraparaumu: Three or four meetings are held annually (the timing is flexible) and are held 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.

Speakers Programme from July 2008 to February 2009

7th July: Dr. Colin Miskelly. DOC, Conservation Analyst, Wellington Conservancy. *"Conservation genetics of New Zealand snipe"*. Colin will bring us up to date with genetic studies on New Zealand snipe.

4th August: Dr. Ricardo Palma. Scientist/entomologist, Te Papa Tongarewa – Museum of New Zealand. *"History of the naming of N.Z. birds"*. Dr. Palma is a member of the OSNZ Checklist Committee that is preparing the 4th edition of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*.

1st September: Mr. Peter Moore. Scientist, DOC. Head Office. *"Southern royal albatross on Campbell Island - what have we learned from four years searching for bands?"* Peter has worked on Campbell Island for several summer seasons and has a first hand knowledge of royal albatross migration and biology.

12th September (Wednesday) at Paraparaumu: Dr. Mary McEwen, Wellington & Waikanae. "*Charles Fleming's Cape Expedition Diary*": *Auckland Islands 1942-43: Albatrosses, mollymawks and other distractions*". A presentation of some aspects of the diary of Sir Charles Fleming when he was stationed in the Auckland Islands in 1942-43.

6th October: Mr. David Melville. Consultant ornithologist, Nelson. "*A review of issues and dangers concerning bird flu (avian influenza)*". David is an OSNZ Councillor and has up-to-date knowledge concerning the issues and the ever present dangers to people and birds of bird flu.

3rd November: Mr. Julian Fitter, Leader of the Friends of Galápagos Support Organization in New Zealand. "*Galapagos, the challenge for conservation*". Julian has travelled widely in Southern Oceans of the world and has a specific knowledge of the Galápagos Island group in the Pacific Ocean, west of Ecuador.

12th November (Wednesday) at Paraparaumu: Mr. Peter Moore. Scientist, DOC. Head Office (and OSNZ member at Paraparaumu). "*Southern royal albatross on Campbell Island - what have we learned from four years searching for bands?*" Peter has worked on Campbell Island for several summer seasons and has a first hand knowledge of royal albatross migration and biology.

1st December: Mr. Dave Hansford, Wellington. "*A presentation and discussion on bird photography*". Dave will outline aspects of his photographic experience and will show some stunning bird photographs. As this is the final meeting of the year we will commence with some Christmas cheer (Christmas cake and wine, soft drinks).

2nd February 2009: "*Members evening*". An opportunity for members to make short presentations on their summer bird watching, bird study and bird conservation activities.

Other activities:

1. "*Mist-netting and passerine banding*" sessions at Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery continue this year. These popular sessions for banding and moult studies of passerine birds captured by mist-netting enable members to gain useful first hand experience in handling small birds. Sessions are usually held on Saturdays but if Saturday is too wet on the Sunday. Is anyone on the Kapiti Coast interested in commencing this work? 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 the Barry Dent or the RR for details.
3. "*Monitoring of birds at the Pencarrow lakes*". Monthly field trips to monitor populations of wetland and forest birds on the lakes and in adjacent forest and scrublands, on sand dunes and on adjacent beaches, with emphasis upon species having a 'threat classification conservation status'. This field work will be conducted on weekdays commencing in July and is a more sharply focused continuation of field work conducted between 2004 and 2007. Please contact Reg. Cotter for details.

Notable and recent bird sightings in the Wellington Region

During the late summer and autumn two families of **dabchicks** were spotted by Mary McEwen on Waimanu Lagoons at Waikanae. Between March and June several Kapiti Coast members saw a banded **shore plover** at Waikanae, one of the recently released Mana Island birds. A young **shore plover** that fledged recently on Mana Island made at least one brief visit to Hongoeka Bay, near Plimmerton. Ian Armitage saw 10 banded **shore plovers**, all from Mana Island, at Green Point on 3rd June. Stuart Nicholson counted seven **magpies** in one tree, an unusually large number of magpies seen altogether. During two late afternoon-early evening field visits to the Pencarrow lakes in March several **dabchicks** were seen and Ros Batcheler heard a **spotless crane** call. **Shovelers, black swans, paradise shelducks, scaup** and many

redpolls (feeding on toitoi seed) were also seen. **N.Z. falcons** have also been spotted around the region recently: one was seen in Johnsonville by Hugh Best and the Robertson family saw two birds in Ngaio and on Mt. Kaukau. Several members have seen a pair of **brown teal** and a **shore plover** at the Waikanae River estuary recently. The drake brown teal is showing bright breeding plumage and is a stunning looking bird. The shore plover is, as others have found elsewhere, quite approachable and is one of the group released on Mana Island in February.



Photos. Left: Brown teal,

Right: Shore plover.

Photos: Phil Palmer

At the end of June many hundreds, if not thousands of **fluttering shearwaters** were seen by several members in Wellington Harbour, perhaps sheltering from the recent stormy weather (see photo below, taken in the Evan's Bay marina). **Fluttering shearwaters** have also been seen off the Kapiti Coast by Graham Bird who also reports an **Arctic skua**. At least one pair, and possibly three **red-crowned parakeets** continue to be present in the Porirua Scenic Reserve and have been seen and heard several times since January by Ian Armitage. Duncan Watson (non-OSNZ) reports up to 50 **pipit** on the south Wellington coast west of Red Rocks, between Sinclair Head and Tongue Point, in mid-June. Peter Reese reported an unusual **owl** at Island Bay in March. **Eastern rosellas** have been reported by several members.



Recent Wellington Region talks

Monday 3rd March 2008: Dr. Ralph Powlesland made a two-part presentation. Firstly, he described his joint study with Jean Luke of ["bird visitors to a bird-bath on the Kapiti Coast"](#). Some fascinating scenes of bird behaviour were illustrated using a camera and time-lapse video recorder.

Secondly, Ralph made a colourfully illustrated presentation of an August 2007 visit of several OSNZ members (including four from Wellington) to Sabah (Borneo), in Malaysia. Entitled ["It's not all about birds"](#) Ralph's talk covered visits to Mt. Kinabalu National Park, the Sukau River, Danum Valley and to the Sepilok-Sandakan locality. Some of the colourful birds encountered in the tropical forests were the velvet-fronted nuthatch, indigo flycatcher, spangled drongo, flavescent bulbil, chestnut-capped laughing-thrush, glossy swiftlet, yellow-breasted warbler, brown-throated sunbird, and several species of hornbills, kingfishers, owls, herons, monarchs, pittas and tailorbirds. But as Ralph explained, it wasn't all about birds and we were amazed at the diversity of tropical plants and mammals (including monkeys, orang-utan and elephant),

snakes, lizards, frogs, spiders, insects and of course the leeches! Thanks Ralph for showing us some examples of the splendid birds and other wildlife that inhabit the Sabah forests.



Left: An ashy tailorbird, roosting at night beneath a leaf.

Right: An orang-utan eating sugar cane.

Photos: Ian Armitage

Monday 7th April 2008: Jennifer Vinton who is studying at Victoria University of Wellington explained her “[survey of birds in the Wellington urban area in relation to landscape types](#)”. Thirty-four species were counted, including many kingfisher records, eastern rosellas in Karori (particularly in the evenings) and in Wadestown, and a morepork in Wadestown. Jennifer is presently completing an M.Sc using this study material. Thanks Jennifer for sharing your study with us.

Monday 5th May 2008: Another two-part presentation. Firstly, David Melville, visiting Wellington from Nelson, explained some aspects of the [bar-tailed godwit migration studies](#) that he and others are pursuing in a coastal reserve in north-west China, on the border with North Korea. New Zealand and Australian bar-tailed godwits migrate through this region located at the north end of the Yellow Sea. A benthic survey on the tidal flats has been carried as a pilot study to examine food sources for migrating godwits and other bird species.

Raewyn Empson, conservation scientist at the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, described the results of “[recent studies on the breeding ecology of hihi \(stitchbirds\), bellbirds, and kaka in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary](#)”. Hihi productivity was compared with the productivity of the source population at Tiritiri Matangi Island: more eggs are produced per female at Karori, but fledgling survival is better at Tiritiri. Juvenile bellbird survival rates to September show a marked sex imbalance with more males known to be alive than females. Kaka hatching success shows a gradual decline but fledgling survival rates to September are good.

Monday 12th May 2008: The first full evening meeting on the Kapiti Coast was held in early May when more than 20 members and visitors met at Paraparaumu. We were pleased to welcome Dr. Murray Williams who gave us a fascinating “[ecological overview about sub-Antarctic waterfowl](#)”. Murray explained that all sub-Antarctic islands have species of waterfowl and that the limitation for the establishment of new populations appears to be the extent of winter sea ice. 13 species occur in the New Zealand region and 16 species occur in Tierra del Fuego. It is probable that the unique sub Antarctic taxa are derived from related species on the nearest land mass. Species displacement seems to have occurred following new arrivals, e.g. the arrival of mallards, leading to the species loss. Evolution may have occurred quite rapidly, since the end of the last ice age, leading to the evolution of new and modified species. An example is that the Auckland Island teal has almost certainly evolved from the New Zealand brown teal. Murray summarised the following primary features of sub-Antarctic waterfowl: – the ability to colonise new and often harsh habitats, - display of migratory tendencies, - the ability to colonise salt-water environments, i.e. marine feeding, - lowered energy demand, - body size reduction, - flightlessness, - reduced clutch size, - occupation of territories year-round, e.g. Auckland Island brown teal, - aggressiveness and the establishment of long-term pair bonds. It was an entertaining evening and we are grateful to Murray for sharing his knowledge with us.

Beach Patrols

Recent beach patrols on Wellington, Horowhenua and Manawatu beaches have revealed several **sooty shearwaters**, **fairy prions**, **gannets** (juveniles), a **royal albatross**, **diving petrels**, **black-backed gulls**, **fluttering shearwaters**, a **black-browed mollymawk**, a **black swan** and a **harrier**. Please take opportunities to wander along our beaches to look for beach-wrecked birds. Even short walks may turn up interesting and significant finds.

Recent Field Trips

Farewell to the Birds, Manawatu River Estuary, Foxton. Six local members joined other OSNZ members from Manawatu, Wairarapa and Wanganui on 8th March to enjoy a great day to celebrate a 'farewell to the birds' that was arranged by the Manawatu Estuary Trust. The weather was warm and settled and the tide at midday was unusually high, almost submerging 'the spit' and flooding all mudflats! There were many birds and the highlights were viewing 22 Pacific golden plover most showing grand breeding plumage, about 100 each of beautifully coloured red knots and bar-tailed godwits – almost ready to depart on migration – a shore plover (banded as BR-BY from Mana Is; many visitors had not previously seen a shore plover), a curlew sandpiper and a sharp-tailed sandpiper. Other species present were about 30 pied oystercatchers, a few variable oystercatchers and numerous juvenile and adult Caspian terns and pied stilts.



Don & Muriel Stracy, Andy Falshaw, Jean Luke, Frances Gazley and other visitors viewing birds on 'the spit' at the Manawatu River estuary on 8th March. Photo: Ian Armitage

Birds at the Pencarrow Lakes, East Harbour Regional Park, Wellington. Over a three-year period from 2004 to 2007 several members have monitored birds at monthly intervals at Lakes Kohangapiripiri and Kohangatera, near Pencarrow. The aim has been to establish a baseline of avian biodiversity in the wetlands and adjacent lands following the end of pastoral farming in 2004 and the establishment of the East Harbour Regional Park. 51 species were recorded at Lake Kohangatera and 34 Lake Kohangapiripiri. The six most abundant wetland species are (in order) mallard, paradise shelduck, shoveler, black swan, black shag and NZ scaup and the six least abundant wetland species are NZ dabchick, spotless crane, Australasian bittern, grey duck, brown teal and pied shag.

Significant population trends over three years at Lake Kohangatera include (i) NZ scaup have increased from no birds to about 6 birds observed/month, (ii) black shag show slowly

decreasing numbers from about 8 to 6 birds observed/month, (iii) the little shag population is low but appears to be slightly increasing to about 3 birds observed/month and (iv) Shovelor have increased from about 12 to 18 birds observed/month. Pipit data for Lakes Kohangatera & Kohangapiripiri combined show a declining population, from about 6 to 4 birds observed/month. Banded dotterel data for both lakes combined show a steady though small population of between 5 and 6 birds observed/month.

Following a discussion recently with Greater Wellington Regional Council staff we are encouraged to continue monitoring populations of birds on both lakes, in the adjacent forest and scrublands, on sand dunes and on adjacent beaches, with emphasis upon species having a 'threat classification conservation status' (grey duck, Australasian bittern, brown teal, banded dotterel, spotless crane and black shag) in order to determine population changes and habitat preferences. We hope to commence this new phase of field work soon, hopefully in July. Field work will be carried mid-week, not at weekends. Contact Reg. Cotter if you wish to join in.



Left: Rod Orange near lake Kohangapiripiri.



Right: A view at Lake Kohangatera.

Photos: Ian Armitage

Kapiti Island Forest Bird Survey. The first set of counts of Kapiti Island birds for the current programme took place in April, over ANZAC week-end, and was led by Geoff de Lisle. This new phase on monitoring will enable comparisons to be made with counts made in 6 to 8 years ago. Vegetation changes are evident since the early 2000s, and saddleback, kokako, little spotted kiwi and stitchbirds were recorded in the April counts. The programme involves counts over one week-end every three months, therefore four times a year, for three years. For any inquiries about taking part in the trips, contact Colin Miskelly. Colin has just advised that for logistical reasons, including stormy winter weather presently, the survey will be deferred for up to a year. More news later.

Mist-Netting and Banding of Passerines at Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery. The mist-netting and passerine banding activities are continuing this year. The sessions are led by Peter Reese and are usually held on Saturdays, or on Sunday if the Saturday weather is too wet. Further details are obtainable from Peter Reese.

Field visits at Kaikoura during the 2008 Conference. Several Wellington members enjoyed meeting others from throughout the country at the recent Kaikoura conference. There was a great deal of fun and wonderful hospitality was arranged by the Canterbury organizers. Boat trips were made off the East Coast to watch oceanic bird species at close range (albatrosses, petrels, prions) and bus tours also took members to sites on the lower slopes of the Kaikoura Range (robins, rifleman) for a walk across the Kaikoura Peninsula and southwards along the coast.

The photos show Derek & Ros Batcheler, Sheelagh Leary and others watching royal and wandering albatrosses, cape petrels and a giant petrel several kilometers out to sea.



Photos: Dr. Andrew McEwen

New Zealand eBird

A new internet-based system for recording and documenting bird observations was launched at the annual conference of the society in Kaikoura on 31st May. Known as **New Zealand eBird** the system is major advance in bird documentation technology. It is a new tool designed to give bird-watchers the opportunity to submit observations made in New Zealand into a permanent archive, while building their own lists and enjoying birds!

The following notes are extracted from the News section of the eBird website, <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand> and are circulated for your information.

"Through collaboration with Cornell University and the Audubon Society of America, the Ornithological Society of New Zealand is proud to present this state of the art system for the recording of all your bird observations. Ever wondered what to do with your bird observations? Do you want to know how many species of bird you have seen in NZ but are too lazy or shy to make a list? This programme allows anyone who wishes to, to enter bird observations from New Zealand (and incidentally anywhere else in the western hemisphere). This data is then compiled into your own monthly, yearly, regional and life lists for the user AND it contributes data that can be used by scientists to assess the status of New Zealand's birds. It enables all who visit the site to view maps of bird distribution in NZ and updates users on rare bird sightings and lists for over 100 "hotspots" around the country. We hope that as many users as

possible will take advantage of this programme to add an extra dimension to their bird-watching and to help science and conservation. If you visit a spot regularly, are working in the back blocks or even if you just record birds on the way to work or in your backyard you should add these observations to eBird. There are so many things we don't know about NZ's birds that eBird may help us resolve.

We hope eBird will help us answer many questions that have been asked on Birding-NZ: when do the first cuckoos arrive each year - do they first arrive in the north and filter down the country or do they get to most places simultaneously? Are cuckoos declining? Where do the introduced finches go in the winter? Which introduced birds migrate in NZ? Which native bush birds migrate in NZ? Is the intensification in agriculture and the "dairy boom" affecting even NZ's common birds? Did you know red-billed gulls are declining all over NZ - is this serious or a minor readjustment? What real changes that are taking place amongst our native birds?

These questions require many observers making regular records. Even if you don't do regular counts already why not start? You can do it whilst walking the dog, driving to work or to the beach, going for a relaxing bush walk - when ever. You can make a difference."

Go ahead, have a look at the website and add your observations to **New Zealand eBird**. Registration as a new user is, of course, free and is quick and easy to do.

Greetings Cards for Sale

About 20 years ago the society published a set of illustrated greetings/best wishes cards for sale. Many still available; they make nice little gifts and are good for keeping in touch with

friends. Each set of cards (10 in a pack, 10 cm x 13 cm) has a different native bird printed on the front - tui, pied fantail, Antipodes red-crowned parakeet and pied stilt. The artwork is from paintings by Mrs. Janet Marshall. Each pack of 10 cards includes envelopes and can be bought for \$3 per pack at local meetings (add \$1/pack if postal delivery is required). The fantail and pied stilt designs have the words 'Best Wishes' printed inside; the other designs are blank. Please contact the RR if you wish to order cards. Funds earned will be retained in the Wellington OSNZ accounts for local bird study project purposes.

First-Aid Kits, Telescope, and HANZAB books for Loan

The region owns first-aid kits if any members want to borrow one for their field trips. We have a telescope that can be borrowed by members for observing birds and their activities and habitats. We also own five volumes of the "Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds" – Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks; Volume 2: Raptors to Lapwings; Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons; Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbirds; Volume 7: Passerines (divided into 2 books). These can be borrowed for a while by any member; contact Ian if you wish to borrow these.

Wellington Region Contacts

Regional Representative

Ian Armitage (04) 232 7470

ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz

Regional Recorder

Stuart Nicholson (04) 934 5940

nicholson@paradise.net.nz

Southern Bird Regional Roundup

Andy Falshaw (04) 562 8428

arfalshaw@xtra.co.nz

Pencarrow Lakes Bird Survey Coordinator

Reg. Cotter (04) 568-6960

reganne@clear.net.nz

Beach Patrol Coordinator

Sharon Alderson (04) 298-3707

salderson@doc.govt.nz

Mist-netting & Passerine Banding

Peter Reese (04) 387 7387

ruth.peterr@actrix.co.nz

Shore Plover Surveys

Barry Dent (04) 476 6536

barry.dent@bdg.co.nz

Wellington Region Newsletter production

Sally Truman (04) 388 2242

sally2001@hotmail.com

Ian Armitage (04) 232 7470

ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz

Websites:

www.osnz.org.nz

www.notornis.org.nz

ebird.org/content/newzealand

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

Photocopying of this Newsletter has kindly been provided by

Beca: Engineers, Planners and Managers