

The Wrybill

**Newsletter of the Canterbury Region,
Ornithological Society of New Zealand**

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January 2011

**What's on at OSNZ Canterbury:
January to June 2011**

Indoor Meetings

Evening meetings take place at 7.30pm on the last Monday of the month at the Mahaanui Area DOC office, 31 Nga Mahi Drive, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking is available.

Monday 21st February: [IMPORTANT - Please note this is a week earlier than our usual meeting day. IT IS NOT THE LAST MONDAY OF THE MONTH] We are really pleased to be having Keith Woodley from Miranda Shorebird Centre in the Firth of Thames to talk about his expedition to find nesting Godwits in Alaska. Fabulous videos of breeding birds.

Monday 28th March: AGM of Canterbury Branch and Members night, postponed from February. Please let a committee member know if you have something to present at this meeting.

Monday 2nd May: [Please note this is a week LATER than our usual meeting day as the last Monday in April is Anzac Day]. Jim Briskie from the School of Biological Sciences at University of Canterbury will talk about the work being done on preen gland smells of native passerines. This may have a link with predation by introduced mammals.

Monday 30th May: Mike Bell from Blenheim, RR of the Marlborough Branch, will speak about the work he and others have been doing on the Chathams.

Monday 27th June: James Fraser of Nose for Conservation will tell us about training dogs for finding different birds and predators.

Field Meetings

Sunday 20th February: Farewell to the Godwits at the end of Southshore Spit. 6.00pm. OSNZ are encouraged to attend with scopes and binoculars to show people the birds. Keith Woodley will be speaking, but only briefly.

Saturday 27th February: Wader count Lake Ellesmere, our second summer count for this season. Start at 9am end of Embankment Rd, Greenpark.

Saturday 12th March: Twitchathon and picnic behind Lake Coleridge, looking at the group of small lakes [Selfe, Evelyn, Georgina etc]. This may involve the Council Minibus again. More details later.

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Saturday 9th April: Continuing our Banks Peninsula Reserves survey. Meet at Halswell Bowling Club at 9am.

WEDNESDAY 11th MAY: Day trip to Peacock Springs. More details later.

Saturday 18th June: Winter Wader Count, Lake Ellesmere. Meet at far end of Embankment Rd, 9.30am. Warm drinks, warm clothes and gumboots essential

Profiling Kathleen Harrison

Droppings from the Regional Rep

The main things that come to mind about the last few months' OSNZ activities are the stunning landscapes in the Ashburton Lakes basin, with light snow cover and clear air; our fieldtrip to see the Brighton Godwits being cancelled because the area was all but cut off after the earthquake; the great weekend we had at Peel Forest with nesting Wrybills in the riverbed and Riflemen in the bush and the waders at Lake Ellesmere, miles out in the lake on a green wetland of flowers.

It seems to have been a very productive spring after the wet winter, lots of plant growth bringing insects and flowering and fruiting galore. So much so that the nesting birds are abundant and competing for territories all around. Bellbirds nested and produced offspring in the Botanic Gardens again. A pair also made a nest in our garden at home but it fell out of the tree, so will they try again? Hope so.

There were more of almost every species we are keen to have in the Ashley riverbed, including for the first time Black-fronted Dotterel. Wrybills are up to 16, though the Black-fronted Tern population is still a worry. A large Black-billed Gull colony is being monitored in the Waimakariri. The BR-aid group is now an incorporated Society and in the process of getting a bank account with tax exemption. It will very soon be asking for small subscriptions so it can make itself conspicuous in public and fulfill its aims of working for braided rivers and their well-being.

Jan Walker

Kathleen grew up in West Yorkshire, oddly enough in the same small town as Jan Walker's brother and sister in law were married some 40 years later – what a small world! After the war Kathleen and New Zealand soldier, Ray Harrison, were working in the Laboratory of a dyeworks in Huddersfield. In 1946 she came by ship to Auckland to join Ray, her fiance, and they were married. Ray was transferred to Christchurch where they brought up 3 children.

Kathleen was always interested in natural history in the UK and she continued this in New Zealand. When the children were off her hands, and because we have so few mammals, she eventually concentrated on birds.

I first became aware of Kathleen from her well worded letters to the Editor of 'The Press,' mainly on environmental issues of the time. They were the same issues I myself was interested in. This was the time of "Native Forest Action Council" and "Save Our Beach Forests." I was struck with how well expressed her letters were. I could not aspire to the calibre of her words.

Soon afterwards I had the opportunity to meet her through a mutual friend, Phil Howell, when I attended a meeting of the Forest and Bird Society. Kathleen had met Phil through his lectures on Astronomy at the Workers Educational Association (WEA). In 1974 they both became interested in birds and they joined Forest and Bird and later OSNZ (known in those days to Cantabrians as OSOC). Kathleen became Secretary and Phil and I committee members of Forest and Bird.

Kathleen and Phil soon became proficient in their identification of birds. Together they commenced lectures at the WEA and organised field trips which quickly became extremely

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popular and attracted a large following. Some of these people joined OSNZ.

Kathleen and Phil became firm friends and birdwatched the northern waterways, estuaries and rivers weekly, finding and reporting a number of rare birds. They went further afield, as far north as Nelson, and as far south as Stewart Island, plus estuaries in between. They bought a canoe, to explore the local lakes and lagoons.



Photo: Unknown
Kathleen and Phil on a WEA Field Trip to St Ann's Lagoon in the early 1980's

This was the days of binoculars. No-one had scopes, but Kathleen and Phil, just with bins, were so good at picking up waders. Once they found the waders at Lake Ellesmere bird watching became even more popular. And after we bought scopes our eyes were opened, making the migratory waders much easier to see and identify. Kathleen was always very adept at keeping a diary and her influence started me on my diary, which has proved to be so useful.

I remember an occasion when Kathleen led a field trip to the Lake. She marched ahead at Jarvis Road, wading through a typical muddy pond. Everyone stopped, not knowing what to do, until they realised they either had to get their shoes and feet wet or not see the birds.

In 1981 Phil died suddenly of a massive heart attack, just after a lecture at the W.E.A. He and Kathleen were sorting out their slides, and having a cup of tea at Mona Vale at the time. I then took his place and accompanied her on her weekly bird watching trips and helped with field

trips and lectures at the W.E.A.

Kathleen's dedication to birding resulted in many rare bird sightings. She and Phil recorded the second ever Cattle Egret in 1974 on McLeans Island Road, the only other record of one being 10 years previously. In February 1976, Kathleen and Phil saw a Gentoo Penguin in Le Bons Bay, but in spite of good photos this was not accepted by the Rare Birds Committee. Kathleen was leading a Field Trip in August 1986 to the Lake when she spotted a Painted Snipe, the only New Zealand record of this species. In 1983-84, she saw two male Wilson's Phalaropes. And she and I were the first to see the first Little Stint in NZ in 1992, again at the Lake.

Kathleen and Phil did sterling work for the Canterbury Branch of OSNZ, attending meetings regularly and organizing all the field trips, contributing articles to Notornis, helping with the first New Zealand bird Atlas and encouraging Juniors, many of whom are still birders. At the Branch Meeting in March 2010, when Kathleen was presented with her Meritorious Service Award, tribute was paid to her by Peter Langlands, who spoke of the influence she had on him as a boy. She has also made numerous overseas friends by taking visitors birding, with whom she keeps in regular contact.

Sheila Petch

Recent Sightings

July: Bev Elliot found a beach wrecked Blue Petrel at Kaikoura, a very unusual bird in this area. Bruce Kirkman watched for 30 minutes as a New Zealand Falcon was mobbed by three magpies at Halswell Quarry. Andrew Crossland reported SIPO departing from Avon-Heathcote Estuary and arrivals at inland sites doing display flights etc. Kevin Baker reported another "townie" male NZ Falcon at Fairlie and said he had also regularly seen a Falcon at Hokitika in the 1990's, perched on lampposts. Jan Walker said 410 Bar-tailed Godwits had remained at Avon Estuary this winter, many more than usual. This is perhaps because they had a really good breeding season last summer in the Arctic,

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or lots could not moult and fatten up in time to fly back, or both. Peter Langlands saw his first High Country Bittern in over 20 years at the annual Ashburton Lakes Survey. Jonathon and Petra Palmer of Prices Valley had a NZ Falcon in their garden, attracted by their white fantail pigeons. Marius Adrion saw 2 NZ Falcons flying close to the base of the hill when climbing Peak Hill, Lake Coleridge. By the end of July Russell Langdon had 6 Cape Barren goslings at his Riverbridge Wetland breeding area near the Ashburton River as well as 2 Black Swan cygnets, a pair of SIPO and over-wintering Pied Stilts. Nick Allen and 2 year old Olivia had a birding day out which included seeing many Scaup, Grey Teal, Shoveler, 9 Coots and 5 Cape Barren Geese at St Anne's Lagoon, 2 Mute Swan at Omih Stream 900m North of Waipara Springs Winery, a regular site for Mute Swan although they are often hiding in the willows along the stream, and approximately 500 Grey Teals, 50 Pied Stilts and Black Swans at the ephemeral Amberley Swamp. Andrew counted 244 Crested Grebes at Lake Forsyth and 40 Caspian Terns, probably close to a record for this bird. Amberley Swamp had good numbers of birds, including 1 Black Stilt and 1 node "E" hybrid Stilt. At the July evening meeting Sue Stubenvoll said a NZ Falcon had visited her garden at Brenchley Road, Lyttelton. It may be a young bird looking for territory as possibly the same bird has been seen in Purau, Governor's Bay, Diamond Harbour and Halswell Quarry. Bev Alexander said her son's garden has a permanent record of 2 Pipits visiting their garden at Drains Road, one having left tiny foot prints in the wet concrete of their new patio. She had also seen a Bittern and White Heron at Timberyards, a Bittern at Lower Selwyn Huts, 3 Mute Swans at Lineside Road and 5 NZ Pigeons in a Copper Beech tree on Cambridge Terrace in town. Peter Howden reported Rifleman and one Tui had been seen near Geraldine.

August: In her garden Jan saw Bellbirds feeding from the flowers of a tree *Echium*, possibly a native of the Canary Islands, and another working over *Camellia* flowers, further evidence not only native plants provide food and nectar for native birds. The first signs of Wrybill moving south were seen when Peter observed 15 Wrybills at Charlesworth Wetland and there were other sightings at Ashley Estuary. 70+ were seen at Lake Ellesmere by Colin Hill and

Steve Wratten and up to 90 by Sheila, Bev and Jan on another occasion. Peter Langlands heard his first Bittern of the season booming on 22nd August. Colin reported a Black-fronted Dotterel, a Red-necked Stint and 56 Bar-tailed Godwits at Lake Ellesmere and a Cape Barren Goose grazing in the paddocks with their sheep. Sheila, Bev and Jan found 2 Cattle Egrets at Ridge Road and at Ellesmere 4 Crested Grebes, 11 Mute Swans, 62 Wrybills, 1 Red-necked Stint, 1 Curlew Sandpiper and 11 Caspian Terns. There was a possible sighting of a Gull-billed Tern, an Australian vagrant, seen by a non-birding farmer moving stock near Waimakariri Gorge. Diane Parker reported 40 Black-fronted Terns roosting 1km upstream from pylons crossing the Waimakariri at McLeans Island. And Niall Mугan found a Golden Pheasant at Okuti Valley, Little River.

September: The earthquake occurred and not much birding was done. Ian McHenry saw 2 Wrybills and a Gannet flying at Waikuku Beach. On the 21st Niall Mугan found a leucistic silvereye at Travis Wetland.

October: Jan reported Arctic Waders had arrived in large numbers – Godwits at Southshore Spit and at Lake Ellesmere 350 Bar-tailed Godwits, three with bands, ~30 Knots, one with a white flag, 4 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 2 Red-necked Stints, 7+ Turnstones and 1 Pacific Golden Plover. At Yarrs Bay they saw a Cape Barren Goose and one hybrid stilt among hundreds of Pied Stilt. A day later Steve and Colin found 7 Asiatic Golden Plovers, 3 Curlew Sandpipers, 3 Turnstones and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Clark's Road. At Yarrs/Embankment 362 Godwits, 158 Wrybills and 35 Red Knots were counted. On the 8th Colin O'Donnell saw 10 pairs of Crested Grebes displaying in front of the hide at Harts Creek, heard a few Marsh Crake churring in the raupo and 4 Bittern booming from different spots at a rate of about one a minute. Two Kereru nests and a Falcon were seen in the Botanic Gardens. 16 Cattle Egrets were regularly being seen at Rushbrooks and Lake Roads, Leeston. Sarah Richardson heard a Shining Cuckoo in Victoria Park in the city on the 18th and Nick observed 4 Pied Stilts, 2 Shovelers and lots of Black-billed Gulls whilst attending the Band Together Concert at Victoria Lake in the central city. All the water had leaked out of the lake after the

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earthquake, leaving mudflats for the birds. On 24th among more common waders at Kaitorete Spit Steve and Colin found 16 Turnstones, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 31 Red-necked Stints, an Asian Golden Plover "and a lovely full-adult White-winged Black Tern (chased by Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls)." There were 11 Royal Spoonbills at Kaituna Lagoon. Jan had reports of a Hudsonian Godwit seen at Avon/Heathcote Estuary. On the 29th Udo Benecke saw 6 Curlew Sandpipers, 63 Wrybills and 128 Bar-tailed Godwits at Embankment Road and a Bittern at Halswell Canal. At the October Branch meeting Jan said she had seen another baby Bellbird in the Botanic Gardens. Charlotte Rivers said she had enjoyed seeing Welcome Swallows feeding juveniles at Godley Head, near a small tarn. To wrap up the month, on the 30th Nick saw a Kea on the east side of Porters Pass, an unusual occurrence in this area.

November: On the 2nd Jill Hanna confirmed 16 Cattle Egrets were still at Lake Road, several in breeding plumage, and 23 Crested Grebes were seen and Shining Cuckoo and Bittern were heard at Harts Creek. She had also filmed Fantails building a nest. Jan, Sheila and Tom found a colony of about 1000 Black-billed gulls on a shingle bank in the Waimakariri River opposite Groyne 53. At Ashley Estuary on the 6th Bev observed 1 Knot, 2 Turnstones and 29 Bar-tailed Godwits. In South Canterbury Ian Southey saw a Glossy Ibis at Lake Wainono and at Waitaki Rivermouth massive flocks of Black-billed Gulls (approximately 1500) and White-fronted Terns (approximately 4000), and, not to be left out, 2 Turnstones! Sheila, Bev, Jan and Tom found 10 Cattle Egret, most with very colourful plumage, near Drains Road. Sheila recalled seeing as many as 40 birds in the same area 30 years ago. None bred then so, although there is hope, it is unlikely the present birds will breed. Peter Langlands was very concerned to find 16 dead adult Black-billed Gulls in a colony in Lees Valley, and the chicks starving. There was no obvious cause of death. Among other birds Ben Rodriguez found 2 Australian Crested Grebes, 6 Caspian Terns, 3 Royal Spoonbills, a number of Mute Swans, one SIPO and 20+ Spotted Shag at a small lagoon between Taumutu and Gullivers Road near Lake Ellesmere. In the town at Hanmer Springs Nick saw 2 New Zealand Falcons and a Tui (not a common sight for this bird), Riflemen, Tui and Yellow-crowned

Parakeet were heard and he saw a Robin carrying food at Marble Hill Campground, near Springs Junction. Steve and Colin's visit to Kaitorete Spit produced 11 Caspian Terns, 12 White-fronted Terns, 3 Asiatic Golden Plovers, 3 Curlew Sandpipers, 6 Wrybills, 32 Red-necked Stints, 24 Turnstones and 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, their first record of this species at the Lake since seeing one at Embankment Road on May 9. Richard Schofield was at Jarvis Road on the 19th and saw 40+ Pacific Golden Plovers, 12 Turnstones and 4 probable Sandpipers. Steve, Colin and Peter Reese, in very early festive mood, reported 4 perfect Pectoral Sandpipers at Embankment Road (the maximum seen for a long time), 1 scintillating Sharpie, 33 gorgeous Golden Plovers, 3 running Red-necked Stints, 17 twitchy Turnstones, 7 cracker Curlew Sandpipers (something of a record), 1 nervous Knot, 92 brave Bar-tailed Godwits (no flags seen) and 27 Pied Oystercatchers, 11 Wrybills and 1 Hybrid Stilt at Jarvis Road. Peter also saw 2 Cattle Egrets at Drains Road. Brent Stephenson on a trip through the Mackenzie Basin saw a pair each of Chukors and NZ Falcons at Mt John, Black Stilt at a number of sites, including Pukaki delta, Glentanner and 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Lake Poaka. On 26th Jan found what was most likely a Sanderling at Jarvis Road, and 40 Pacific Golden Plovers. The Sanderling was not present the next day but she and Bev saw 16 Knots, one with an O Flag but no numbers, 3 Turnstones and 5 Pectoral Sandpipers.

December: Duncan Watson found a Robin's nest with chicks easily visible from the ground at Hawdon Shelter, Arthur's Pass, and a DOC worker told him that he had seen Mohua (Yellowhead) nearby the previous day. At the beginning of the month Andrew counted 2100 Bar-tailed Godwits at the Avon/Heathcote Estuary and some days later saw a bronze phase Stewart Island Shag and a pale phase Arctic Skua at Kaitorete Spit. On the 5th Jan reported 5 Pectoral Sandpipers at Jarvis Road. Duncan saw, amongst other birds, 9 Turnstones at the Ashley River estuary. At Heathcote/Avon he found a Bar-tailed Godwit still in breeding plumage which Jan explained was a bird which "walks to a different beat," going into breeding plumage out of season in what is called 'reverse breeding plumage.' This bird is often ostracised by the other Godwits. Dale McEntee reported a

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group of 6 Black-fronted Dotterels at Kowai Rivermouth, near Leithfield. Sheila and Tom, following up, found only 3 but were pleased to see a Tattler (possibly Wandering), a pair of SIPO, 7 Black Cormorants and 12 Banded Dotterels, one possibly breeding. Colin found 2 Hybrid Stilts and 45 Asiatic Golden Plovers at Greenpark and he and Steve's visit to Kaitorete Spit was rewarded with 10 Wrybills, 31 Red-necked Stints, 22 Turnstones, 25 Banded Dotterels, 4 Curlew Sandpipers, 2 Pectoral Sandpipers, 1 Sharpie, 28 Red Knots and 3 Asiatic Golden Plovers. Andrew Crossland reported 1350 adult Black-billed Gulls and 1100-1300 chicks at the Waimakariri River before the river flooded. Mimouk Hannan, Regional Park Ranger, was hopeful most chicks would have been fledged "or at least good floaters" by this time. 75 White-fronted Terns in the BBG colony disappeared early in the fresh and may not have successfully fledged their chicks and Mimouk is also concerned Black-fronted terns may have had a rough breeding season this year. Peter Langlands saw 204 Wrybills, several colour banded from the upper Rangitata, and 5 juveniles at Greenpark Sands, 400 Banded Dotterels, 15 Turnstones, 2 Pectoral Sandpipers and 8 SIPO. On 27th Warren Jowett saw a Tui in his garden at Staveley, his first in 38 years of visiting and living in the area. On 30th Andrew noted Crested Grebe are "another step toward colonising Christchurch waterways" with one juvenile seen amongst 500+ moulting Paradise Shelducks on Bromley Oxidation Ponds and at Clearwater Resort, NW Christchurch, there was a Female Crested Grebe and 2 chicks.

Finally, with southern rivers in flood, Wrybills are already reaching northern estuaries. And Jan, Bev and Marion saw a Taiko (Magenta Petrel) on their recent trip to the Chathams.

A Fiji Tale A volunteer for NatureFiji on the island of Gau.

In June 2010 I was asked to work as a volunteer for NatureFiji on Gau to assist with training the Fiji Petrel project team in locating

and recognising burrows of small petrels. The Fiji Petrel is critically endangered and its population may be as few as 50 birds. Some individuals have been photographed at sea south of Gau on 2 occasions and single birds have landed randomly in villages over the years, probably attracted by lights. Because of this it is believed that the nest areas are on this island.

So in July I flew to Suva and then by a chartered plane to Gau. In order to look for burrows it was necessary to camp out on the top of the ridge for several nights in two separate places. The work involved searching areas along the crests and steep slopes to check out holes in the ground that had been marked by local villagers as likely burrows. We visited each of these "holes" and examined the entrances to determine if they showed any characteristics of a petrel burrow. Many of the marked spots did not have a suitable sized entrance or any signs of diggings at the entrance and many had crab droppings outside.

However, some did look likely and then we used a burrowscope to investigate the tunnel and interior. This piece of equipment has a long flexible tube that can be pushed into a burrow with a camera on the end which passes images to a display unit on the outside. This was invaluable in allowing us to see that most of the burrows were long tunnels with no nesting space and often contained a land crab; these crabs live in the bush – not the ocean. The outcome of this work was that we managed to eliminate a few ridges from future searches but no petrel nests were located.



Photo: Jill West
A burrowscope is used to inspect a burrow

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While we worked, I talked to the others about petrels in general and discussed the breeding behaviour of small burrow nesting petrels. This work was done by day. One campsite was on top of a hill and had 2 large voltaic solar panels and a huge battery to power spotlights. At night we sat outside with a fluorescent light illuminating an area of sky and watched for any passing birds. It was hoped to attract petrels and allow us to capture them using a spotlight – this technique has proven successful with other species. None were seen while I was present. A second species of small petrel is also known to breed on this island and we did visit one known burrow from which a chick had fledged about 2 weeks previously. The burrowscope showed everyone the inside of a typical petrel burrow and made a good comparison with all the crab tunnels we had investigated.

Life on Gau was very different from my life in Christchurch. First of all, it was so warm that the only clothing required was light shorts and shirts and even when I was soaked to the skin one day as we walked in a downpour, I never felt cold. At night while we were observing the sky and stars and watching for any passing birds it was still not necessary to wear any extra clothes. The local men who were working in the bush with me mostly walked in bare feet or jandals (they call them slippers), while I trudged around in my boots. While in the bush we did encounter snakes on 3 occasions; these were the harmless Pacific Boa but even so, they made me feel rather uncomfortable much to the amusement of the others. There was nothing else in the forests that was a cause for concern and there were very few troublesome biting insects although I did sleep under a mosquito net on a foam mattress when in the village school house.

On my arrival on the island, I had to present a gift to the chief of the village and this was supplied to me by NatureFiji staff and presented on my behalf by a high ranking elder from another village. The gift was a bundle of kava and was accepted, after which I was made a guest of the village and able to enter any house there. When I was not up the hill in my tent, sleeping on the ground, I was staying in one of the houses at the school which is located between the villages of Nukuloa and Levuka. Thus I was not actually in a village and “rules”

did not apply there. If I went into the village, however, I had to wear a skirt or wrap, not shorts or longs, to conform to the village protocol. On one occasion I was on my way to the second campsite with a local lad carrying my backpack, when he decided he needed to go to his house to collect his knife. I was in a dilemma as I did not have a skirt with me. I said I would wait for him on the road but he borrowed a wrap from a woman in the first house, I put it on and walked through the village in a bright pink skirt and my boots! At the last house, I removed it and he gave it to another woman to return to its owner.

The people I worked with were fabulous people and they looked after me really well, organising meals and lunches in the field. I had taken tea and coffee bags and some muesli bars with me and these were much appreciated by my co-workers. They have very little in the way of cash and the consumer items we all take for granted; their life is really a subsistence existence and they seem happy. At our second campsite we were at about 300m above sea level and about an hours walk from the village so we didn't cook an evening meal; Eleazar, the project leader, arranged for it to be brought up to us from the village. The first meal was a huge pot of chicken casserole which signified that I was really important as chicken is a rare treat. The second night was a delicious potato and eggplant curry – both times served with masses of taro. The food was brought up the hill in a canvas bag carried by hand and not in a backpack.

On my last night on the island I was invited to a farewell dinner at the house of Qalo who had worked with me up the first hill. We partook in some kava first, followed by a delicious meal of fresh tuna, taro leaves in coconut milk, potato curry and taro. The men continued drinking kava well into the night and didn't eat at all. Farewell speeches were made and I was able to express my thanks for their hospitality, to Qalo's wife (Millie) for the meal and to all the guys for looking after me so well.

Jill West

OSNZ Weekend Field Trip to Peel Forest 16 - 17 October 2010

Most of us left Christchurch on the Friday afternoon and met at the cottage Jan had booked for us. Up until a few days earlier, the numbers for the trip stood at 5 but as the time drew closer and weather forecasts were known, our group grew to 9, plus Nick and his family who drove down for the day on the Saturday.

On Saturday, the first stop was Peel Forest Campground to let Ron and Jill know the plans for the morning. We then drove along the Rangitata Rd approximately 30 kms to the Fish and Game access to the Rangitata Riverbed. At the entrance, it was good to see a Department of Conservation sign identifying the area as a "Threatened bird breeding area".

We had only walked a couple of hundred metres when Jan spotted the first Wrybill preening itself in the distance. We walked upstream and located another Wrybill with a one egg nest. A short time later we saw two females feeding at the water's edge. Nick and his family had joined us by then and he was keen to get close to them.



Photo: Rob Evans
Nick demonstrating the Birdwatcher's Bellywiggles

Rob and I walked upstream a short distance and found a male incubating a two egg nest. The Norwest wind had started to blow so we made our way back to our vehicles and had our lunch before leaving to take a look at Rauls Reserve. The Reserve was overgrown with weeds and there were no birds, although we could see an unusual land formation, caused by erosion, on the other side of the river.

After this we visited Mt Peel Anglican Church

(Church of the Holy Innocent). We saw that the church was not immune to earthquake damage and the whole rear end appeared to be badly damaged and was closed due to being unsafe. We walked around the Church grounds reading the headstones and saw one for Elizabeth Hawdon born 1851, the first person born in Christchurch. Maureen pointed out the huge lilies that she saw in flower here once. While at the Churchyard we could hear the Bellbirds and saw a Wood Pigeon.

We then drove to Te Wanahu Flat where we did the Big Tree Walk, admired the Totara and were pleased to see a rifleman.

We all met back at the cottage for dinner and drinks and it was a nice enough evening that we were able to sit out on the verandah enjoying the good food and company.

Sunday we decided to walk the Fern Track which started behind the cottage. The walk has just what the name suggests - plenty of ferns. Jill and Keith helped us to identify the different range of ferns. At the east end of this walk near the river Keith, Maeve, Jan, Zuni and Maureen decided to take Allans Track back to make it a round trip. There were several Tomtit territories in the gullies and more Riflemen were seen.

It was a great weekend away and there were plenty of walks near the cottage that provided a variety of native vegetation and bird life.

Diane Parker

White-flipped Penguin Trust Update

Quite a few of our members have been lucky enough to be shown round the White-flipped Penguin colony in Harris Bay, Godley Head by Dr Chris Challies. Recently Chris was interviewed by TV3 news. If you missed the televised item it can be viewed on <http://www.3news.co.nz/5000-tiny-penguins-on-a-3ha-island-tabid/1160/articleID/189468/Default.aspx> (Please click "view video"). The White-flipped Penguin Trust is very keen to establish their profile and public support for the penguins and asks us to inform our families, friends and

colleagues about this coverage The Trust also has a web page which can be viewed at <http://www.penguin.org.nz/>



Photo: Unknown
Chris Challies interviewed by TV3 news

Hutton's Shearwater Trust – Impressive Progress

The June 2009 issue of The Wrybill carried a story on the Hutton's Shearwater, whose two breeding colonies (the only ones in the world) were found in the Seaward Kaikouras by Geoff Harrow in 1965. Threats faced by these breeding colonies from pigs led to a management plan produced by DoC in 2005 based on doctoral research by Richard Cuthbert. He recommended the creation of a third colony on the cliffs above the town of Kaikoura and the translocation and feeding of chicks in artificial burrows. It was hoped the chicks would adopt the site as their home and return there after migration to Australia. The colony was developed by the Trust, Whale Watch, DOC and Te Runanga of Kaikoura. Between March 2005 and March 2008 270 chicks were relocated. Eighteen months ago the first returning Hutton's Shearwater flew into Burrow 11 in the created colony, to the delight of everyone involved. During the summer of 2009-10 further birds returned from the 2006-07 batches.

A predator-proof fence was needed to protect the artificial colony. In February 2009 Geof Harrow established the Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust, which has now raised over \$350,000. In February 2010 the predator-proof fence was completed. It is 540m long, enclosing 2.1 hectares and encompassing the original 0.5ha in which DOC originally established the colony in 2005. Decoy birds and loudspeakers are in place sending out shearwater calls to

further convince the birds that the peninsula Colony is their home. A farm fence is to be built, 5m from the predator fence, for protection from cattle damage. Native shrubs are being planted along the fences to provide cover for birds and screen the predator fence and the internal part of the colony now has a set of wooden steps and path leading down the slope through the centre of the colony. This allows safe access through the colony and keeps people out of the actual burrow areas. In the near future a set of interpretation panels for the colony site is planned in conjunction with DOC. Last winter pest eradication took place to get rid of rabbits, rats and mice before the shearwaters returned in early spring.

On 24th November there was great excitement when Lindsay Rowe, Project Manager for the predator-proof fence, was inspecting the site and lifted a burrow lid to find a Hutton's Shearwater sitting on a freshly laid egg. The news took the Trust by surprise. It was thought that it would be 5-6 years before these translocated shearwaters bred, but this bird is only 3 ½ years old. And since this discovery another breeding pair has been found in the colony.



Photo: Lindsay Rowe
X-17115 sitting on freshly laid egg at the Kaikoura Peninsula colony

The Trust has now begun one of the research projects it hoped to put in place once it had sufficient funds. At present permits cover the mountain colonies and when permits are through work will also involve the peninsula colony. Little is known about the birds' movements at sea. They return to Kaikoura in September to prepare for breeding after a winter spent in Australia. Last March twenty

birds were fitted with geolocators, tiny recording devices fixed to their legs. In early December all these geolocators were retrieved and when data is downloaded it should determine the shearwaters' migration routes to Australia. At the same time the researchers put 20 GPS loggers on another 20 adult birds to get a handle on the local feeding grounds and data is being retrieved now. Preliminary results for both these projects will be available in time for the Trust's next newsletter in the New Year.

If you would like to donate to the trust you can do so by sending a cheque to Lindsay Rowe, Treasurer, Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust, PO Box 58, Kaikoura 7340. You can receive the Trust's newsletter by joining Friends of Hutton's Shearwater (Individual \$15; Family \$20; Corporate \$100 or Life \$250).

(Compiled from the Trust's Newsletters, news articles and information provided by Geoff Harrow and Lindsay Rowe. Ed)

Nifty Nest Sites

Bev Alexander was amused by three nest locations she has found recently. Blackbirds had built their nest on the top of a woodpile, starlings chose down the centre of a coil of wire and thrushes, obviously not too worried about secrecy and protection, went for the top step of a metal ladder. Jan described her garden blackbirds' preference for one site, and the construction of annual additions, resulting in this year's 3-tier nest.

On the same theme, Birds Australia's most recent edition of Wingspan magazine contained an intriguing extract from The Emu, their scientific journal. A grazier from Mount Benson, South Australia was preparing his sheep for shearing when he found a nest containing three baby Common Starlings embedded in the wool on the back of a sheep. The nest was built in the 10cms-long wool in the centre of the sheep's back. This incident occurred in 1961 but apparently is not an isolated case as The Emu has several articles describing similar occurrences.

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ASHBURTON LAKES MID-WINTER BIRD COUNT															
	L. Heron	Emily	E Maori	W Maori	Trinity	Denny	Emma	Roundabout	Spider/Donn	Nursery	Camp	Clearwater	Lambies	Barossa paddocks	Totals
Date 17/7/10															
%Ice	10	99	90	99	100	99	90	100	100	99	75	75	100		
Crested grebe	14										4				18
Black shag	4						2				2	10			18
Little shag	59						3				12	31			105
White-faced heron	4														4
Bittern							1								1
White heron															0
Black swan	124	2	17	4			11			3		19		84	264
Canada goose	437			1			128				2	170			738
Paradise shelduck	84	2	2	5		2	2					6		18	121
Mallard	109		13			18	109				24	48			321
Grey duck	1						1				2				4
NZ shoveler	13						8								21
Duck spp															0
NZ scaup	2902		18								720	365			4005
Grey teal	17														17
Pukeko			14												14
Coot	217														217
Pied oystercatcher															0
Pied stilt	1														1
Hybrid/black stilt															0
Spur-winger plover															0
Banded dotterel															0
Black-fronted tern															0
White-fronted tern															0
Black-billed gull	1														1
Back-backed gull	3			3			1				1	1		2	11
NZ Falcon	1											1			2
Harrier	2	1	3	1										1	8
Kingfisher															0
Swallow	2						6								8
NZ pipit	1						1							2	4
Totals	3996	5	67	14	0	20	273	0	0	3	767	651	0	107	5903

Ashley River Bird Survey, 20 November 2010

Species	200 0	200 1	200 2	200 3	200 4	200 5	200 6	200 7	200 8	200 9	201 0	Average	Median
Black Shag	18	3		8	7	2	2	10	9	6	2	7	7
Little Shag	3	6		4	7	6	2	4	0	17	6	6	5
SI Pied Oystercatcher Variable	25	22		22	37	22	5	26	27	32	20	24	24
Oystercatcher	0	0		0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pied Stilt	229	82		138	140	137	68	164	131	196	233	152	139
Black Stilt				2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Banded Dotterel	199	130		169	213	245	84	237	198	233	260	197	206
Wrybill	17	7		16	9	7	5	9	8	13	18	11	9
Spur-winged Plover	18	nc		13	27	149	37	116	11	39	15	47	27
Black-backed Gull	26	nc		10	27	3	5	12	10	19	19	15	12
Black-billed Gull	314	3		0	10	1	213	13	16	2	41	61	12
Black-fronted Tern	74	44		102	28	26	180	89	81	124	192	94	85
Caspian Tern	0	0		4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0

nc = not counted

In addition to the above, 2 black-fronted dotterels and 8 white-fronted terns were seen. These are the first records of these species during our counts that I am aware of.

Pied stilt, banded dotterel, wrybill, and black-fronted tern counts were the highest on record.

The river flow at Ashley Gorge was 4.35 cumecs.

The survey was undertaken by 15 volunteers (Bev Alexander, Nick Allen, Udo Benecke, Winsome Blair, Rob Evans, H. Goulter, Mimouk Hannan, Keith Harrison, Nick Ledgard, Joan Miles, Dianne Parker, Ben Rodriguez, Geoff Swailes, Roy Swailes, Jan Walker). Thanks everyone for your help. I'm sorry I was unable to be present.

Compiled by Eric Spurr, 2 December 2010