



Birds New Zealand  
PO Box 834, Nelson. [osnz.org.nz](http://osnz.org.nz)  
Regional Representative: Mary Thompson  
197 Balmacewen Rd, Dunedin.  
[maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) 03 4640787  
Regional Recorder: Richard Schofield,  
64 Frances Street, Balclutha 9230.  
[cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

*Birds New Zealand*

*Otago Region Newsletter 3/2019 March 2019*



### **Rare tern?**

As you might still remember I had joined a pelagic out of the peninsula (Hamish Spencer was the guide) and saw an Antarctic tern on the big day last year (Oct 6 2018)...

I reported this record to the OSNZ Records Appraisal Committee in October last year and it took them quite a few months to discuss the id... Yesterday I received the response. They did not accept the identification and said it was a Common Tern with breeding plumage.

I then examined the id of Antarctic terns and checked my photographs of common terns (taken in China). I think the RAC is correct. Well, it is indeed a common tern.

As a rare species (breeding in China) wintering in NZ, it is amazing that the bird still appeared with breeding plumage (and no sign of moulting!) in early October. This is the first time I had heard about the circumstance like this...

I think this is a very interesting record so I attached the letter from RAC (below) as well as a photograph of the bird to let you know the detail.

Dear Lei Zhu,

Thank you for your Unusual Bird Report of a possible Antarctic tern photographed off Otago Peninsula on 6 October 2018.

**UNUSUAL BIRD RECORD (UBR) CASE NUMBER: 2018/109**

**DATE SUBMISSION RECEIVED:** 28 October 2018

**OBSERVERS:** Lei Zhu and Hamish Spencer

**DATE OF OBSERVATION:** 6 October 2018

**LOCATION OF OBSERVATION:** off coast of Otago Peninsula

**SPECIES SUBMITTED:** Antarctic tern

**DECISION:** NOT ACCEPTED

**ALTERNATIVE IDENTIFICATION:** Common tern

The Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee has assessed the sighting based on your photograph, and have determined that the image is of an adult common tern in breeding plumage.

The images show a tern in immaculate plumage, with fully black cap and no evidence of moult in flight or body feathers. The combination of black bill and grey ventral plumage rules out all species on the New Zealand list apart from eastern common tern in breeding plumage. Note that this subspecies of common tern (*Sterna hirundo longipennis*) has a black bill when breeding, unlike the nominate subspecies, which has

a red bill.

It is likely that a few common terns reach New Zealand every year, but only a few of those identified get reported to the Records Appraisal Committee. You are very fortunate to have found a bird in breeding plumage, with a full black cap. There have only been a handful of common terns in breeding plumage reported in New Zealand.

As common tern is also a reportable species in New Zealand, we have given this record an additional UBR number 2018/124 for reporting purposes. This means that your record will appear on the online database as both 2018-109 Antarctic tern (Not accepted) and 2018-124 Common tern (Accepted).

Thank you for bringing this interesting record to our attention.

Please do not hesitate to contact me ([racsecretary@osnz.org.nz](mailto:racsecretary@osnz.org.nz)) if you have queries.

Regards,

Elizabeth (Biz) Bell

Secretary, For Convenor

**Lei Zhu**

## Ornithological Snippets



A **Marsh Crake** was seen and photographed at Lake Hayes on 26th Feb by visiting birder Sam Englund.

Birding NZ reported that a **Royal Penguin** found “South of Dunedin” on 24th Feb was taken into care, but died.

During a seawatch from Aramoana Mole on 25th Feb, Russ Cannings had good views of a **Short-tailed Shearwater**

Also photographed was a **Shining Cuckoo** at Papatowai on 5th Mar by Deb Eiger.

The first report of a **Cattle Egret** for the year was one at Te Ngaru on 4th March. Meanwhile a **Royal Spoonbill** was on the river in Balclutha on 26th Feb; they are scarce here.

A **White Heron** has been seen at Hawksbury Lagoon by Ann Charlotte several times over the last few weeks.

Finally, a **Fernbird** at Glenorchy Lagoon on 27th Feb, was not particularly unexpected, but they are seldom reported in the area.



Interesting reports to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com) **Richard Schofield**



## **Post Breeding Kotuku at Tomahawk**

A White Heron is at Tomahawk Lagoon every day again, showing post breeding state with bill half black and yellow.

The large heron is seen from my study window every morning, it perches and hunts at Raupo Channel. Through binoculars, it clearly has a bill black from tip halfway back, then yellow back to gape. It perches on or behind a shed roof, lots of energetic preening with bill and feet. White Heron are at the same place every year, using perches on buildings and trees to spot prey. The same site was home to the Bittern, before development and noise drove it out in 2011.

The heron is attacked by Red-billed Gulls, which it is not afraid of. It stays and stabs at the gulls. Black-backed Gulls and other birds do not attack the heron. Maybe Red-billed Gulls have some genetic memory of big herons preying on their chicks?

The heron stalks the long shed roof, and Eucalyptus trees. Then it plunges down into the broom and long grass, and flies up to perch again. Less often, it plunges down into Raupo Channel. Many Silvereyes and House Sparrows flock in the bush; and mice and copper skinks. This daily routine goes until about 1.20pm, when it disappears into the Raupo.

**Andrew Austin**



## Robins Outside Orokonui 2018



I keep missing the monthly newsletter deadline, so apologies for the lateness of this article!

Between 12 August and 8 December 2018, upwards of 12 Birds NZ members came out to help with fortnightly nest finding and monitoring of robins to the east of Orokonui

Ecosanctuary. We located 5 pairs of robins and suspected there were at least four other territories in and around the main study area that we did not have time to search. We chose to monitor four of the robin pairs, all of which nested.

The first nest of the season was found September 1st. In total, we found or suspected the presence of eight nests. Of these, five nests failed, 2 nests had unknown outcomes because we did not continue monitoring them, and we believe one nest successfully fledged at least two young as fledglings were seen with the male bird in his territory. Maree also reported seeing fledglings when she was at the site later in December doing the Orokonui bird counts. Therefore, there could have been another successful nest that we did not monitor.

The robins chose some fairly unusual spots to nest. Nests were found in gorse and also suspended above the ground amongst a tangle of vines. We found one nest with two young chicks in late September. Nick watched the chicks being fed by their parents when they were about 17 days old. He reported that they were fed 35 times in just under 3 hours. A busy day for the parent birds! On subsequent visits, no sign of the chicks was found despite much searching, and therefore, we do not think that they fledged.

Robin pair	Nest ID	Outcome
1	A	Failed within 2 weeks of finding; 2 eggs left in nest.
	B	Suspected second nest late September but not found; outcome unknown.
2	A	Last seen with 2 quite old chicks; no evidence of fledging.
	B	Nest high up in macrocarpa; no sign of activity 2 weeks later.
3	A	Failed within 2 weeks of finding; nest empty.
	B	Possible nest found before eggs laid; female disappeared soon afterwards; nest empty.
4	A	Pair known to have nest; nest not found; 2 fledglings seen with male bird in territory late November.
	B	Second nest suspected late November but not found; outcome unknown.

## Banding project

The robins outside Orokonui are not banded. We found it quite challenging at times to follow and identify the individual robins from each of the pairs. We would also love to know whether it is the same robins holding territories from year to year, and to get an idea of adult survival and recruitment of fledged young into the population. Thanks to work by Mary and others, we have just been informed by the Birds NZ Scientific Committee that we have been successful in our application to band the robins at the site. Graham Parker has kindly agreed to be a Level 3 bander for the project, and we hope to be able to begin banding our robins later this year. We hope that this will also allow Birds NZ members who are trainee banders to gain some useful bird handling and banding experience. Keep an eye out for further details.



Nest suspended in vines about 1.8m from the ground.  
Photos © Nick Beckwith.

**George Pickerell**



## **Survey of Birds present in Styles Bush, 9 March 2019**

Birds NZ was invited by the owner of this area to do a bird survey. It contains the only remnant of small-leaved lacebark remaining on the Peninsula and with replanting of natives over several decades, the area is an excellent area of regenerating bush with huge kowhai. The owner has also been trapping possum and rats.

Three members of Birds NZ walked around the tracks through the bush and adjacent forest and gardens from 9.30am to 11.30am. The weather was fine and calm so ideal birding conditions but March is not the peak time for bird song.

All the birds seen or heard were recorded. In addition, 5 minute bird counts were done in areas of different habitat - woodland garden, mixed forest, native bush. These observations have been entered into eBird.

### **Summary**

Fifteen species were seen. This included eight native species. Native species were the most numerous or most conspicuous. The introduced birds were mostly seen in the surrounding gardens and farmland. The highlight was a male tomtit present at the top end of Styles Bush.

Species	number seen or heard during 2 hour walk
bellbird	16
silveryeye	17
fantail	9
kereru	6
grey warbler	6
tui	2
tomtit	1
blackbird	9
song thrush	1
house sparrow	5
chaffinch	3
goldfinch	2
magpie	1
harrier	1
starling	2

**Mary Thompson**

## **Bird Scaring Venue Allowed at Tomahawk**

A noisy commercial venue that will disturb Tomahawk Lagoon birds was granted consent by Dunedin City Council (DCC), with review conditions allowing any other party to report ecological concerns.

DCC's decision, considered in the public – excluded part of the December 2018 hearing, was expected because Council feels compelled to grant “controlled activity” applications regardless of opposition. Opposition was further deliberately suppressed by Resource Consent Application number LUC-2018-219 being a Limited Notification, meaning only a few near neighbours were notified and given rights to object. As reported last month, by the time of the hearing 14 / 12 / 18, DCC were well informed of growing opposition within and beyond Tomahawk. Not that they listened. We live in a democracy?

Lochend Limited owners Mark and Julie Caldwell now have the rubber stamped go ahead to operate a venue for “weddings and other special events” just above the lower lagoon shore. After developing the shore road and a carpark, events will include noise, loud music, lights, and convoys of 30 to 40 vehicles running until after midnight. Not wanted by birds, or many local people. They intend holding eight events per month, each with up to 125 guests, mostly on Saturday afternoons and nights in summer.

DCC's decision runs to 40+ pages. Four pages include scattered comments about birds in deliberately misleading statements, emphasising the fact no ecological assessments were done. As reported last month, the applicants insisted there was no need to consider birds and environment, and DCC accepts that. The same DCC who spins Dunedin as a wildlife capital, who promotes Wild Dunedin when we show people lagoon birds, who know the water quality is already bad, and who employ “biodiversity officers.”

It seems the activity approved now would not comply with future law. DCC “accepts that this controlled status remains in place under Section 88A of the RMA despite the change in the proposed District Plan (2GP) to make the activity a non-complying activity.



In the December hearing, Lochend Ltd's planner Allan Cubitt said "ecological effects were not assessed in any detail (in fact—not at all), as the Department of Conservation (DOC)...had provided a written approval (DCC decision document)." Locals believe DOC approval was based on a traffic easement over a bit of DOC land, probably at the weir. DOC forgot they are responsible for the biodiversity on the lagoon and shoreline. Allan Cubitt also "noted that bird nesting happens a long way from the access road further up the lagoon." Birds and us birders well know that birds nest all round the lagoon, including shoreline beside the access road and below Lochend's party venue. Birds with chicks walk on the access road. Simple observation shows birds will be disturbed.

Allan Cubitt repeatedly referred to the Currie Road function venue, insisting it is comparable to Tomahawk Lagoon. How? Is Currie Rd a significant wetland Wildlife Management Reserve used by 56 bird species? Is Currie Rd a natural water amphitheatre reflecting noise over a wide area including into homes of people DCC deliberately excluded from the process? Unique Tomahawk Lagoon is hardly comparable with anywhere else, and then only with another coastal wetland by people more skilled than Allan Cubitt. He then contradicts himself by noting the same concerns as Currie Rd would not arise "due to greater separation of the proposed venue."

The Caldwells and visitors already drive at excessive speed disturbing birds on and beside the access road. This was seen from the outlet, and is easily photographed. Who will monitor the DCC's 25kmh speed limit? Development and increased traffic will cause noise and repeatedly drive away birds on the shoreline, and probably across the lagoon along the fallen tree shoreline. In spring and summer these birds have chicks that cannot fly. Already 700++ Paradise Shelducks are massing around lagoon shores for their moult, as they do every summer. The critically endangered White Heron is back, in post breeding condition shown by bill half black and yellow.

Allan Cubitt "noted that DOC monitor birdlife at the lagoon on a regular basis." Untrue. In 20 years frequent bird studying Tomahawk Lagoon, I encountered DOC only twice. They removed the Wildlife Service sign at upper lagoon and replaced it with a DOC sign. Second event, responding to a minor slip half way along the existing trail DOC staff excessively used

chainsaws and a small bulldozer carving a track wide enough to drive a Mini along, before I complained. Ornithologists, OSNZ and EcOtago monitors lagoon birds, not DOC. Allan Cubitt said, “limited vegetation on the access way meant that it was not good for nesting, ...native birds nest further up the lagoon and into the bull rushes.” We see birds nesting very close to the access way, including walking the road with their chicks; for example Black Swans, Pied Stilts, Spur-winged Plovers, Pukeko. “Bull rushes” is probably Raupo reeds, where birds that need more cover do nest, at the same time as other species nest in the open beside Lochend access road. Vehicle traffic would be “typically mid-afternoon and late evening” (and late night), when birds and their chicks are resting close to the road, or walking on the road. There are many birds ashore around the lagoon at night. Finally, Allan Cubitt noted “the applicants were not going to damage their relationship with DOC...and the applicants were not offering or recommending an ecology survey.” They don’t have a relationship with DOC, beyond a bit of easement. And of course the applicants don’t want ecology.

DCC’s panel acknowledged “it may have benefited from more specific ecological evidence...” We have to watch who gives such evidence. Clearly, DOC is derelict and incapable of it. It would be tragic if developers’ mercenary planners provide ecological evidence, being unqualified to do so if Allan Cubitt’s statements are any example. DCC imposed review conditions. If “evidence of ecological impacts from the venue is brought to Council’s attention by DOC or another party these can be addressed through a review of conditions.” DOC is unlikely to know, or act. We are another party. Birding at lower lagoon? Scan the shoreline with binos, scopes and cameras. Note down the birds, and the people’s activities. The access road to 261 Tomahawk Rd is a public paper road all the way to Lochend Ltd gate at the weir channel. Take photos. At least, you will see many birds in places Lochend Ltd pretend they are absent.

**Andrew Austin**

## **Notices and Business**

### **NZ Bird Atlas-related news and updates now on Facebook**

The NZ Bird Atlas project is now on Facebook under New Zealand Bird Atlas and there will be information being uploaded at least one post per week, keeping followers informed on Atlas-related news and updates. It will also provide a forum for people to post comments and questions

So for those of you who are active on Facebook, please visit this page and “follow” it to receive these regular updates.

The project will be officially launched on 1st June at the NZ Bird Conference in Wellington.

### **Call for Funding Applications**

A key objective of Birds New Zealand is to encourage, organise and promote the study of birds and their habitat use particularly within the New Zealand region. Three funding options are currently called for:

Birds New Zealand Research Fund - Applications will open 1 April and close 15 June

David Medway Scholarship - Applications opened 1 February and will close 30 March

Marj Davis Scholarship - Applications opened 14 February and will close 31 March

Details are available on our funding page

<https://www.osnz.org.nz/Funding-and-Awards>.

Please share this message among your networks and any contacts you may have in universities or other research arenas!

### **New Zealand Birds Conference 1 -3 June 2019**

This is the 80th celebratory conference so should be a great one. This is the first where our own Bruce McKinlay will be chairing as President of Birds NZ. Our Birds NZ conference is the annual premier New Zealand conference for the communication of new research findings on New Zealand birds and for providing opportunities for discussion and networking for professional ornithologists, students and others who are interested in birds and their habitats.



There will be several keynote lectures of a diversity of topics, including Wellington birds, Auckland Islands, old bones and ancient DNA, genetics and taxonomy, physiology and reproduction, and seabirds. Field trips include Zealandia, Kapiti Coast, Te Papa Bird Collections and a pelagic cruise.

It will be held at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington between 1 to 3 June 2019 (Queens Birthday Weekend).

### **Travel Option**

Richard Schofield is thinking of driving up, birding on the way and from the ferry; he would like a couple of passengers; this might be a good travel option for students; so contact Richard if you are interested [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

**Online registration and full details** are available on Birds NZ website. Register before 1 March for early-bird discount!  
Deadline for Abstracts for the conference is 19th April.  
Full details on website, or ask Mary for a printed version.

### **eBird News**

A reminder that eBird Big Day 2019 is fast approaching. This year it is on 4th May, and hopefully the weather will be a bit more favourable than 2018. Further details next month, but in the meantime if anyone has ideas of where they'd like to go or particular species they'd like to go after, please let me know.

**Richard Schofield**

### **Pelagic Trip, 16 April**

Richard Schofield is hoping to organise a pelagic trip from Port Chalmers on Tuesday 16th April and would love to hear from members who are able and keen to join with him and his guests on this trip. Contact Richard at [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## Programme 2019

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

- Wed 27 March** Indoor Meeting. Bruce Spittle on “Encounters with moa?”
- Wed 24 April** Indoor Meeting. Kristina Smiley on “Hormonal regulation of avian bi-parental care; a study using zebra finches.”
- Sat 27 April** Tomahawk Lagoon Bird-watching, 10 to noon; our event for Wild Dunedin Festival; we plan to have telescopes to let the public see birds close-up and to help identify them, etc.  
Contact Andrew if you can help; phone 454 5830
- Sat 11 May** Field Trip. Global Big Day for eBird. Teams will be heading to Otago hotspots; to join a team contact Mary maryt@actrix.co.nz or phone 464 0787.  
Carpooling will be arranged.
- Wed 22 May** Indoor Meeting. Rachel Hufton on “Birdlife of the Makarora Catchment.”
- Wed 26 June** Indoor Meeting. Warren Jowett on “Confessions of two birding tour guides.”
- Sun 30 June** Winter Wader Count. High tide at 13.44 at 2m. (14 July back-up weather day) We need counters for harbours and estuaries around Dunedin area and Catlins. New counters most welcome. Please contact Maree Johnstone to be allocated to a team.  
mareej@kinect.co.nz

- Wed 24 July** Indoor Meeting. Nick Beckwith slideshow on “Birds of my neighbourhood.”
- Wed 28 August** Indoor Meeting. Speakers from the International Penguin Conference.
- Sun 15 Sept** Bird-watching Walks. Dunedin Botanic Garden, 10 am to 11 am. We will be guiding groups of 10 or so, helping members of the public to spot and identify birds. Please let Mary know if would like to help [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) or phone 464 0787
- Wed 25 Sept** Indoor Meeting. Bruce McKinlay on “Birds of the Dunedin Town Belt”, when he will up-date us on our project and findings so far.
- Wed 23 October** Indoor Meeting. Francesca Cunninghame on “The Galapagos Hawk”.
- Sun 24 November** Summer Wader Count; High tide 14.42, 2.2m
- Wed 27 November** to be announced

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)  
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Articles, photos etc for next newsletter please by 17th April