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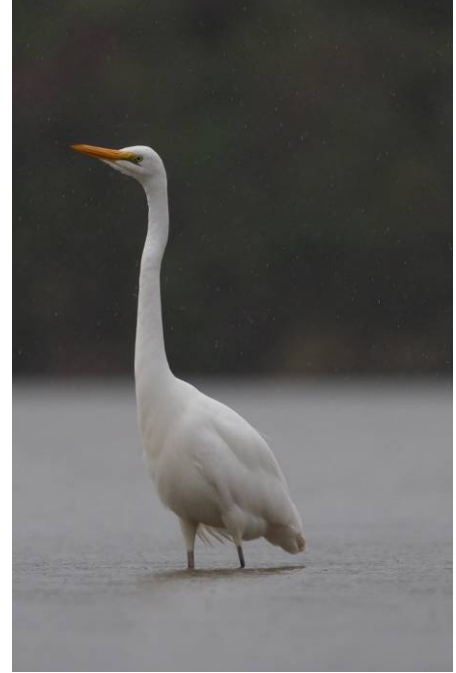
Otago Region Newsletter 5/2019 May 2019



Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching, 27th April

Drizzle and threat of more rain meant the number of participants was fewer than other years but those who turned up were rewarded with a great show of birds. The light was excellent for viewing. Thanks so much to Andrew (who did a fantastic job rounding up the birds!), Bruce, Nick, Karthic and Mary, who helped set up telescopes and show the visitors the birds. When we arrived at quarter to 10 there was no sign of 'our' white heron but at about 10am it flew in to the lagoon corner where we were set up and it proceeded to stalk for prey for about 1h. The arrival of the heron set the hundred or so red-billed gulls off but we were left with plenty. This has been the best year for total number of species. All ducks – paradise, shoveler, grey teal and mallard and a domestic (scaup on upper lagoon). Both oystercatchers, pied stilt and one hybrid with black head, neck and breast. Even the spur-winged plovers showed their spurs. The

distant fallen tree revealed through the telescope, black, little and 1 pied shag. Several people were interested in the brown plumage of the juvenile black-backed gulls. A kingfisher came by and fantails and welcome swallows displayed nearby. The heavy rain held off until the afternoon. And the white heron came back around noon to the delight of the remaining visitors, and I must say it was also a lovely birding day for us too.



Photos Nick Beckwith

But they missed!.....



Photo Dean Williamson.

Marsh Crake - A First for Tomahawk Lagoon !

We have had exciting reports of sightings of Marsh Crake at Tomahawk Lagoon. Dean Williamson whose home backs on to the lagoon first saw a Marsh Crake at the bottom of his garden sometime in mid February. He got a photo of it on 10 April, 2019 at 9 in the morning. He set up a camera in the raupo and videoed for 20 minutes on 19/4 in the evening and got excellent views of three crakes moving about feeding in the same shot! This may be a family group and suggest breeding in the area is occurring. I think this is the first report of these crakes in this area for a very long time. Do any of the old hands have records of crake at Tomahawk and when?

Glen Riley has also seen and heard Marsh crake again at Sinclair Wetlands on 29th March.

EBird Big Day by Bike

Due to a combination of circumstances, I found myself without birding company on 4th May, so I decided to utilise the opportunity to put my money where lots of other people's mouths are, and get on my bike, and see how many species I could see without getting in a motor vehicle.

One of the circumstances involved event photography in the local park, so I arrived early, just after first light, and did one count in the park (it would be embarrassing to miss the common birds), then another on the adjacent lagoons. First day of duckshooting is probably not the ideal time to go chasing birds, but the ducks know where it is safe, and there were large numbers of **Scaup** in particular, with more birds arriving every few minutes.

Once the photography was out of the way, it was time to change shoes and backpack, and start pedaling. The initial destination was Pounaweia, but en route I made various stops in varied habitat types, though the regular gunfire probably didn't encourage any **Fernbirds** to advertise their presence, and stopping to count at known **Little Owl** sites was probably optimistic for the same reason.

I carried my telescope (but no tripod) so was able to scan the far side of the estuary at Pounaweia, saving me 14km – fortunately there were some flat-topped railings to rest the 'scope on. I saw all the expected species there, but no **tattler**, which is just as well as it would be difficult to ascertain the length of the nasal groove at 600+ metres!

A big advantage of birding by bike is that you can just stop wherever you want. Heading to Kaka Point, I realised I was cycling alongside an area of bush, so stopped for 5 minutes and saw my only **Brown Creepers** of the day. A short distance later, I pulled up alongside a parked vehicle and flushed 130 **White-fronted Terns** from their high tide roost right next to the road. Hoping that the person in the car was not watching them (seemed unlikely) I waited patiently as the terns returned to their resting place within 5 metres of where I was standing, with the bonus of a single **Black-fronted Tern** at a similar distance.

I had intended to take a lock so I could leave the bike unattended when necessary, but managed to forget it, so wheeled my Sunday best road bike up the track to Nugget Point. I felt a bit conspicuous, till I met a family coming the other way with a set of bagpipes! There were very few birds at sea, but some **Buller's Mollymawks**, a few **Sooty Shearwaters** and a couple of **Gannets** were all added to the list. Final stop of the day was at Kaka Point, where an estimated 2000 ducks, mainly **Mallard**, with smaller numbers of **Grey Teal & Shoveler**, were sitting offshore, out of range of the hunters.

I thought I was about done then, albeit with the hope of sighting a **Little Owl** on my way back across Paretai in the fading light. They were still not co-operating, though, so having returned home to refuel, I then spent another hour in the evening scanning fenceposts and power poles in vain, and bringing the total distance to 104km – exactly 2km per species.

Richard Schofield

and by car

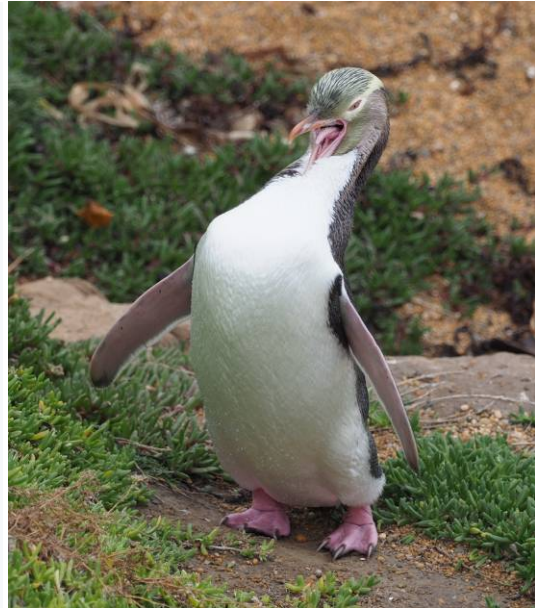


It's not a competition but we did come top of the regions for number of species seen and top by far for number of checklists submitted and Lei Zhu was top individual birder for the whole of NZ with 71 species. Otago region got 76 species and submitted 142 checklists and compare very well with other regions. Well done.



Otago Birds NZ members can be very proud of their efforts. 18 people in Otago region participated in the Global Birding day on Saturday 4th May. A group of 9 of us headed out at 8.30 am, stopped off at Blueskin Bay (godwits etc), then on to Karitane (Caspian terns and banded dotterel), Hawksbury lagoon (white heron elusive) and the team split up to cover Trotters Gorge and Shag Point seabirds. Lunch at Moeraki was spent watching shy mollymawk come in behind fishing boats, and comparing the pied, spotted and little shags on the wharf. Out at Katiki Point we had pleasing encounters with 5 yellow-eyed penguins, so with all the ducks, shags, finches and gulls on our list our team got 50 species. Richard Schofield got 52 species around the Catlin area and came 6th overall in NZ. Francie got us kaka, robin and takahe at Orokonui.

Congratulations to Lei Zhu who topped his own record, as well as the national record, for number of species in one day with 71. From looking at his checklists you can see he started out very early on the Catlins River walk and got mohua, yellow-crowned parakeets as well as usual bush birds, at Waihola he saw a crested grebe as well as the ducks and swans, then got some good seabirds at Aramoana with a reef heron on the mole, and finished the day at Orokonui.



Bird featuring that day were Pied shags in small numbers at a lot of places along the coast this year. Also several Caspian terns were seen as well as gannets. Our friend at Tomahawk spotted the white heron. Sharon at Alex got us quail. We missed out on crake and ruru and little owl this year.

Mary Thompson

Ornithological Snippets

At this time of year wildfowl know where it is safe, and accordingly notable numbers of several species were seen in the last few weeks. At Hawkesbury Lagoon on 4th May there were 600 **Canada Geese**, 100 **Shoveler** and 209 **Grey Teal**, while in Balclutha 149 **Scaup** were seen from the causeway, and a raft of approximately 2000 ducks, mainly **Mallard** were offshore from Kaka Point on the same date.

Other significant counts on 4th May were 38 **California Quail** near Clyde by Sharon Roberts, 115 **Banded Dotterel** at Aramoana, courtesy Lei Zhu,

while Tom Waterhouse counted 12 Pied Shag at Kakanui River Mouth, and there were about 500 **White-fronted Terns** on the beach at Nugget Burn, near Kaka Point. Francie Beggs recorded 59 **Bellbirds** at Orokonui. Lei Zhu also saw a **Great Crested Grebe** on Lake Waihola en route from Catlins to Dunedin.

A **Tattler** was seen independently by 2 parties at Cabbage Point (Catlins River Estuary) over Easter; possibly one of the 2 **Grey-tailed Tattlers** seen earlier in the year, but not specifically identified this time. Recently, whey from the Stirling cheese factory was spread on the airfield in Balclutha; the gulls loved this and there were an estimated 700 **Black-backed Gulls** on the airstrip. Early on 20th April, Fergus Sutherland was somewhat surprised to see a **Bittern** by the side of the road on the Chaslands Highway.

Passerines are also starting to flock. If you are wondering where all the **Greenfinches** are, at least 200 were in a brassica crop on Inchclutha on 27th April, and an estimated 350 **House Sparrows** were in another Inchclutha paddock. A small flock of **Starlings** nearby contained one bird that appeared completely white from a distant view.

Interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

The Further Adventures of Graeme Loh



Today Friday 17th May I was out at Sandfly Bay, on the headland above the east end overlooking Tow Rock and Gull Rocks. Heavy seas were pounding in and a strong rip was running underneath me out to the rocks. There was a small flock of red-billed gulls and a

Gull Rocks feeding ground for sealions and seabirds and proposed for a marine reserve.

few black-backs feeding where the rip eased as it came into the green water. Occasionally there was a more concentrated frenzy joined by shy mollymawks and even a southern-royal albatross crowded in to grab morsels where a sealion was thrashing a fish before swallowing. Great to see. I was surprised to see so much activity when the sea was so rough and dirty. But there were none of the usual terns and shags, nor the giant petrel that usually comes by if ever you spend an hour on the shore.

I look forward to the time when we have a marine reserve here with more fish for the sealions to share with the gulls and mollies. It is pleasing to see that the Ministers of Conservation and Fishing are putting forward the South East Marine Protected Area forum 'network one' recommendations for marine reserves in Otago. All we have to do is write and support them when they are released for consultation in a few months time. AGAIN!

The reason for being on the headland was to check the predator traps around the sooty shearwater colony. It has been a bad season for them. On 8th May when I checked the six cameras all recorded a ferret going into each burrow ten days earlier on the 23rd April. No chicks were caught on camera emerging to flap their wings after that. A complete wipe out. A ferret was caught, but too late. Fergus records similar failure at Papatowai and Te Rere. A visit to one of the colonies at the Nuggets also found no activity at fledging time. But five titi chicks were caught while exercising on the surface at Long Point and banded. Three more were seen but not caught.



Sooty shearwater chick out and about in the "rama" period before fledging



Jim Young at Long Point, Catlins with titi chick about to be banded

At the prion fence there was also disappointment with the fledgling titi colony. Seven eggs laid, four chicks hatch, two of which die early on. Later, two well advanced chicks are banded, but both are found dead on the surface soon after. Starvation. Last year was better in the fence with five titi fledging.

It has been an extraordinary summer with massive flax flowering. At Sandfly Bay and Sandymount there were extraordinary numbers of mice and rats, so it is no surprise that the trapping was not adequate to protect a bird whose chicks are in the burrow for many months. Sobering.



Graham Parker had a look at the giant petrel in the harbour that I reported last month. He said “yes, it is a southern giant petrel”. Sometimes they do have white iris’s too. “What book did you use?” So, Sharyn, you get another tick for your lists.

Graeme Loh

Notices and Business

Classic Bird Books for ‘purchase by donation’ at next Indoor Meetings

I am pleased to report that Jane Wilson has donated a selection of excellent classic bird books from Jim’s extensive library. Jim sadly died early 2017. He was a member of the Otago branch for over 30 years and actively involved in banding projects and bird surveys and was our Regional Recorder from 2014.

This selection of his books, all in excellent condition, will be available for ‘purchase’ by a donation (hopefully generous) at the next Indoor Meeting. The funds will go towards funding Travel Awards for Dunedin student members to attend next years Birds NZ Conference.

This is a great opportunity to add to your own libraries or to give to young enthusiasts you know. Check out the titles and remember to come prepared

with lots of cash to the next meeting. If you can't make it to the meeting, please make offers to Mary on any of these titles.

Some of the Classics

Readers Digest New Zealand Birds
 Birds of NZ by MF Soper
 NZ Bird Portraits by MF Soper
 NZ Birds in Focus by Geoff Moon

Quirky

The Scottish Ospreys
 Extinct NZ Birds by Alan Tennyson and Paul Martinson
 Discovering the birds of NZ by Piers Hayman
 The Southern Ark
 Zoological Discovery in NZ, 1769-1900

Field Guides

Seabirds of the World-a photographic guide
 Field Guide to Birds of Australia-Simpson and Day
 Wildfowl (ducks geese swans of the world)
 Ducks of the World Janet Kerr
 Birds of the World's Waterfowl; Seabirds & Birds of Prey
 NZ Birdwatchers Book by Brian Ellis
 Common and garden Birds of NZ by G Moon-ideal for a young birder.

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. One funding option is still open for applications.

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

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!

Mary Thompson

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 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 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
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Articles, photos etc for next newsletter please by 20th June