



Birds New Zealand
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Report on Marlborough Youth Birding Camp, 15-20 April 2019



Max and Harrier

It was a privilege to be given the opportunity to partake on this youth camp. The Marlborough branch of Birds NZ had members plan and accompany us in Marlborough. The aim was to “1) Encourage, organise and promote the study of birds and their habitat use. 2) Foster and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds generally. 3) To build networks between youth interested in the study of birds, with each other

and more experienced ornithologists, and to retain their interest in this field of study.” The five days of adventures in learning new skills, discovering new bird species in various habitats in Marlborough, and getting more insight to what it is like to work in conservation and ornithology, was very well worth the twelve-hour intercity bus ride from Dunedin.

The twelve of us teenagers were still coming in to Blenheim at various times throughout Monday the 15 of April, the first day of the programme. On that day we spent plenty of it visiting the Taylor dam, home to a great number of birds, including swans, ducks, shovelers, coots, teals, geese, herons, dabchicks, shags, kingfishers, and many smaller passerines. That day was sunny and windless, allowing us to take valuable photographs. The contrast between Dunedin’s wetland birdlife and Marlborough’s was rather clear and immediate. We also then visited Marlborough Kārearea Falcon Trust centre, which was a unique treat. I myself have never seen a New Zealand Falcon.

That night we weren’t awfully excited to hear we had to get up at 6am to leave at 7am for Tuesday’s trip - as well as for every other morning. We drove to the property of a local farming family, where we learnt how to assemble mist nets to catch smaller birds. It was exciting to see what was caught in the nets.



We started off with several silvereyes, then caught dunnocks, a fantail, and I was lucky enough to get a song thrush. It was cool to learn how to band

these birds around the leg and measure their primary feather span. In a metal cage trap set up on another field, there were two caught Australasian harriers/hawks. We were then taught how to hold them by the legs, we never banded them. This was probably my favourite part of this camp - seeing a large raptor like this up-close in person was something unique. One harrier was female, other was male. I was lucky and grateful to be allowed to release the female one, by giving her a gentle uplift in the air to prepare her, and then let her go. Later that day we drove to Wairau Lagoon to go on the Kotuku Walk track.



It

took us about three hours, and we saw a variety of coastal wetland birds, such as the endangered Kotuku/White heron and many terns and teals. Caspian Tern I thought was rather beautiful, and it was the first time for me seeing the Grey teal. As we continued walking, the environment was looking more like Dunedin's local wetlands, with similar flora and a large number of Pied shags and Pied stilts. The entirety of the time, my peers were eager upon finding a bird I didn't know of called the Cirl Bunting. This bird was introduced, and highly localized but rare in only parts of the Northern South Island. It does well in Northern Africa and Europe, and looks extremely like a Skylark or a Yellowhammer. We were consistently excited if we saw one of these birds but slightly disappointed in finding out what it actually was. Nevertheless, a bird is a bird and we enjoyed every sighting of whatever specimen we saw.

Wednesday was rather unique as we drove to Picton and boated over to a predator-free island called Blumine island in the Marlborough Sounds. We knew it was going to be interesting from before we got to the island, as we saw plenty of fur seals, elusive King shags, and Fluttering shearwaters following the wake of the boat.



Once we got on the island we quickly found a few Weka, an extraordinary amount of Bellbirds everywhere, and then a young jackbird (juvenile Saddleback). More adult Saddleback came forth, attracted to our calls. We walked for hours, and many Tomtits followed us and provided a great challenge with photographing. We continuously made Mohua/Yellowhead calls but we saw and heard none. Near the end of our walk, we managed to spot several highly well hidden and endangered Orange Fronted parakeets, which was a major highlight.



Seeing something so rare, pretty, and thriving in its original and untouched environment is a treat. Well worth the walk for the day to see them, and we also got some friendly interaction with a black Fantail and a few curious Weka.

Thursday our destination was Marfells beach, we quickly passed Lake Grassmere then parked the vans at Marfells beach campground. We saw no immediate birds, but soon enough, to our delight, a New Zealand Falcon swooped by into bushes chasing after a chaffinch. It perched high on top of some trees in the distance, far enough for good use of our binoculars, but too far for a good photograph. We walked further, past a

headland and collection of tidal pools, where we saw numerous shags, herons, and lots of Red-billed and Black-billed gulls. Beyond that point and onwards towards the Cape Campbell lighthouse, we didn't see much. The odd flock of Goldfinches around the thistles at the feet of the steep hillsides, and the odd Sacred Kingfisher. After many hours we got to Cape Campbell, which was a large treat as we got to rest and sit at the bottom of the lighthouse and enjoy the view from the hill. There were Fur Seals everywhere swimming, and boats and dolphins far in the distance. It was well worth the walk. We walked along the landmass at the point of Cape Campbell that got uplifted in a recent earthquake, where we saw a lot of South Island Pied oystercatchers and Variable oystercatchers. I was surprised by their numbers. Then we were due to get into the vans waiting for us to visit Lake Elterwater. There the sun weakened and we spent some time trying out the spotting scopes. Luck struck us again as we walked on to the wooden platform and immediately to our right we saw a Hoary-headed grebe and it's chick close by. I have never seen one before, and according to our books there are a lot more than just Australasian Crested grebes around the South Island, which are what I have always seen. There was also an extraordinary amount of Shovelers and Mallards, plus a few New Zealand Dabchicks. There were plenty of shags, several swans, and lots of Blue faced herons. We drove back later that day, well worn and happy. I didn't actually take many photographs at all - I left my camera in my bags at the lodge because the walk's length that day was not worth carrying a camera the whole time.



Friday we drove to Havelock, which wasn't too far. We went along the jetty, the small walk around the bush and down the spit where we saw various birds such as Pied Stilts, Caspian Terns, most Oystercatchers, and plenty of Red billed gulls. I learnt how to set and use a spotting scope here, we

stayed here for a bit to read the alpha-numerical codes on the bands of the gulls. I was impressed with how far and accurate the spotting scope was, my camera was not quite like it. Within the aquatic plants and driftwood in

the shore of the water, we saw plenty of Grey teals, Mallards, Shovelers, Blue faced herons, Paradise shelducks and kingfishers. Kaipupu Point was our next destination - all the way to Picton. Kaipupu point was a miniature ecosanctuary, similar to Orokonui. There was a predator-proof fence sectioning the headland off from the rest of Picton, established with plenty of Podocarp forest and small, fast growing Manukas, broadleaves and other trees. We got there via water taxi, and enjoyed a 1-2 walk around it (I forgot how long it took). We didn't see many birds, that was bad luck. We did see and got to hear many bellbirds though, and someone did once hear a Brown Creeper. We waited for the water taxi at the platform of the island, and I and a couple of my mates got the opportunity to have a swim. However hesitant I was of large stingrays, as I did see one under the Picton wharf, I still jumped in. It was refreshing and a fun late afternoon treat. We went back to lake Elterwater again to finish the day, but this time we approached from another angle, a local homestead let us walk across their land to view more of the lake from a headland that protruded out into the middle of the water. We mainly saw Shovelers, and I struggled to see the Hoary-headed grebe people pointed out which frequently took a dive underwater. And that concluded the camp when I got up at 7am the next morning on Saturday to get a ride to the Blenheim bus station for my 12 hour bus ride home.



Oscar and Harrier

I figured that this camp was unique compared to other programmes I have been involved in. This camp was full of enthusiasm since the start and only got better - that was the enthusiasm shared by everyone. This camp only had room for 20 maximum teenagers from across New Zealand, there was little competition for it, but all of us who signed up looked at the offer and said yes because we wanted to - for various reasons, mainly for passion of birds. That passion was what brought us there, and it made the time special. Getting out of bed at 6am each morning was no problem, passion hauled us together out easy, as we knew right before we fell asleep that the next day would bring us a different adventure. Before I signed up for this youth camp I was having second thoughts - it was laziness, thoughts about how the time taken off school might impact, or my holidays, and after all, I had almost long lost my keen interest in birds. I had forgotten about them. I don't regret pushing the second thoughts away and signing up for the programme. Thank you to the Otago branch of Birds NZ (for the travel grant too), the members of the Marlborough branch of Birds NZ, and the peers I met on the camp for making this a great experience and restoring my passion for New Zealand avifauna.

Oscar Robinson

Ornithological Snippets

As winter takes hold, there are not many reports of unusual birds this month, but some large flocks of various species are around. There were at least 1550 **Black Swans** on Lake Waihola on 24th May, while larger than normal numbers of **Shoveler** peaked at 370 on the river in Balclutha on 7th June.

Following on from a report of 2 near Jacks Bay in January, Pen Gillette came across 3 **Peafowl** in the Tahakopa Valley on 15th June. Meanwhile, numbers of **Pukeko** around Henley seem markedly reduced this year, compared to the regular 3 digit counts at this time in 2018. **SIPOs** are around their breeding grounds in South Otago slightly earlier again. The **White Heron** at Hawkesbury Lagoon was seen again on 9th June by Derek Onley and the new merry band of local bird counters.

A count of 13 **Kingfishers** at Aramoana 15th June by Karthic was noteworthy. **Brown Creepers**, which are generally scarce in suburban

Balclutha, were seen in the compiler's garden on 20th May (5), at least 2 a few days later, and 1 on 9th June. Some large passerine counts included 58 **Chaffinches** by Pen Gillette, including a flock of 47, at Albert Town on 18th June; and 450 **Greenfinches**, in flocks of 400 & 50, and 500 **House Sparrows** in a single flock, on Inchclutha on 9th June

Finally, a near miss for eBird, but a hit for the kitchen window. Sharon Roberts found a dead male **Cirl Bunting** male on her doorstep near Alexandra on 27th May.

Interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

Storm Brings Black Duck

Cold weather storming into upper Tomahawk Lagoon overnight on Queens Birthday weekend brought a strange duck, which is still there.

Sunday June 2 revealed a new small black duck, not another Scaup. It is a totally black Mallard type female, even the visible delineated wing scapulars are black. Her bill is near black darkish grey, and her legs are a blackish grey. At this stage I'm calling her a Mallard, although are there Grey Duck genes there with her small size, dark bill and legs? She is smaller and slimmer than Mallards, looks young, and quack calls like a female Mallard but more softly. She is mostly silent. She stays with Mallards, but is more wary of people than them. When ashore, she stays close to water. If she is ashore and a human arrives she instantly flies into water faster than other ducks.

Mallards accept the new black duck, whereas they harass Shovelers and Scaup if they get mixed close to shore when all three species are swimming. Shovelers slowly swim away without fighting when Mallards harass them, then swim back in to feed there again. Male Scaup will attack first with threat lunges at Mallards if they get close together near shore, and defend others by charging and jabbing Mallards. When a Mallard male swim chases a Scaup, frequently a male Scaup charges past his fleeing friend and attacks the Mallard. Mallards then back off and the flocks sort out acceptable space, with Scaup swimming a few metres further from shore. Scaup often soon move back into the same spot. Scraps occur only where there is deeper water immediately offshore with

Scaup feeding close to swimming Mallards. Scaup and Shovelers accept each other very close together, including feeding together in the same near shore space, without conflicts. Scaup frequently all together in one flock of 52 -- 54 are often the most numerous ducks on upper lagoon in winter. Paradise Shelducks mostly seem to ignore other nearby ducks, but sometimes an individual grazing ashore will threaten and drive away a Mallard that walks too close.

The black duck stays near where pet ducks were previously released, and two young Paradise Shelducks from the Wildlife Hospital showed imprinting on people, but she doesn't like people. She is more like a newly arrived wild duck. Maybe she likes that place because she arrived

overnight as a storm borne stranger, and saw where most of the upper lagoon Mallards stay together. She flies fast for brief distance, but only when fear of humans makes her flee the shore out onto water, and stays close to Mallards in one small area. All her brief flights I've seen were from shore to water, I haven't seen her fly from water, or in flight over the lagoon. She saves low brief flight only for alarms, as if lacking energy, but swims as fast as the others. At first, when people fed bread to Mallards the new black duck stayed away alone on the water, or away onshore close to water. When people departed she rejoined the Mallards. Not like a released pet. Now, after Mallards are fed she swims close to shore with them, calling quietly, but I haven't seen her eat any bread.

I can't find pictures of totally black Mallards or Grey Ducks. No pictures from Australia, Pacific Islands; or European and American Mallards. Grey Duck / Pacific Black Duck have three subspecies in Australia, New

Zealand, Indonesia, New Guinea, and Southwest Pacific. I have to look more widely at ducks of the Australasian – Pacific region. If you are counting Mallards at upper lagoon, the small black duck with them is also a Mallard or related, not a Scaup. The first totally black wild Mallard type I've seen. Now she is paired with a Mallard male. Will any of her young be darklings

Andrew Austin

Little Owl Calls

A Little Owl calls at Tomahawk, only some nights, and sometimes at midday. Beyond the Paradise Shelduck couples talking, Scaup parties chuckling by raupo reeds and Pukeko shrieking, the owl's quick "kee—ew" calls. I have heard it calling as it hunts through scrub and gardens on the way over from across the lagoon, and seen it chasing moths around streetlamps.

Introduced from Germany by the Otago Acclimatisation Society in 1906, Little Owls were a bit uncooperative after arrival. They were supposed to cull small birds feasting on orchards and crops. However, they eat mainly insects, spiders, and worms. They like big night flying beetles and moths; and eat a few small birds, mice and rabbits. The local Little Owl lives in the same dense patch of conifers where hundreds of Starlings roost. Maybe they swap shifts, with the owl home by dawn when most Starlings are away feasting. At night the owl can go hunting elsewhere when Starlings may continue racket into darkness. How does a different bird stand the noise when Starlings roost in the conifers? Does an occasional sleeping Starling become supper?

Oh, you want to eBird it. The Little Owl's genus is named after the goddess Athene, favourite daughter of Zeus, wise and able to hurl thunderbolts. She backed the Greeks against Troy, but after victory they disrespected her altar, so she asked Poseidon to send a storm, destroying many of their homebound ships.

An ancient temple picture shows her staring intently at what looks so like an open laptop computer in her left hand.

Not easily counted like any scruffy sparrow, as eBirders are finding. How to cross the lagoon with your offering is your problem. Maybe by kayak, or in your swimming togs with offering held aloft to keep it dry and alive, for she lives above the deepest water. A channel below the owl's home is deeper than the length of a double bladed kayak paddle, and there are some two-metre drop holes.

The going rate for eBirding a Little Owl is a tea box of live moths, to be released only when you see the owl within two metres. At night, turn off your headlamp and any blue lit smartphone beacon that would allow the victims to escape all over your head and clothes. After the owl has the moths, you may eBird. Remember, you still have to cross back over to this world, if you want to. Do you want to be first to know whether Athene and Poseidon have a joint venture with Tangaroa when you are halfway back in your kayak or swimming? So, a tea box of moths. If you are an Otago Birds NZ goddess, equality might waive the owl's fee. Or, you could book with Andrew's Birding Safaris, who have deals with other worlds, and take your chances with owls and the staff. EBirders who "get" Little Owls are not allowed to borrow them. BYO moths.

.....**Andrew Austin**



Athene checking out dodgy ebird records from Tomahawk Lagoon on her laptop outside the Austrian Parliament

And a couple of pics from Karthic for you to peruse.

Was birding in the botanic garden today afternoon and spotted these flying/ gliding over. Not very sure what bird it is. Looked like a bird of prey from the glide. There were two of them flying close to each other one gliding at the other then flying apart. They flew away in the direction of Mt. Cargill.



Notices and Business

NZ Bird Atlas instructions

As you will probably be aware, the New Zealand Bird Atlas was launched on 1st June. Full details can be found at birdatlas.co.nz, but basically it is a 5 year project, with checklists being submitted via eBird. This will allow observers to submit data directly into the system, enabling real time updates of coverage. Full information on how to take part can be found at birdatlas.co.nz, but a brief summary follows.

Atlas portal. There are a few differences compared to standard eBird, however. Firstly, all Atlas data must be submitted via a dedicated Atlas portal <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/home>. Everything that is entered here will still show in standard eBird, so please don't submit lists twice.

10km square grid. Another important difference is that although you submit a checklist for a particular location as usual, the country has been divided up into 10km squares, which unfortunately do not coincide with those on NZ Topomaps, but are similar (but not identical) to those used in the 1999-2004 Atlas. The grid is visible when searching for a location using "Find it on a map", or on the Atlas Effort Map, under the "Explore" tab. The grid can also be downloaded to your device from the Help Centre at birdatlas.co.nz, or contact myself or Mary. It is also planned to produce A4 pdf maps of each 10km square, which can then be printed for use in the field.

Habitats. One of the ideals of the new Atlas is to correlate species presence with habitat. The plan is to survey each habitat within each 10km square during each of the 4 seasons. Any checklist, whether stationary or travelling, should cover one habitat, and whenever the habitat changes that checklist should finish and another one can be started. The habitat type is not specifically asked for now, as this will be worked out by the Atlas team from habitat overlay maps. However, if you visit a temporary habitat (e.g. annual crops, ploughed fields or recently-harvested plantation forests) this should be mentioned in the "Comments" box. These habitats tend not to be very easily captured in pre-existing habitat datasets.

Complete counts. To completely survey each grid square, observers should aim to visit each of the accessible, major habitat types in each grid square and collect at least one complete bird species checklist from within each habitat type. A complete checklist is one in which all the bird species that were encountered and identified in the field are recorded, along with the date, time of day, location and time spent searching.

Protocol. Checklists can be submitted as travelling, stationary or area counts. Although it has always been recommended to keep travelling checklists relatively short, the ideal maximum is now 1 km or thereabouts (or whenever the habitat changes). Stationary counts should continue until all expected species (for that habitat) have been located, or until extra species cease to be added.

Checklist entry. Enter your checklists as normal but via the NZ Bird Atlas eBird website <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/home> or directly via the smartphone App.

And for the technophobes among us, submission forms can be downloaded from the help centre, or from Mary.

As the project gets underway, we will be holding Atlasing field trips and training days. And each newsletter will give you updates and more tips.

If there is anything you are unsure about, please get in touch!

Richard Schofield

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 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
- 29 June to 7 July** Garden Bird Survey. Manaaki Whenua; Landcare Research website for instructions.
- 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. Contact: Suzanne Middleton
smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz ph 022 2601 8579
if you can help
- 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 18th July