



Birds New Zealand  
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## *Otago Region Newsletter 7/2019 July 2019*

### **Ornithological Snippets**

It may be the middle of winter, but the breeding season has already started in Balclutha, where a **Black Swan** was sitting on a nest on 5th July. On the same day Suzanne Schofield was surprised to see 11 swans hauled out on the gravel island by the Clutha rail bridge. A probable **Spotless Crake** was heard calling from the Puerua Ponds on 30th June. Despite visits on the following 2 evenings, it could not be relocated, whereas a **Grey-tailed Tattler** was found during the wader count at Cabbage Point on 30th June,



photo Karthic

presumably one of the 2 birds seen there in the summer. Further north, a **Southern Skua** was reported from St Clair on 29th June, and there have been multiple sightings of **Great Crested Grebes** – Bruce McKinlay saw one at Andersons Lagoon on 7th July, while Karthic came across 2 at Broad Bay the same day; on 12th there were 2 at Macandrew Bay and a third bird at Raynbird Bay, all 3 still being present on 13th. Tom Waterhouse came across a **White Heron** at Shag River estuary on 14th July, and a **Reef Heron** was seen at Jacks Bay on 30th June; nearby, 2 **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were sitting on fence posts.



Graeme Loh reports a **NZ Falcon** along the Tunnel Beach to St Clair coastline harassing rock pigeons, and on 5th July, eating a **Blackbird** by the Prion Fence.



And also from Graeme 77 of the 170 **Welcome Swallows** at Highgrove by St Clair golf course midday 16th July. Although they regularly forage on the up draft there, usually there's just ten to twenty. Derek Onley saw at least 50-60 sitting on the Otago Polytech roof and feeding over the hockey pitch on 2nd July

In the Botanic Gardens on 15th July, Penelope Gillette counted 26 **Tui**, and (royal) we have overlooked a **NZ Robin** at Ross Creek, first seen by Murray Efford on about 22nd April, and by Mary Thompson on 20th May, and again in June. And finally, Sharon Roberts near Alexandra has upgraded from a dead **Cirl Bunting** (see last month's report) to a live one, again a male, with the **Yellowhammer** flock on 12th July

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

**Richard Schofield**

## Otago Winter Wader Count 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019

	Karitane	Blueskin Bay	Aramoana	Harbour West	Harbour East	Papanui Inlet	Hooper's Inlet	Catlins	Totals		
									2019	2018	2017
Pied Oystercatcher	63	261	268	64	95	249	162	158	1320	842	1023
Variable Oystercatcher	17	29	1		65	46	112	8	278	99	130
Pied Stilt	38	43			115	35	46	32	309	188	65
Banded Dotterel		78	110				53	1	242	294	36
Spur-winged Plover	8			12		6	2	116	144	168	128
Bar-tailed Godwit							109	24	133	135	161

For this year's winter count the weather was fine, with high cloud and a light sou'easterly.

Note that there is a lot of disturbance on East Harbour south of Broad Bay due to road widening: Birds roosts have changed and some of the usual vehicle pull over spots are not available making counting difficult. However a pair of Australasian Great Crested Grebes was seen at Broad Bay.

Also because of earthworks at Observation Point hill I was unable to count all the birds on the roofs of Port Otago's Harbour buildings. There were no SI pied oystercatchers on the west side, only black backed gulls...the east side was not visible.

Derek commented that at low tide at Karitane the following week, more than 50 banded dotterels were counted.

Many thanks to all those who took part

**Maree Johnstone**

### Better Cleaner Sugar Feeder

At the conference Auckland student Daria Erastova presented "Is it really so sweet to feed sugar water to native birds? Insights into urban feeding practices".

It inspired me to write a long note to her about my observations and thoughts on the subject. Here is a version for our newsletter and hopefully the incentive to create the perfect feeder.

I was a late adopter of sugarwater feeding but have been doing it for a few years now here in St Clair with a particular interest in gaining re-sightings of Tui and Bellbirds banded by Murray Efford. I use white sugar because

I was told that honey and brown sugar provided a better culture for microbes.



The Blokes at the Bar

One of the great puzzles of our birdlife, exemplified by tui and bellbird, is the actual persecution of the females by the males. You really wonder how females get to feed and breed successfully. A good digest of this subject is in Tim Low's book "Where Song Began". I have not got around to torturing the dominant male tui by having two feeders set apart so far that he cannot easily 'defend'/'dominate' both. A friend has.

Hygiene is quite a problem. A special problem now that sparrows have learnt about this source of food. They first discovered this about three years ago. Even before then I made efforts to restrict silvereyes because of their heavy consumption and pooing lots. Silvereyes are afflicted with a pox of the facial flesh quite often in spring which is another reason to worry about contagion. So, I made a 'niggardly' feeder which only allows long beaks and tongues to reach the sugar water. That greatly reduces the silvereye and sparrow visitation, consumption and soiling. But not perfect. It would be fascinating to see how the bacterial counts go up. Probably

happens very quickly, maybe even after just one bird visiting! Probably within hours. An obvious problem is the birds perching on top and poo going everywhere. If poo contamination is the main hygiene problem we need designs and settings that prevent birds perching overhead or pointing vent towards the feeder.

How should the feeders be cleaned? The DOC and vet quarantine people are very keen on using powerful antibacterial bleaches like Trigene and Vircon. I worry that

these could kill good gut flora as well as bad foreign flora. And risk creating/encouraging super bugs. Why not just use dishwasher or regular bleach?

I have seen a couple of other hazards presented by feeders. Wasps are a big issue, especially here where they are at the margin of a suitable climate and food is scarce. I have found it hard to manage them. But starting up the wasp trap with sugar water before the bird feeder helps and having a trap that is a bit leaky means wasps communicate and lead more to the trap. Still, this is no substitute for finding and destroying the colony which is usually several neighbours away. Lowering the sugar content seems to make a difference, so I drop the concentration to the lowest that will maintain tui interest. And a friend's feeder in a natural tree feeds rats. Probably possums too. Of-course they must be placed out of reach of cats.

In summary I think there is a need for good guidelines and a quality bird feeder for our honeyeaters.

**Graeme Loh**

### **Pacific Black Duck Visited Tomahawk?**

Two of us were watching birds at lower Tomahawk Lagoon 11.30am June 29, when I saw a different duck.

Andrew Innes and I enjoyed seeing a few Mallards, Shoveler, and Grey Teal sleeping on a scrubby little island close to the opposite bank. Nervous wild Mallards on the southern bank lifted their heads over long grass to watch us, softly quacking, seemingly debating should we stay or should we go. Decision made, a flock of 30 Mallards exploded out of the grass and flew fast west out to distant water. Probably not local Mallards, a few of them remained swimming, not worried about us. About 12

swimming Shovelers had flown off from nearby, and descended onto water even further out. Then a different lone duck walked out of long grass closer to water, and swam quietly following the shore, staying close to the grass and scrub entangled bank. It stayed away from a few local Mallards swimming nearby. “That one looks more like a Grey Duck,” I said.

Not a Mallard. A small darker brown duck, with a broad black stripe running alongside the head through the eye, bill dark grey. Legs grey. I didn't see the speculum, it didn't fly. Swimming a half metre offshore, using the background wall of scruffy vegetation as cover looked like a deliberate strategy. I watched through binoculars until it went ashore again further away and disappeared in long grass and scrub. Despite not flying, it did not appear injured, swam strongly looking around with a very alert attitude, and walked strongly out of the water and through shore vegetation. I considered how to stalk that shore, or settle in where we were and just keep watching the scrub covered channel it swam up. The other Andrew had a time commitment, so we moved on.

I checked *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* (1996 edition), and there it is in Derek Onley's picture as a Grey Duck. Repeated trips back to the same site with a scope, hoping to see more details, revealed no more sightings of the duck. Then, last trip to the library, a brand new book, *The Complete Guide to Australian Birds* by George Adams (2018). A field Guide format, crammed full of photographs of all Australian birds. The duck I saw is there on page 41, a Pacific Black Duck, a more interesting name for the same species we call Grey Duck. No way of knowing whether the duck came from Australia or within New Zealand, or if it is a pure PBD or a hybrid mixed with Mallard. It was not with Mallards at Tomahawk, and stayed away from them. Repeated return trips with scope for waiting and watching, but no more sightings. Lots of other birds, though.

**Andrew Austin**

## **Tomahawk Winter Circuit**

Another failed search for the elusive Pacific Black Duck I saw at lower Tomahawk Lagoon last month. Seen once only, for about 10 minutes.

The White Heron standing in the creek, filmy plumes blowing like a fine cape from the wings, bill still yellow. It is usually in Raupo Channel in winter, maybe there is good hunting in the creek today. The lagoon is full and very clear.

A family of four Pied Stilts, including two juveniles. Also Mallard Ducks, Paradise Shelducks, Shovelers, and four Grey Teal. Two Welcome Swallows. Scope the famous fallen tree, named as the Bird Hub by ECOTAGO leader, Andrew Innes. One Little Shag, perched high up. One Pied Shag, standing on the log near water.

A lone Kingfisher watches from the powerlines. It is young, with bright blue upper and a fluffy yellow chest and belly. It stands repeatedly opening and closing its bill, catching flying insects too tiny to see through binoculars. Then it flies a short distance and perches a bit further along the same wire, and continues seizing invisible insects as they drift by. The Kingfisher flies down to a flood smashed tree leaning over the creek, and snatches more tiny airborne bugs. Cloud opens, and the sun paints it into a blue and yellow jewel bird. It moves like an exquisite handmade sculpture come alive. Again, absurd delight at seeing this metres from a road and a carpark where people noisily slam doors and call their dogs. Kingfisher looks intently into the creek, then flies off direct and fast toward the horse field.

Head on to upper lagoon, via the sports field. Bushes bustling with House Sparrows, Silvereyes, Starlings, a few Goldfinches fly over twinkling calls. Near the cricket pitch are two Variable Oystercatchers piping, and a lone Pied Oystercatcher. Apart from high tide moving them up, and eating worms and insect larvae from grass, they also stand on sports fields to show us whether they have leg bands. These three didn't.

Counting Scaup on upper Tomahawk Lagoon, after spotting 27 together. Ten minutes watching them through my scope sweeping sideways, as they energetically swim and dive faraway NW below a bush slope. 27, 52, 45,

45, 27, 31, 45, 34, 20, 36...depending on who is under. Then another 5 mins: 47, 47, now plus 12 Shovelers and 2 Grey Teal, 42 Scaup, 49...Nearby in shallows beside raupo, a shoal of little Galaxias fish each about 50mm, and on the edge of their group a lone perch also about 50mm. Watching fish through binoculars is fun, I've introduced the habit to ECOTAGO. Haven't quite mastered it through a scope, yet. There are often 56 Scaup together. Upper lagoon is full and very clear.

Upper Lagoon's completely black wild Mallard female is still there, with her Mallard mate. She is now fully integrated with the Mallards, and flies more strongly than when I first saw her. She is still wild, avoids people. An imprinted female Paradise Shelduck, probably a released pet or an overly coddled ex patient, wanders the carpark approaching people and calling to you. She pecks at car doors. Her wild male mate stays back, uttering low grumbles. At least she can still feed herself like a normal Paradise Shelduck, despite neurotic certainty that all humans are nice and give food. Years ago, there was another one like her, but she did not know anything about being a real shelduck. Her tragic life after release as a dumped pet was very short.

Black clouds moving in fast. Quick look in Lagoon Creek field for herons, or a Kingfisher, but none just now. Two distant Spur-winged Plovers. A dark Harrier drifts low over the Ngaio canopy, almost brushing trees. The same Harrier we saw through the scope eating prey just onshore, on schools science day? Blackbirds thrashing ground vegetation litter. Silvereyes mob through bush, feeding up before the cold front hits. Grey Warblers busy too. A Tui calls from the big Eucalyptus. The first cold raindrops fly in from SW, sky promising more. Hot tea and afghan biscuits at home.

**Andrew Austin**



## **Notices and Business**

### **eBird News**

We are now halfway through the first season of fieldwork for the NZ Bird Atlas, and as I write this 72 out of 348 (20.69%) grid squares in Otago have had at least some coverage, so it has been a very satisfactory start. As mentioned elsewhere, we intend having regular field trips to survey of squares in various parts of Otago, and we will hopefully use these to explain some of the finer details of the project. In the meantime here are a couple of tips for carrying out fieldwork.

One aspect of the Atlas is that complete counts are required whenever possible, rather than incomplete counts or counts using the incidental protocol. This means that if you come across a scarce, secretive or otherwise interesting species that you wish to submit a record for, it is preferable to start a stationary or travelling checklist. Yes it will be slightly biased because you were only prompted to start a checklist when you detected a particular species but this is a bias that is essentially unavoidable (we are all guilty of it!) but is much more use than an incidental observation.

For those of us who are entering data via the website, it is helpful to make a note of the route you covered – obviously this is done automatically if you are using the app, and is prompted if you are using the field data sheets.

If there is anything you are unsure about, please ask – either myself or Mary, or the Atlas team via the website [birdatlas.co.nz](http://birdatlas.co.nz).

**Richard Schofield**

### **Agenda for AGM, 24 July**

#### **Who are the people that help keep our branch running?**

Confirmation of positions and thankyou's to all

Regional Representative: Mary Thompson

Regional Recorder/ Atlas Coordinator: Richard Schofield

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley

Newsletter distribution: Hamish Spencer; Susan Schweigman

Refreshments: Francie Beggs

Treasurer: Vacant. Move nomination of Sue Odlin as Treasurer and Bruce McKinlay and Craig McKenzie as signatories.

Proposal to convert our account for internet banking.

**What projects do we have underway?**

Beyond the fence-robins of Mopanui; coordinator Georgina Pickerell

Wader Counts; Maree Johnstone

Town Belt Survey: Bruce McKinlay

**How will we organise the Atlasing field trips?**

The Project to survey all the birds present in all main habitats within 10km squares all over NZ has started and will run for the next 5 years. This is a huge task for us all but very exciting as we will get out birding in all sorts of areas all over our region. In the first few months we will probably be surveying 10km squares fairly close to home but whenever you travel remember to at least do a 5 minute survey wherever you stop. Every checklist will contribute.

Richard Schofield will be overall coordinator and liaise with the national organisers. He will review the completed and uncompleted squares and suggest areas to survey.

We plan to have an atlasing field trip every month. We would appreciate volunteers to lead these trips (maybe once or twice a year to spread the load); involves organising meeting points, travel routes, survey teams (pairs), maps, etc., with Richard helping.

**What other jobs need doing?**

Regional Round-up for Birds NZ magazine; would someone like to be the reporter to collate key sightings and activities of the region over the previous 3 months to send to the magazine each quarter.

**Publicity**

Any ideas? Anyone with media contacts?

**How are our finances looking?**

Annual statement below

In addition we have received a grant for our Robin project.

**Ornithological Society of New Zealand**  
**Region: Otago**  
**Current Account: 03 0903 0392455-00**

	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Balance as at 1 Jan.</b>	1814.18	1777.46	1366.44	1621.96
<b><u>Income:</u></b>				
Interest				
Capitation	350.00	350.00	350.00	350.00
Donations	103.87	65.99	148.60	140.00
Transfer from Bonus saver for projects/grants			600.00	
OSNZ Project assistance Grant				
Beca consulting		230.00		
Waitaki District Council-travel for survey			113.88	
Sinclair Wetlands Trust-survey		400.00	400.00	400.00
Sale of cards and books	25.00	70.00	93.00	
	<b>478.87</b>	<b>1115.99</b>	<b>1705.48</b>	<b>890.00</b>
<b><u>Expenses:</u></b>				
Transfer to savings account	12.00	12.00	12.00	12.00
Bank fees	5.00	5.00	5.00	
Room hire			105.00	
Envelopes, stamps, photocopying	193.94	161.85	224.19	208.51
Speaker Gifts	99.90	197.87	30.00	187.82
Book prize-Science Fair		30.00	9.90	
Project: Bluetooth speaker				218.99
Bittern/morepork study	143.75			
Spoonbill/redbilled gull study		639.00		
Sinclair Wetlands survey		360.00	300.00	300.00
Posters and publicity			153.52	56.70
Student travel grants			450.00	
Miscellaneous	61.00	121.29	160.35	50.00
	<b>515.59</b>	<b>1527.01</b>	<b>1449.96</b>	<b>1034.02</b>
Income less Expenses	-36.72	-411.02	255.52	144.02
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>1777.46</b>	<b>1366.44</b>	<b>1621.96</b>	<b>1477.94</b>
<b>Breakdown of Accounts</b>				
<b>Running Expenses</b>				
Balance brought forward	543.61			
Income	390.00			
expenses	515.03			
Balance		<b>418.58</b>		
<b>Other Projects</b>				
Balance brought forward	574.35			
Income	100.00			
Transfer from Spoonbill project	214.00			
Expenses	218.99			
Balance		<b>669.36</b>		
<b>Sinclair Wetlands</b>				
<b>Balance brought forward</b>	140.00			
Income	400.00			
Expenses	300.00			
Balance		<b>240.00</b>		
<b>Student travel</b>				
Balance	150.00			
Expenses				
Balance		150.00		
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,477.94</b>		
<b>Bonus Saver account 0309030392455-25</b>				
Balance brought forward	1280.44			
Interest	1.28			
Transfers from cheque	12.00			
transfer for projects	0.00			
Balance		<b>1293.72</b>		

## 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 24 July** Indoor Meeting. Nick Beckwith slideshow on “Birds of my neighbourhood.”  
Followed by the AGM.
- 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](mailto: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](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)  
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Articles, photos etc for next newsletter please by 21st August