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## *Otago Region Newsletter 1/2020 January 2020*

### **Ornithological Snippets**

At Tomahawk Lagoon on 18<sup>th</sup> Jan, Andrew Austin counted at least 1248 **Paradise Shelduck**, though he estimates there could have been up to 1700 birds there. Warren Jowett reported a **Long-tailed Cuckoo** at Knox Church in Dunedin on 5<sup>th</sup> Jan

A Chukar was seen from the Cardrona access road on 18<sup>th</sup> Jan, and a possible **Crane** sp was seen flying over the Matukituki valley between the Treble Cone turn-off and Cattle Flat on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec; a **Pacific Golden Plover** was seen & photographed at Papanui Inlet on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

On the seabird front, 2 **Pomarine Skua** were reported chasing gulls off Katiki Point on 16<sup>th</sup> Jan, and the Otago Daily Times reported hundreds of **Red-billed & Black-backed Gulls, & White-fronted Terns**, swarming while small fish washed ashore on 10<sup>th</sup>

December at an Oamaru beach, which was described as a “spooky” scene  
<http://tinyurl.com/vqxupkk>

A **White Heron** has been present at Hawkesbury Lagoon since at least 15<sup>th</sup> Dec, and another was near the Otakou Golf Course on 9<sup>th</sup> Jan, and 1 or 2 **Little Black Shags** were claimed from Andersons Bay Inlet and Tomahawk Lagoon on the latter date.

Franny Cunninghame found a **Little Owl** by Highcliff Road on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec, just a couple of hundred metres from suburbia, while Tony Green came across a juvenile further up the road at Pukehiki on 20<sup>th</sup>; another reported on eBird near Balclutha on 28<sup>th</sup> Nov, was presumably “twitched” 4 days later by a couple of overseas birders.



Pacific Golden Plover

3 **NZ Falcons** were at Macraes Flat on 5<sup>th</sup> January, while another was flying high and calling over Great King Street, Dunedin, 5 days later. 2 **SI Robins** were reported from Ross Creek Reservoir on the appropriate date of 25<sup>th</sup> December

Finally, a piece from the Star News, <http://tinyurl.com/rhldyn8> regarding a **Silvereye** with an abnormally long bill, photographed in a Pukekihi garden in mid-January.

Please send any interesting reports to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

Richard Schofield

## Otago Summer Wader Count 24 November 2019

	Karitane	Blueskin Bay	Ara moana	Harbour West	Harbour East	Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Catlins	PBello-Taiaroa	Total Nov. 2017	Total Dec. 2018	Total Nov 2019
Pied Oystercatcher	1	230	48	70	-	15	46	26	1	724	270	437
Variable Oystercatcher	6	7	22	2	7	10	7	2	13	137	45	76
Pied Stilt	23	6				9		2		82	97	40
Banded Dotterel								7		15	43	7
Spur-winged Plover	4	6	2	11		9	6	6		95	30	44
Bar-tailed Godwit	84	966	185				900	300		2017	1723	2435

Thankyou dedicated wader counters and special thanks to Franny and George who filled in for Craig.

Of interest:

Work on the track and hillside at Observation Point is complete. There is now a clear view of Otago Harbour Board buildings. Interestingly there were only 70 oystercatchers and a few black-backed gulls on the roofs...a pair of paradise ducks though!

On the other hand at the marina, red-bill gulls (approx.500) were nesting and squeezed onto the southern breakwater. When I returned before Christmas most chicks had fledged.

Mary and Paul had good numbers of godwits wheeling for 10 minutes in two distinct groups (see photos) at Hooper's Inlet. They 'guestimated' 900 birds. It's good to get a total count of 2400 plus in our region to compare with counts done in Alaska and in Australia in January. It will be interesting to see how February's count compares.





**Please note that there will be a 'special' godwit count on Sunday February 16<sup>th</sup> 2020. High tide (2 metres) is at 10.53 am. It would be useful to also count other seabirds if you have time. I hope all regular counters are available for this task. If not please contact me and I will attempt a juggling act! Other members please feel free to join in the count.**

**My contacts are:** [mareej@kinect.co.nz](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz), cell 027 6609 446, landline 4728 473.

**Many thanks.**

Maree Johnstone

## **Bar-tailed Godwits**

### **An estimate of the total population of *Limosa lapponica baueri* in 2019/2020 in the breeding and non-breeding areas**

Happy New Year!

**We are requesting your help in counting important sites for Bar-tailed Godwits this February.**

Last August our Alaskan colleagues at USGS, led by Dan Ruthrauff, completed a very successful aerial survey of post-breeding Bar-tailed Godwits, covering the entire Yukon-Kuskokwin Delta and the Alaska Peninsula – the first such survey since 1997.

This provides us with a unique opportunity to compare the Alaskan aerial survey with non-breeding counts in the southern hemisphere to allow an update of the total population. The continuing shortages of food at the major staging ground used by Bar-tailed Godwits in China is placing stress on the population and accurate information is urgently needed.

It appears that 2019 may have been a good breeding season, judging from the number of juvenile Bar-tailed Godwits which we have at a number of sites around the country – and we expect that many of you are watching their movements as they explore their new home - [http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019\\_BTGO/](http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019_BTGO/)

Birds New Zealand has already completed the November 2019 wader census but we know that godwits continue to arrive in the country after this. Furthermore, our colleagues at BirdLife Australia make their counts in January.

To get the best estimate that we can for the total population we would like **counts of Bar-tailed Godwits over the spring tide series 8-14 February 2020.**

The attached note provides further background to the count, and lists the **PRIORITY SITES** for counting (**20 in the North Island** and **14 in the South Island**). If we can cover all of these we should account for about 97% of the total number of Bar-tailed Godwits in New Zealand.

We particularly need counts of Bar-tailed Godwits, but of course counts of other species would be welcome!

We recognise that a lot of effort has already gone in to the regular Birds New Zealand census but hope that you will be able to assist in this '**godwit extra**' count!

It would be very useful if you can advise us which site(s) in your region you will be able to cover to help us with national planning. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have questions or require additional information.

Thank you very much.

Rob Schuckard and David Melville

## **An estimate of the total population of *Limosa lapponica baueri* in 2019/2020 in the breeding and non-breeding areas**

Dan Ruthrauff, scientist with the United States Geological Survey, will make a presentation about the status of Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica baueri*) at the up-coming East Asian Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting (May 5-8, in South Korea). USGS completed a successful aerial count of the birds prior to the birds leaving Alaska in 2019 and a further detailed count of the population in the Southern Hemisphere may help to shine light on knowledge gaps for the species in our flyway.

Bar-tailed Godwit numbers in New Zealand have declined significantly from about 100,000 to about 75,000 birds between the mid-1990s and 2004 (Sagar *et al.* 1999). Counts in New Zealand indicate that the population has apparently stabilized since 2004, but an estimated adult survival of ~0.84 would lead to an estimated population decline of 5–6% per year (Conklin *et al.* 2016). Such disparity between population trend and estimated adult survival requires an urgent update of the best field information.

More years of surveys in New Zealand, combined with up-coming counts from Australia and recent successful surveys from Alaska warrant an additional synchronized count with Australia to establish whether further declines have happened.

Uncertainty about the rate of decline has resulted in the potential overestimating the population. Wetlands International (2019) estimated that the total population of the Alaskan breeding population of Bar-tailed Godwit at 133,000 birds, based on 'expert opinion', including Bamford *et al.* (2006), Garnett *et al.* (2010) and Watkins *et al.* (2012). This estimate came with a note that '*Substantial rates of population decline documented across flyway but no new estimate has been published. WPE5 estimate is much lower than for WPE4 (some experts suggest an even lower estimate) and it is derived from preliminary analysis pending outcome of ongoing comprehensive analysis by University of Queensland*' (Wetlands International 2019).

Hansen *et al.* (2016) apparently calculated population estimates separately for *baueri* and *menzbieri* (on the breeding grounds), but only present a combined total population for Bar-tailed Godwit (325,000).

The Australian census in January 2020 will focus on selected sites over a month to be compared to previous numbers at those sites. Some sites will not get counted and big concentrations e.g. Corner Inlet and Gulf of Carpentaria are likely not part of survey as there are not enough people.

To obtain the most accurate estimate of the population we propose a New Zealand count to coincide as closely as possible with that in Australia. For New Zealand, the best protocol to estimate the population will be to obtain accurate counts at sites which support large flocks.

A national godwit census will take place in early February 2020, during a prolonged high tide series between 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020. There are 34 sites with >0.25% of the population in the country, 20 in the North Island and 14 in South Island. Such approach allows for an estimated 97% of the national population to be counted.

### Proposed Areas for Survey:

<b>North Island</b>	Est.Percentage	Code	<b>South Island</b>	Est.Percentage	Code
Ahuriri Estuary	0.27%	<b>1</b>	Avon-Heathcote Estuary	1.84%	<b>3</b>
Aotea Harbour	2.13%	<b>2</b>	Awarua Bay	0.75%	<b>4</b>
Bowentown	1.27%	<b>6</b>	Blueskin Bay	0.63%	<b>5</b>
Coromandel	1.44%	<b>8</b>	Catlins Lake	0.28%	<b>7</b>
Firth of Thames	8.55%	<b>10</b>	Farewell Spit	11.18%	<b>9</b>
Houhora Harbour	0.67%	<b>12</b>	Golden Bay	1.31%	<b>11</b>
Kaipara Harbour	15.87%	<b>14</b>	Invercargill	1.03%	<b>13</b>
Kawhia Harbour	3.56%	<b>16</b>	Karamea	0.37%	<b>15</b>
Maketu - Little Waihi	1.14%	<b>18</b>	Lyttelton Harbour	0.41%	<b>17</b>
Manawatu Estuary	0.29%	<b>19</b>	Otago Harbour	0.28%	<b>23</b>
Mangawhai Estuary	0.53%	<b>20</b>	Otago Peninsula	0.87%	<b>24</b>
Manukau Harbour	16.98%	<b>21</b>	Riverton	0.26%	<b>29</b>
Ohiwa Harbour	2.56%	<b>22</b>	Tasman Bay	4.01%	<b>30</b>
Parengarenga Harbour	1.34%	<b>25</b>	Westhaven Inlet	1.46%	<b>32</b>
Porangahau	0.26%	<b>26</b>			
Raglan Harbour	0.57%	<b>27</b>			
Rangaunu Harbour	3.90%	<b>28</b>			
Tauranga Harbour	7.40%	<b>31</b>			
Whangarei Harbour	2.83%	<b>33</b>			
Whitford	1.39%	<b>34</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73%</b>			<b>25%</b>	

### References

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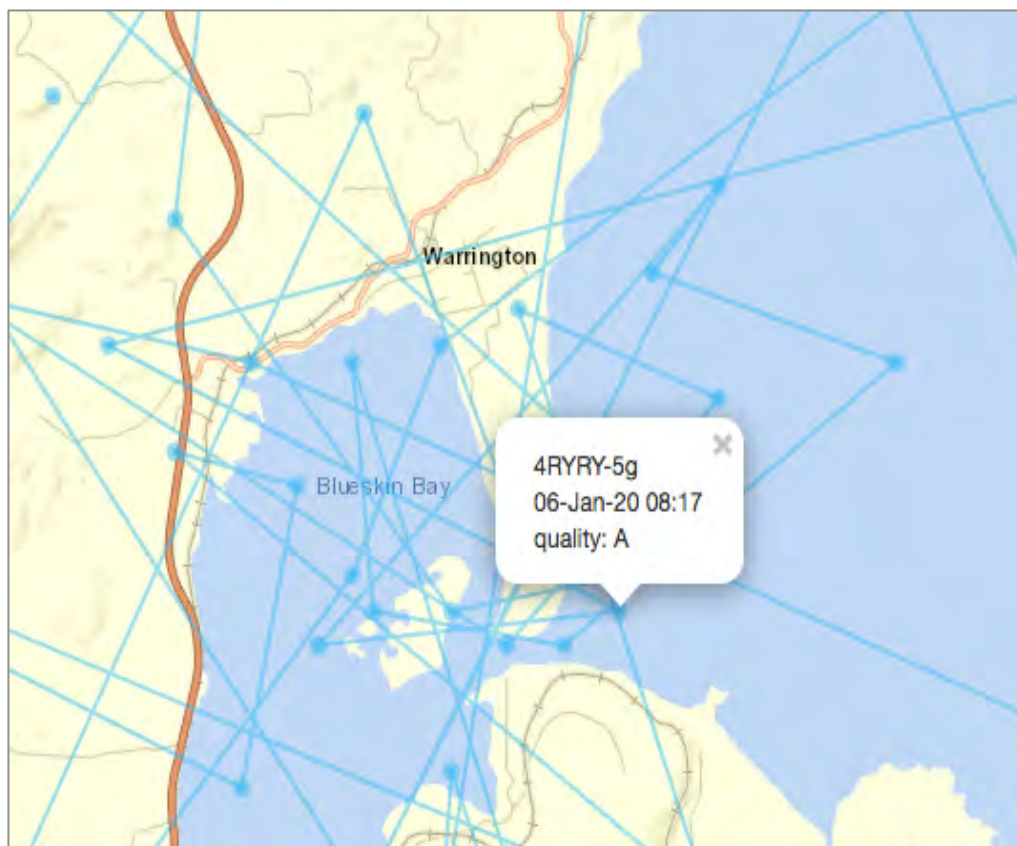
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Kind Regards

Rob Schuckard and David Melville

### **Sat-tagged juv. Godwit from Foxton in Otago area now. See if we can find it!**

A bunch of researchers from various organisations (including Max Planck Inst, and Massey Uni (Phil Batley)) have just put satellite tags on to 38 young birds. This research aims to understand how young birds explore NZ and to determine when they settle down. We expect these birds to move around extensively, and the birds are starting to do so, with birds from the Manawatu moving locally to the Rangitikei Rivermouth, Otaki and further afield to Mahia Peninsula and Lake Ellesmere.



On 20<sup>th</sup> December one of them came to visit Otago, from the Horowhenua, and has been hanging around at least until 7<sup>th</sup> January. It's around Karitane and Warrington according to the satellite transmissions, presumably hanging out with other godwits. Phil has asked Otago Birds NZ to look out for this bird. He is very keen to hear if anyone has spotted it. Its bands are 4RYRY (so white flag on the right leg above the bands). It would be great to get some local insight into what it's doing, if it's in with the main flock, etc.

You can get nearly live information on its whereabouts from this website:

[http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019\\_BTGO/](http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019_BTGO/)

It will automatically show the last 10 days, but you can change that with the cog icon in the right-hand corner. The latest position for each bird is shown as a pulsing dot - click on the dots and it will give the details of who, when and what quality the record is. You can select just a bird of interest via the cog also. Quality is 3 = best, letters = uncertain or bad. If you want to look for a bird in the field, just select the good positions (again, via the cog). Times are local, but there is a 5-h delay in uploading, so if you're itching to see where a bird is this morning, wait until the afternoon... The tags are solar, so night-time flights appear as straight lines and the bird will appear when the sun comes up.

## Atlas News

**How to find more birds!** In order to make best use of your time in the field, especially when birding in an unfamiliar location, I've put together a few tips based on experience in general, and Atlassing in particular.

**Plan ahead.** Before you travel to an unknown square, check out the promising sites and available habitats on a map. You can either use the effort map on the "Explore" page (which you have already looked at to check which squares need more coverage!) or you can download the NZTopomap for the relevant square from the Atlas website <https://birdatlas.co.nz/#!/help-centre/> (Tip – if you've already visited the coverage map, make a note of the grid square number to expedite the search.) Look for different habitats – any wetlands or waterways, forestry or native bush (different symbols on Topomaps, different patterns on satellite photos), gardens, farmland, etc.

**When you arrive at the square.** Try to visit a sample or two of each habitat – I recommend a mixture of stationary (ideally 5 minutes minimum, but the longer the better, within reason) and travelling (up to 1km, but without changing habitat) counts. When planning forestry counts, there's a fair chance trees that were shown on the map will have gone when you get there (speaks the voice of experience!); it's still worth doing a count, but make a note of the change of habitat in the comments section. On farmland, look for different types: crops, pasture, and different stages of growth all produce different birds (thrushes and blackbirds particularly like newly-mown paddocks); again it's worth noting the details of the habitat.

**Look up** - & behind you – frequently; you never know what may be flying over without calling. And I'm sure everyone does this anyway, but stop and listen; depending on habitat many birds are first located by call, and many individuals are not even seen. They are all valid and valuable records, as long as you are happy with the identification.

**Miscellaneous.** Water troughs are favoured by White-faced Herons and Paradise Shelduck (or maybe Cattle Egret). Brown Creepers are often found in pine plantations, even small ones. If it's windy, Fantails are often in the lee of shelterbelts, and swallows fly low over water or in sheltered areas. Look for birds in vicinity of farmhouses. Pigeons (not glamorous, but we have

to count them) like bridges (on/under) and agricultural sheds. Pipits have a preference for gravel roads.

In lowland squares, the first 30 or so species are relatively easy (fewer in upland areas), but after that you're subject to the law of diminishing returns (it's just taken me 55 hours to get NZ Pigeon in the Balclutha square, even though it's a bird I'd expect to see there on a regular basis), so especially in remote squares don't spend too long looking for that extra 1 or 2 species.

Finally, the next Atlassing trip will be on Sun 2nd February. Destination is the Clarks Junction/Middlemarch area. Meet at 9am at Otaki St. outside Bunnings to carpool, and then at Outram, by 4 Square. Please let me know if you plan to come. Phone 027 281 8701, or email [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com).

Richard Schofield

## Atlassing News

Hope you have all been out and about recording species in different habitats and submitting to the eBird NZ Atlas project this summer.

**Atlassing Trips** We plan to have regular monthly field trips on the first weekend of the month, and a Weekend Field Trip over the long Anzac Day weekend in April, so keep a look out for details in up-coming newsletters.

Special congratulations to **Maureen Howard** for her absolutely splendid 2-page article about atlas project "Counting on Citizens", which appeared in the Resilient Supplement of the ODT in early December. She explained the reasons for the Atlas project very well indeed from several different perspectives. And great to see Richard Schofield, our premier atlasser, featuring in the photographs and story.

**Richard Schofield** will be the speaker at our first meeting of the New Year on February 26<sup>th</sup> at 7.30pm. He will update us on our atlas progress and enthuse us to get out to survey more squares.

## Birds New Zealand (OSNZ)

### Subscriptions 2020 – reminder!

The annual membership subscriptions were due 1 January 2019. It is all too easy to overlook this during the Christmas New Year period. There are heaps of us who have forgotten to pay!! Remember that you can pay subs by direct banking online. Or ask your RR for a printed form. Thanks.

Mary Thompson, Regional Representative

### Birds NZ Conference and AGM, 30 May to 1 June, Christchurch

The annual meeting of Birds NZ is being held in Christchurch at the Commodore Hotel at Queen's Birthday Weekend. This is a great chance to get to a conference as it is close. There will be two days of presentations on recent research and a variety of field trips, including atlas trips, bird banding, and a behind-the-scenes tour of the bird collection at the Canterbury Museum. Early Bird Registrations by 1 March 2020.



## Student Conference Support

The Otago Branch of Birds NZ is offering a grant-in-aid of up to \$200 for an Otago student member to attend and present a research paper at this year's NZ Bird Conference in Christchurch. We hope this will encourage students to consider attending the conference and furthering their interest in bird research. Application details can be obtained from the Regional Rep. [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz). The details been circulated to student members and to relevant departments of the University. **Applications close 1 February 2020** with the Birds NZ President, Bruce McKinlay ([president@osnz.org.nz](mailto:president@osnz.org.nz))

## Congratulations to Karthic

At the international Environment and Wildlife Film Festival held in New Delhi in November, Karthic's film won the Best Newcomer award in the international category. He says "It was a special feeling to be in India representing a film speaking about the conservation of a NZ bird".



Karthic receiving his award

Karthic will be showing his films and talking about how he makes them at our April Meeting. He is now working at NHNZ (Natural History Film).

## Dunedin Hatching and Fledging Week

It is all on at present. In the Prion fence six sooty shearwater chicks have hatched with one egg still being incubated. Photo Michelle Goh



At the prion Cliff the first chick in the study colony fledged 21<sup>st</sup> with peak fledging expected early next week. One chick in a box outside the study area escaped jewellery by fledging before the 19<sup>th</sup>. Sarah Saunderson has led following the progress of the now 49 study boxes with daily visits since hatching in early December.

I made a quick visit to the rock stack hidden in a cove off the east end of Smaills Beach to monitor the prions there. This year white-fronted terns have formed a nesting colony here. Difficult to say but around thirty pairs. On 14<sup>th</sup> December, tern eggs were just hatching, 21<sup>st</sup> January the chicks were feathering up but not flying. Sue Maturin drew my attention to how different to the fledging plumage the early feathering is. Lots of camo khaki which is not at all obvious once flying.



I have been doing some possum monitoring with Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group in November and December which has required visiting the most significant bush remnants on the peninsula. I was disappointed not to find rifleman, tomtits and brown creepers at Taiaroa Bush, Sandymount and Varleys Hill. I did notice an adult male sealion making a regular feast of fur seals in Telfers Cove and a giant petrel calling in to check on pickings. Blue Penguins are persisting here.

Graeme Loh

Oamaru Penguin Symposium 7-8 May 2020  
 Philippa Agnew is calling for presentations.  
<https://www.oamarupenguinsymposium.com>



## Tracking a Parasitic Jaeger

Autumn-Lynn Harrison, a Research Ecologist with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre, has provided two maps showing the track of a Parasitic Jaeger from Alaska to the South Island of New Zealand in 2019.

The bird does not have colour bands or streamers for identification, just a metal band (always on right lower leg). An antenna sticks up from above the tail at about a 45-degree angle. Autumn-Lynn can be contacted via email [HarrisonAL@si.edu](mailto:HarrisonAL@si.edu)



Harrison: Parasitic Jaeger  
AK to NZ



Harrison: Parasitic Jaeger NZ Nov 2019

## Programme 2020

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

**Sun 2 Feb** Atlassing Trip. Destination is the Clarks Junction/Middlemarch area. Meet at 9am at Otaki St. outside Bunnings to carpool, and then at Outram, by 4 Square. Let Richard know if you plan to come. Phone 027 281 8701.

**Sun 16 Feb** Special Godwit Count. High tide (2 metres) at 10.53am. Enquiries to Maree, [mareej@kinect.co.nz](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz) cell phone 027 6609446.

**Wed 26 Feb** Indoor Meeting. Richard Schofield on "NZ Bird Atlas Project- an update".

**Wed 25 March** Indoor Meeting. **Bird Briefings** - a chance for any member to give a 5-10 minute talk about anything birdy that has captured your interest over the summer: special birds seen, unusual behaviours, latest photos, difficult ids, etc. Contact Mary 464 0787, 021 029 80504, [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) to be added to the list of speakers for the evening.

### **Saturday 18 April Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching, 10am to noon**

This is 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

**Wed 22 April** Indoor Meeting. Karthic will present "Birds through the lens" - Screening of two short-documentary films on conservation of endangered species - Yellow-eyed Penguins and Southern NZ Dotterels. This will be a special treat.

### **ANZAC weekend (25-27 April) Atlas Weekend Field Trip.**

Destination and details to be decided. Please diary this long weekend now.

**Wed 27 May** Indoor Meeting. Susan Walker from Landcare will present "Insights for native bird conservation from the Bird Atlas projects".

**Offers and suggestions for talks or topics for Indoor Meetings would really be appreciated, please contact Mary [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz)**

Please send all contributions for the February newsletter to:  
Sue Odlin [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

Many thanks to all who contributed.  
Final date for copy for next newsletter: **19 February**