



Birds New Zealand
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Otago Region Newsletter 5 /2020 May 2020

Ornithological Snippets

On 29th April Rachel Hufton heard a **Marsh Crake** at Diamond Lake, near Wanaka, while another was seen (& photographed) at Hawkesbury Lagoon on 16th May. Oscar Thomas spotted (sorry!) a **Spotted Shag** at Waihola on 16th May, while a late report was of one at Lake Hayes on 21st March, possibly the one reported from the same site a month earlier. Another late report is of a **Bittern**, seen at photographed at Lake Tuakitoto on February 16th. Ruth and Harry White saw a **White Heron** on the road in Deborah Bay on Monday 20th. Apparently after being on the road, it went back to a creek in their neighbour's property.

A **Morepork** was recorded from the Otago Peninsula on 3rd May. **NZ Falcons** were reported at Abbotsford on 14th April, and at the botanic gardens on 26th and another seen briefly in Balclutha on 20th May. 2 **parakeets** were seen around Papatowai township during the week up to 17th May. Sharon Roberts was surprised to see an **Eastern Rosella** at Green Park cemetery, Waldronville 16th May, feeding in a strawberry tree near the entrance.

There have been a number of sightings of **NZ Pipit** away from breeding areas, with Andrew Austen reporting 6 at Ocean Grove Sports Ground on 9th May, and there were up to 7 around the Balclutha airfield on 4th May, including a group of 4 together; other sightings were at Warrington, Mount Allan, Lake Tuakitoto and Owaka.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com **Richard Schofield**



**Sat 27 June
to
Sun 5 July**

eBird News

The eBird Global Big Day took place on 9th May, and this year 30 intrepid birders were out and about covering most areas of Otago. The final tally was 68 species on 129 checklists, and as last year Lei Zhu finished on top of the pile with 52 species, equal 4th for the whole country, and Otago was equal third overall, so a valiant effort. The first species of the day was House Sparrow flying from the roost in South Otago High School's car park, while the final addition was a Morepork, heard calling 17 times by Mary Thompson above Ross Creek. In between were California Quail near Clyde, Great Crested Grebes at Queenstown and Lake Hayes, White Heron at Tomahawk Lagoon, 240 Black-fronted Terns at Aramoana, and numerous others. Incidentally, the first birds in the world for the Big Day were Morepork & Spur-winged Plover in Auckland at 12.08am – something to aim at next time!

Atlasing Field Trip Queen's Birthday Weekend

Fingers crossed we will have a trip on **Saturday 30th May**, to the Henley/Berwick area. There will be car sharing for those who wish, but it is not obligatory. Please contact me (cluthaphotos@gmail.com 027 281 8701) if you are interested in coming along. Meet at Bunnings in Otaki St at 9am, then at the parking area by the railway at Henley at 9.30.

Richard Schofield

Warrington Beach birds Pt 2

Some birds from around home



One morning making a coffee after the beach I heard an unusual call which I knew I had heard somewhere before, but I couldn't place it, 5 minutes later this walked across the lawn. Who knows where it came from.

It is not unusual to see a wood pigeon chasing another around, but a couple of weeks ago for 3 days in a row this activity went on in a large old Laburnum tree in the front yard. In the mornings they seemed to take a few breaks but in the afternoon it went on hour after hour right through till almost dark crashing through the tree sometimes ending up on the ground. Both birds looking very distressed panting with beaks open. Both birds are still here but the activity has ceased.



I'm surprised this tree is still alive in recent years the pigeons strip every leaf they can reach as you can see in the photos. I'm not sure how the tree manages to develop any leaves at all, they start on it in spring when the first leaf buds are a few mm long. Years ago it used to be a mass of flowers in the summer, these days just a few on the tips they can't reach. There must be more pigeons around. Earlier in season on some days there would be up to 8 pigeons feeding in it.





There is often a kingfisher around but never when I'm doing a checklist at home



This fantail seemed to be doing fine, I have seen it a few times



Back to the beach

With pied shags seeming to have taken over a roosting tree (visible from the headland) that little shags have used for years, a clamber along the rocks north of Warrington Beach to check some other dead trees seemed like a worthwhile venture. This proved to be a great idea.



As I made my way along the rocks I noticed a heron perched on top of highest rock about 150m ahead, a quick look through the binoculars and there was a reef heron. As I moved a little closer it flew down closer to the waters edge and disappeared among large rocks, presumably to feed.





About 5 mins later two herons took off and headed out to sea, one appeared to be chasing the other, initially the flight seemed a bit more energetic than normal lazy heron flight, as if one was chasing the other, at first I thought two reef herons, (the low early morning sun was vicious reflecting of the water) But about 150m - 200m off shore one turned and came back. While watching this return bird I lost track of the other, the returning bird turned out to be a white faced heron, which landed nearby and started hunting the rock pools.

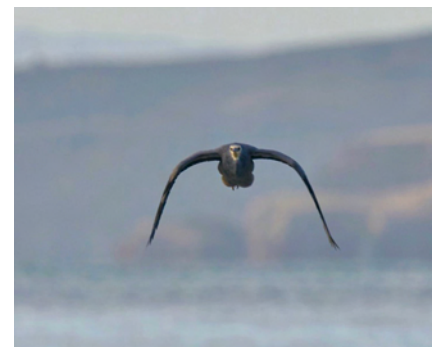


As Mary suggested to me it may have been the reef heron occasionally seen around Taiaroa Head, that's certainly the general direction it was heading when I was distracted by the returning bird. Nothing else as interesting as the reef heron but here is the checklist for that excursion

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S67551595>

I don't know how many times I've walked up and down that beach since the start of our confinement, but often twice a day, I think its about 23 days now, my phone tells me I've averaged 5.7km per day. That's over 130km.

It's hard work this Birding !!



Nick Beckwith

Kārearea sightings in Dunedin City

I've had a handful of kārearea (NZ falcon, sparrow-hawk) sightings in the city reported to me in the past three weeks. Rather enjoyably the first report was from my neighbourhood, but the bird is quite mobile. From the plastic leg-band we know that the bird most frequently observed is a juvenile male banded at Orokonui on December 2, 2019 as part of our ongoing study. Our work mostly focuses on plantation forestry where falcons encounter several threats to their breeding and survival. We also banded the bird's parents and two male siblings. The type of leg-bands used in our study are depicted in the image below (Fig. 1). The juvenile male repeatedly seen around town is the only bird that has a white plastic (darvic) band with engraved numerals. We were trialling these bands in the past summer both here, and in the Auckland Islands. It is quite possible other banded birds are observed around Dunedin.



Figure one. An adult female (left) and a juvenile female (right) kārearea. Note that these birds (part of a separate study we are conducting in the Auckland Islands) illustrate the two types of leg-bands we have used to mark individuals. The bird with just colour wrap-around bands would be read as metal left and orange right.

We have leg-banded 37 adult kārearea and 82 chicks over the past four summers. So far the leg-banded juvenile male has been reported from Maryhill, Mornington, Northeast Valley and the Botanic Gardens. Reports of a banded bird from Abbotsford may or may not be the same bird. A few years ago a banded adult female with a breeding territory at Hope Hill was repeatedly observed at Abbotsford over the winter – a distance of approximately 9km in a straight line.

Resightings of banded birds, particularly juveniles, are rare. We therefore hugely value resighting data, so please keep your eyes (and ears!) open, and binoculars handy, for banded kārearea. My email address for resightings is at the bottom of this blurb.

If the bird has just colour bands, the bands are read from top to bottom and the bird's left leg first, and then the right leg.

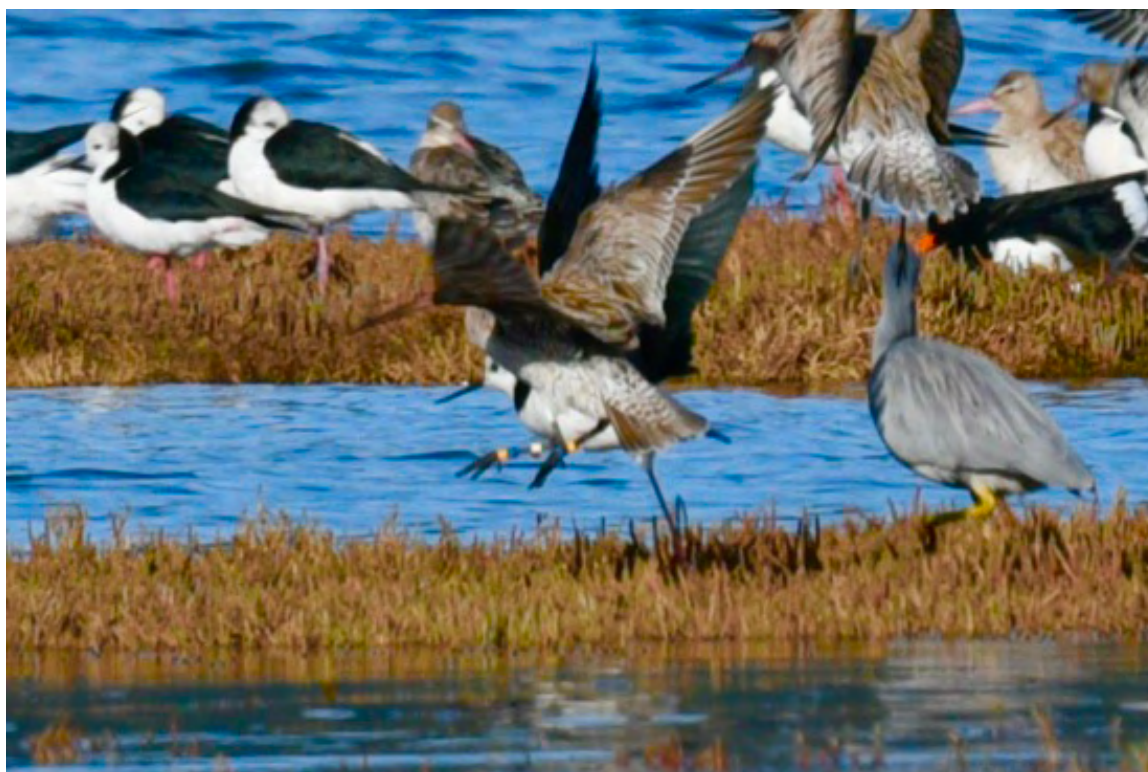
I realise some reports are to Facebook, but please don't assume everybody looks at Facebook.

As an aside, some of you may notice that our study doesn't report the locations of breeding kārearea in e-bird. This is because we know kārearea are still persecuted (shot), so we don't want to provide location information for breeding pairs on a public platform. Sightings are fine for e-bird, but I suggest we don't report sightings that may allow breeding territories to be found.

Graham Parker

g.parker@parkerconservation.co.nz

Another banded godwit, 6 May at Evansdale, Blueskin Bay



Here are the comments from Phil Battley who heads the godwit banding projects:

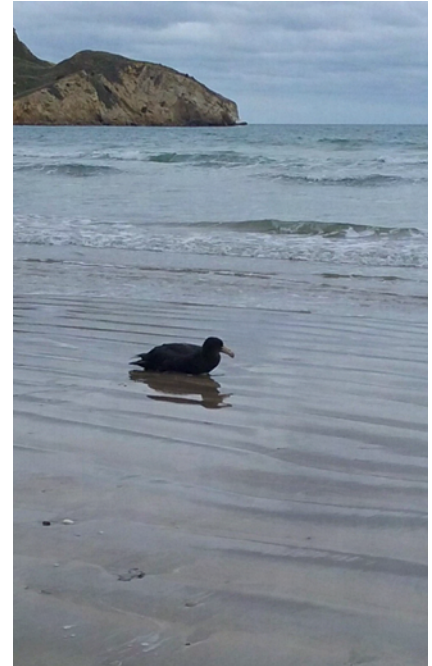
“Interesting! It certainly looks like it should be 3BYWB or 3BWVB, and we have 3BYYB banded at Warrington, but 12 years ago as an adult.

(Possible IDs include 2 birds banded at Awarua Bay on 11 January 2009 or one at Warrington 15 December 2008.) In fact, all the possible birds are adults, so this bird must be one of the rare records of a bird taking a season off from migration, or starting and returning (which we had with a satellite-tagged bird from Miranda, though that then went again 16 days later).

It would be fabulous if you were able to confirm the ID of the bird. We got a lot of good resightings from Otago folk when we were looking at movements of birds, but resightings have been infrequent in recent years, so all records (and checks without bands being seen) are very valuable.”

Nick Beckwith

Juvenile Giant Petrel Waikouaiti Beach 9 April 2020



Too weak to take off, it was collected by a local DOC volunteer. After a feed it was decided to return it to an isolated beach next day rather than take it to Wildlife Hospital. A friend saw it on the beach two days later, but it was not in good shape

Ann Charlotte

Otago Birds NZ in the News

A great photograph of **Oscar Thomas**, Otago student and birdwatcher and recent addition to Otago Birds NZ, featured in an article by Tim Miller in the ODT on 28th April, "Noticeable increase in number of birds". If you missed it click the link below to a video with interviews with Oscar and Mary. Thanks to Oscar for agreeing to help with this story during lockdown.
<https://www.odt.co.nz/news/the-south-today/birds-making-most-empty-cities>

Bruce McKinlay featured in the ODT a couple of times, commenting on the birds around the city during lockdown.

Bruce also featured in an online book launch of "Lost Gold" at Te Papa last week; all Birds NZ members will receive a copy of this book about the birds of the Auckland Islands.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmC3E48FRMs>

Francesca Cunninghame gave a great interview with Kathryn Ryan on Radio NZ National 28th April on her conservation work in the Galapagos and in Otago. It was broadcast the day she was flying back to NZ. You can listen via this link

Atlas Webinar Series during lockdown

The NZ Bird Atlas team presented 4 webinars during lockdown each Friday at 1pm. Over a 100 people linked in for these very informative sessions. They covered the basics of the Atlas and eBird, including the smartphone app, and went into more advanced information, giving tips and tricks and answering participants questions live.

These are now all available to watch on YouTube by going to the NZ Atlas eBird webpage <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/home>

Then under About, find webinars in the box entitled About NZ Bird Atlas. The webinar link will take you to the Youtube links; I found the most useful sessions to be Number 1 and Number 4.

Lock down and bird life - items from Radio New Zealand



One of the interesting results of the lockdown is that many of us have had the time to walk in our neighbourhoods and suburbs and notice the birds and natural environment around us. Professors Phil Seddon and Yolanda van Heezik are wildlife biologists in Otago University's Zoology Dept and they been thinking about our relationship with nature in the current situation.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/nights/audio/2018744526/lockdown-and-our-relationship-with-nature>

Since the lockdown, Birds New Zealand says interest has peaked in bird spotting on social media - with more people wanting to join bird groups, and submitting pictures to identify a bird. However, ornithologists believe birds - which have been more visible in parks and public spaces - could abandon them once people start to come back.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/416264/increase-in-bird-life-during-lockdown-may-be-lost-once-people-return>

Common Greenshank

May 3 image by Lloyd Blakie at the Riverton Estuary.

May 20 not seen.

38 bar-tailed godwits were present, presumably overwintering.

<https://www.birdingnz.net/forumviewtopic.php?f=9&t=10321>



The Great Godwit Count - February 2020 Bar-tailed Godwit census

Last August (2019) our Alaskan colleagues at USGS, led by Dan Ruthrauff, completed a very successful aerial survey of post-breeding Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica baueri*, covering the entire Yukon-Kuskokwin Delta and the Alaska Peninsula – the first such survey since 1997.

This provided 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 (Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve, Liaoning) is placing stress on the population and accurate information is urgently needed.

The Great Godwit Count took place in early February 2020, during a prolonged high tide series between 8 and 14 February 2020 (a few counts had to be made outside this period for logistical reasons). Birds NZ members made a fantastic effort to cover as many sites as possible, in some cases facing difficult conditions – vehicles bogged, high temperatures causing heat stress etc. Thanks to financial support from the BirdsNZ Project Assistance Fund it was possible to use a helicopter to survey estuaries in the Far North – see Les Feasey's report on <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2003-Article-Godwit-Aerial-Survey-Northland.pdf>.

A **HUGE “THANK YOU”** to the 182 counters who took part in the census.

A total of 81,549 Bar-tailed Godwits was counted; 71% on the North Island and 29% on the South Island. Across the country, 21 sites held more than 1,000 godwits - these in total support 75% of the national population.

Number crunching is continuing and we are liaising with counters in eastern Australia to try to come up with a total non-breeding population for the *baueri* Alaskan-breeding population. Further details will appear in due course.

It appears that 2019 may have been a good breeding season, judging from the number of juvenile Bar-tailed Godwits which arrived at a number of sites around the country – and this may be reflected in the forthcoming **June 2020 national wader census**.

In the meantime, you can see where some of these juveniles are by checking out sat-tagged birds at

http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019_BTGO/

Rob Schuckard and David Melville April 2020



Banded Royal Spoonbill



A banded Royal Spoonbill was sighted in the Waimea estuary, Nelson, by Margot and Peter Syms on 28 April 2020, along with about 35 other roosting spoonbills. (Exact location: on Noman Island about 250 m south of Grossi Point, Mapua. Mapua village is to the north and NW of Grossi Pt. The sandbank in question is about 500 m WSW of Grossi Point. In these very neap tides the sandbank is still just exposed at high tide.)

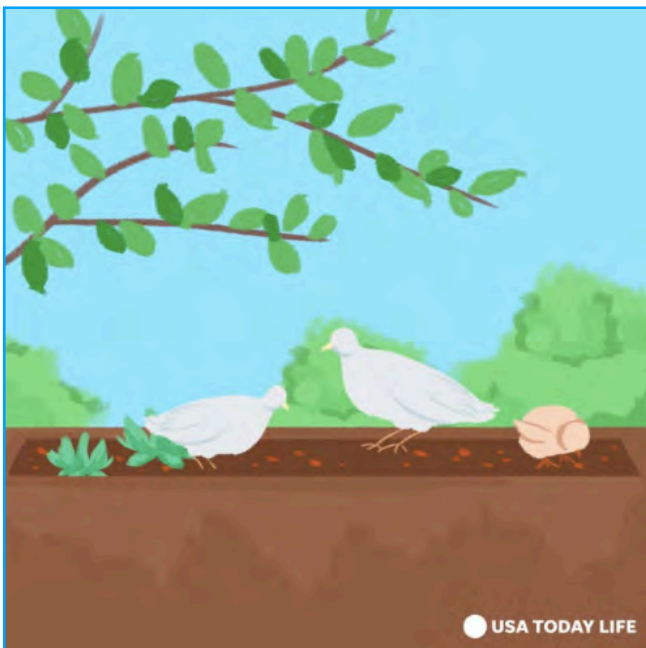
Likely colour combinations:

R/M Y/W banded Wairua 19/1/1995 033004 Seen previously, Ahuriri estuary May 1995 and Whangarei autumn and spring 1996

or R/M W/Y banded Wairau 24/1/95 033014 Seen Brighton 1996, Taieri Island 1998 in January and Waimea estuary July 1998; then at Unahi 1999 and 2000 and in Waimea estuary 2006, 2007, 2009.

Bill Cash who banded the bird thinks this is the most likely bird although the yellow and white bands have faded somewhat. It looks like it hangs out during autumn and winter in Nelson area rather than migrating north, which may have allowed it to survive to such an old age.

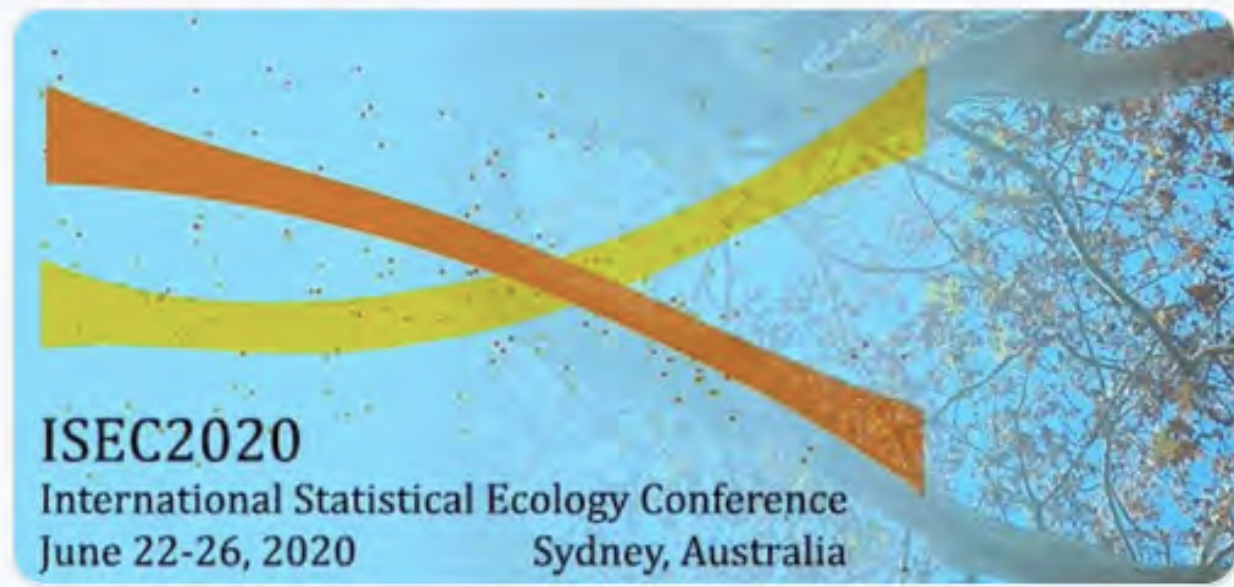
So this bird 25 years 3 months old irrespective of which colour combination.



As people are stuck inside, birds have never been a more welcome sight

Teresa Lo

Visit: isec2020.org



The International Statistical Ecology Conference is a biennial meeting of researchers at the interface between ecology and statistics. At vISEC2020 we have planned an exciting list of keynote speakers that bridge these two disciplines, as well as training opportunities for attendees, a forum for interdisciplinary collaboration, and a healthy dose of fun - all online, via this website!

Home base for the conference will be a Slack workspace, where registered participants can mingle, watch live-streamed talks (and recordings of talks you missed, or want to watch again!), browse poster presentations, interact with presenters and other attendees via text or video chat, plan Special Issue paper proposals, check our twitter stream, or compete at trivia night! There will be two conference sessions each day, no more than three hours in length, set at opposite ends of the Sydney day (8-11am & 9pm-12am GMT) to better align with timezones world-wide.

Latest news: [Registration now open!](#) Closing Friday 12th June, 7pm GMT.



Taiwan Birds - helping a bit.
@TaiwanBirding

[#TweetForTaiwan](#)

Chirp
Squark
Whistle
Trill

One way or another, we want to share how we beat* Covid-19.

*don't believe me see our numbers



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.

The May meeting is cancelled. We hope Susan Walker can come later in the year to present her research using Atlas data to give insights for native bird conservation.

We are hoping that the June meeting will go ahead as scheduled; we will confirm or otherwise in the June newsletter.

Sat 30 May Atlasing Field Trip Henley/Berwick area

Meet at Bunnings in Otaki St at 9am. Please contact Richard (027 281 8701) if you are interested in coming along.

Wed 24 June Mike Thorsen, an up-date on Predator-free Dunedin.

Sat 27 June to Sun 5 July Garden Bird Survey

Sunday 5 July Winter Wader Count. High tide at 15.30 at 2.1m.

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 and survey area. mareej@kinect.co.nz

Wed 22 July Hamish Spencer Birding in Panama

Wed 26 August Georgina Pickerell

An up-date on findings from the study of Robins of Mopanui

Sun13 September Birdwatching Walks at Botanic Garden, 10 to 11am

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 23 September Bruce McKinlay will review findings so far from the Town Belt bird survey

November Summer Wader Count, date to be confirmed.

Offers and suggestions for talks or topics for Indoor Meetings would really be appreciated, please contact Mary maryt@actrix.co.nz

Please send all contributions for the May newsletter to: Sue Odlin sodlin@gmail.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **17 June**