



Birds New Zealand
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Otago Region Newsletter 6 /2020 June 2020

Ornithological Snippets

It may be officially winter, but the **Black Swans** don't seem to realise that. Mary Thompson counted around 50 cygnets in 10-12 families at Tomahawk Lagoon on 3rd June; further south a family with four cygnets were at Puerua Bridge on 31st May, and one was sitting on a nest at the lagoons in Balclutha on 12th June, a month earlier than last year. At the latter location on 23rd May (the first day of duck shooting) there were 373 **Scaup** present among the wildfowl, which is about twice the previous high for this site.

Hamish Spencer reports that on 10 May, just after midday, from his front deck in NEV, he saw several **Kereru** flying high, but not doing their usual stooping dives. He wondered if something had disturbed them and, sure enough, soon spotted a **NZ Falcon** flying north along the valley. It flew right over the house, which is about 1 km north of the Botanic Gardens. This sighting is the first falcon sighting he has made in NEV, although he has previously seen one in the Botanic Gardens.

In the SW corner of Lake Hayes, he and Abby Smith saw a **Marsh Crake** on 3 June. It responded vigorously to a taped call. Abby took a couple of photos as a record on her phone, which are on ebird. Around the whole lake they counted 23 **Great Crested Grebe**, including one immature bird. At the Titri Creek Conservation Area near Waihola, they saw a **Fernbird** on 4 June.

Small numbers of **SI Pied Oystercatcher** have been returning to their breeding grounds recently; 8 were flying over Balclutha airfield on 27th May, and 3 were in paddocks around Clinton on 10th June.

Pete McClelland was driving south at 15.50 on 6th June and saw 4 **parakeets** fly over the road going up the hill out of Waitati. They were definitely parakeets- shape, flight pattern etc and were kakariki size but he couldn't guarantee they were kakariki. They were green but appeared to be lighter coloured (yellowish?) underneath which could have been the light, so could have been a different species. Is anyone aware of any free living parrots in that area?

And as a reminder that it is winter, Bruce McKinlay counted 200 **Silvereye** on pasture crop near Orangapai on 27th May, 270 **Coot** were on the lake at Frankton on the same day, and there have been large numbers of **Song Thrush**, with about 110 in two paddocks just north of Balclutha on 16th June.

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

eBird News

We have now completed the first full year of the Atlas project, and at the time of writing we have achieved coverage in 251 squares (72%), from 4489 visits. Naturally there is a bias to the more populated coastal areas, and around Queenstown Lakes, but even here there are still plenty of opportunities to fill gaps. Don't forget to check out the Atlas Effort Map, on the Explore tab, and select Winter coverage under Date, to see where more work (not really the right word, I know) needs to be done. It's also a good idea to filter by species observed, to get an idea of any habitats that are not being covered, or else check the map for a widespread species. And if it is a fine calm evening, and there's not too much traffic noise, why not try a nocturnal count?

Richard Schofield cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Atlasing Field Trip

The next field trip will be on Sunday 28th June, to the Taieri Mouth area. Meet at Bunnings in Otaki St at 9am for car sharing, then at the parking area by the bridge at Taieri Mouth at 9.45. Please contact me (cluthaphotos@gmail.com 027 281 8701) if you are interested in coming along.

Richard Schofield



Welcome back to Bird NZ activities

Otago Birds NZ is all up and going again so we hope to see lots of you at up-coming events. Thanks to Sue and contributors for putting out fulsome and interesting newsletters during lockdown.

There will be an Indoor Meeting on Wednesday 24th June at 7.30pm in the Benham as usual. We will hear from Mike Thoresen, technical and scientific advisor to the Predator free Dunedin project, who will up-date us on progress so far and what is planned, especially regarding bird monitoring to assess success of predator control. This is an area we may be able to be involved with.

The Winter Wader count is scheduled for Sunday July 5th. Please let Maree know if you would like to join a survey team as new people are most welcome.

Nick counted 230 godwits at Blueskin Bay on 3rd June – not known whether godwits were also at Aramoana and Hoopers so counting all the area simultaneously is crucial to get the totals for our region.



Nick Beckwith

There will be another Atlassing field trip at the end of June, which are really fun and a great way to see new areas and birds and learn the whole process of entering counts directly by eBird mobile app. Last month on a glorious last day of autumn, we surveyed 3 10km² squares around Henley, Waipori and Waipori Falls Road covering a variety of habitat including river, farmland, wetland and native bush and got a goodly number of species – brown creeper, tomtit, kereru, (no rifleman), rosella and little owl at Henley, hundreds of redpoll, great views of fernbird and harriers basking in the sun on farm posts.

Mary Thompson, Regional Rep.

Tomahawk Lagoon: black swans breeding and increased numbers of scaup

For the first count at the main lower Tomahawk lagoon just before lockdown on 11 March 2020 there were 91 black swan with one family of very small cygnets. During lockdown breeding must have continued at a pace so that by 20 May 2020 there were 211 swans counted which included 55 cygnets, comprising 12 families. Cygnets ranged from very small to quite large but still fluffy grey birds. There were still about 50 cygnets on 3 June 2020. The last time there was a large number of breeding swans was back in September 2017 on the upper lagoon.

Are these swans late or early breeders? NZ Birds online says black swans breed from July to March in NZ; Australian websites say those in north of Australia breed Feb to May and those in the south June to September; another website (Animal Diversity) says Feb to September. So there is a lot of uncertainty/confusion about when black swan breed. I seem to remember reading that they can breed any time the conditions seem OK so our good autumn may have triggered it plus there would need to be plenty of *Ruppia* weed in the lagoon for feeding on.

Another bird whose numbers have increased at Tomahawk is the Scaup. Scaup were reported for the first time on the upper lagoon in April 2017 with 4 seen. By December 2017, breeding was reported with 2 families of 5 and 6 ducklings. Scaup have been present on Tomahawk lagoons ever since with numbers steadily increasing. Recently they frequent the lower lagoon and on 3 June 76 scaup were counted. Does the presence of scaup indicate that the lagoons are in good health?

Mary Thompson

Riflemen sightings wanted!

Riflemen have been experiencing an ongoing range restriction and corresponding population decline on the Otago Peninsula. This trend is backed up by the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group bird monitoring surveys from the last ten years. Former strongholds now have no recent sightings of the birds. Predation by rodents and mustelids is likely to be the leading cause of the decline.

But all is not lost! Properties where nest boxes are provided and pest control is undertaken are seeing a localised rise in numbers. One such property near Hereweka/Harbour Cone had 10 out of 12 nest boxes utilised last breeding season. So OPBG and STOP have joined forces to spread the love to other properties. STOP are leading the charge in getting as many nest boxes built and ready to be installed mid-July to ensure they're in place for this year's breeding season. OPBG is mapping the distribution of riflemen vs existing nest boxes and working to fill in the gaps. Pest control will be instigated or enhanced where riflemen are found.

Ways you can help:

- Report any sightings, recent or historical, of riflemen on the Otago Peninsula.
- Build a nest box
- Donate funds for materials so a volunteer can build a nest box (\$15 per box)
- Sign up to be a springtime riflemen monitor

A DIY guide for building nest boxes at home is available in PDF format.



Please contact Marcia Dale, OPBG Community Coordinator at guardians@opbg.nz to report sightings/request the nest box guide and/or offer help with any of the above.

World Albatross Day Friday 19 June



Monarch Cruises has put on a special albatross appreciation trip for Sat 20th. This has been filled but they have scheduled another voyage leaving from Wellers Rock at 8am Sat 27th June. Cost \$95
Ring them if you would like to jump aboard, 03 477 4276.

Polaris Transect 2 June 2020

Fresh out to sea in the new level 2, Dark until we were 15 km offshore. Quite a quiet day but a nice interaction between grey petrels, white-fronted terns and long-finned pilot whales when we were fifty km offshore. The white-fronted terns were seen right at the end of the transect 63 km offshore. Many mollymawks were gathered around the ling potting boat on the canyon edge.



Nearby was a white morph giant petrel resting. Perhaps its spots can be matched to other sightings?

One, probably two light-mantled sooty albatross was in sight for much of the day. A rare visitor. Two different Antipodean albatross came by for quick looks.



The list: N & S Royals, Antipodean alb, White-capped molly, Buller molly, Campbell molly, black-browed molly, light-mantled sooty alb, N & S giant petrels, Cape petrel, white-chinned petrel, grey petrel, soft-plumaged petrel?, white-headed petrel, fairy prion, red-billed gull, black-fronted tern, white-fronted tern.

Kea

Keas are now very hard to see at Mt Cook until Sue and I went past the huge gravel canyon created by the Husky Stream where it has broken through the lateral moraine into Lake Tasman during storms in the last two years. The derelict Ball Hut road ends dramatically here. I used to catch the bus to Ball Hut!



We were sitting on the spur above all this and eventually heard a kea. Slowly the number increased to four, a family group including two chicks. They were not too bold but held our attention.

Behind us two others approached our packs. The banded one ate Sue's water bladder nipple before detected. It had green bands engraved BB. No others were seen elsewhere in the easily accessible parts of the park in four days. A falcon was patrolling the lake terminal moraine and appeared to be taking opportunities presented by birds rising as people went by.

Sooty shearwater production

At the St Clair prion fence, Six sooty shearwater chicks fledged, one left Monday night 4 May, four left Tuesday night 5 May, and one remains so far today 7th. All looking healthy. All banded.

Unfortunately another year without prions laying an egg despite visiting the boxes and speakers. A falcon has been around this Autumn.

On the east head of Sandfly Bay we also had success. I believe that at least thirty sooty shearwater chicks fledged, a great turnaround from the complete failures the two previous seasons. I am reluctant to use the commonly accepted Maori name 'titi' because I believe that it is more accurately attributed to the gadfly petrels such as mottled petrels which do make ti-ti-ti calls. Many Maori names are onomatopoeic and sooty shearwaters never say anything like 'ti-ti'. Be so good to know the local traditional names.

Sue Maturin and I banded 12 chicks; some dragged out of burrows during the day, others pounced on at night. At least six further birds detected in burrows but out of reach, and two seen but not caught on surface. It is clear that the critical period 'rama', when the chicks stretch their wings on the surface, is 28 April to 5 May but there was still activity and marked birds present on 15th May.



On the predator front

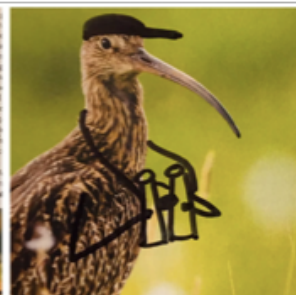
There was no sign of fresh titi mortality on the surface. We reached into more than forty burrows and found no bodies. I got a great dose of fleas burrow inspecting and banding

No stoats were trapped from mid Feb onwards despite many camera shots of them going into burrows. A real puzzle! But there were plenty of mice in the burrows in Autumn. The cameras recorded no hedgehogs, ferrets and cats in the colony.

Possums spent a lot of time looking into the entrances of burrows, but I found no bird carcasses, which I would expect to find if possums had taken the opportunity to kill them. They have been caught red-handed in Tasmania killing short-tailed shearwaters.

A ferret was caught down at the beach after it had killed at least two blue penguins. I was pleased to see some fresh blue penguin footprints in the sand mid May despite those losses.

Graeme



Stewart Island dotterels

I made a short film about the Stewart Island dotterels which we were planning to screen in our Monthly meetings, but could not because of the lockdown. I'm sharing a link to the trailer of the film <https://youtu.be/G1egQTTDMZQ>



The Autumn dawn chorus in NZ

Last month I took part in an event of recording & live streaming the Dawn Chorus for International Dawn Chorus day (May 3). We were in Level 3, and there was still reduced traffic noise. Listeners tuning in from the UK and others who listened to the recording were fascinated with our NZ Bellbird song.

<https://soundcloud.com/karthicss/dawn-chorus-day-nz-full-recording>

Karthic



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.

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

Sat 27 June to Sun 5 July **Garden Bird Survey**

Sun 28 June **Atlas Field Trip to the Taieri Mouth area.** Meet at Bunnings in Otaki St at 9am for car sharing, then at the parking area by the bridge at Taieri Mouth at 9.45. Please contact Richard (cluthaphotos@gmail.com 027 281 8701) if you are interested in coming along.

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 022 601 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 July newsletter to: Sue Odlin sodlin@gmail.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **15 July**