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## *Otago Region Newsletter 9 /2020 September 2020*

### Ornithological Snippets

A walk up to Roys Peak on 27 August by Dan Burgin was rewarded with the sighting of 10 **Chukar**. At Makarora West on 5 September Nick Beckwith encountered 70 **NZ Pigeons** in a roadside paddock, apparently eating grass.

A **Shining Cuckoo** reported from Earnslaw Burn Track, near Glenorchy, on 22 August would be one of the earliest on record; also early were 2 **Sooty Shearwaters** seen offshore near Nugget Point on 25 August. Francesca Cunninghame flushed a **Bittern** from by the Fleming River near Papatowai on 8 September. One was seen nearby in April 2019, so maybe they are resident in the area.

Lala Frazer reports a lone **Grebe** is still around the Harbour and seems to be remaining with a group of **Little shags** in the bay beside Pineapple Rock (where the boat shed has a kingfisher painted on the wall). It seems to be able to get enough fish in the area without going up and down the coast.

On 13 September Peter Doyle heard, and possibly saw, a **NZ Falcon** near Knox Church in Dunedin. Finally, the first report of multiple **Robins** at Ross Creek were seen simultaneously on 28 August.

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

**Richard Schofield**

### eBird News

The eBird app now has the functionality to display the New Zealand Bird Atlas grid when you are entering a checklist. However, it is also possible to view the New Zealand Bird Atlas grid on an interactive map on your phone, using the [Maps.Me](#) mapping app, even without cellular service! With this in mind, Maps.Me provides a valuable service to you as an Atlas participant.

The app not only helps you locate yourself within a grid square and see where you are in relation to adjacent grid square boundaries, even whilst out of cellular service, using your device's GPS. It also helps with Atlas trip planning as it contains heaps of walking tracks and elevation information for tramps. This means you don't have to start a checklist just to see where you are in relation to the grid or indeed plan your Atlasing!

For those wanting to check on what Atlas coverage there has been for a particular area (and that should be all of us!), there is a great new tool that is now available. KML\* files can be downloaded from the Atlas portal (About > Handbook & Supporting Material > Mapping Files), either to Google Earth or to the Maps.Me app. You have the choice of year-round coverage, or for each individual season. Once installed, the map shows the location of all checklists submitted for the relevant season, and clicking on a marker shows the number of checklists at that location. This enables you to see which habitats have been visited. Just bear in mind that the files are up-to-date till the end of year one, so any visits since 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 will not show. (\*Keyhole Markup Language, in case you were wondering.)

**Richard Schofield** [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## **Atlas Field Trip Report - Taieri Mouth area, 1 August 2020**

Eight keen birders travelled down to Taieri Mouth and met up with trip leader Richard Schofield by the estuary on a dull but warm morning. The main goal for the day was to record as many species as possible for entry into the Bird Atlas. Most of the group were experienced in the observing, identifying and entering process but there were one or two newbies who were keen to learn. And learn they did and were appreciative of the helpful advice given. Richard led from the front.

We broke into groups to cover the wide range of habitats – estuary, beach, sandhills, park, wetlands, pasture land and bush.

Members of the group were: Richard Schofield, Ivan Lin, Nick Beckwith, Oscar Thomas, George Pickerell, Maureen Howard, Karthic and Tim and Warren Jowett.

45 species were recorded. Note worthy species included a hybrid Pied Stilt, Brown Creeper, NZ Fernbird, Australasian Pipit, NZ Falcon, black phase NZ Fantail. The last two were seen (and photographed) by Oscar, right at the end of the day near the Akatore River Bridge – well done Oscar!



**Richard Schofield**

## Atlas Field Trip Report - Lawrence / Beaumont area 6 Sept 2020

A hardy group of 7 Otago birders led by Richard Schofield, set off to explore the Lawrence and Beaumont area to continue the ongoing counting of birds for the Atlas Birding Project.

We started at Lawrence and divided into 2 groups and set off on alternate routes to meet up for lunch at the Beaumont Bridge. It's always fun discovering new back roads with names like Cockle shell and Chinamans Flat Rd, jumping out at regular intervals to listen to and look for and see how many birds we can identify. Always hoping for something unusual as well as trying to come to grips with being able to identify the usual suspects from a few notes or a fleeting glimpse. Identifying birds is easy if you get a good clear look, not so easy for us beginners with only sounds to go by and so many variations from each species. Lucky for us to have so many experienced and very patient birders who are willing to help and share their knowledge.

Whilst eating lunch at the Beaumont bridge and trying to avoid the worst of the squalls, Richard put up the scope and we were treated to the sight of 15 Black fronted Terns on the riverbed.

After lunch I went with Richard and Maureen south along the Clutha River whilst the others, Maree, Martine, Mary and Karthic went along to Raes Junction. Among the 16 species we saw along there the most numerous was the beautiful songster but terrible pest the Blackbird, numbering 41. Canada geese, Pukeko, Paradise shelducks and Kereru were the highlights for me; all casually mooching around.



We headed home mid afternoon as the weather improved rapidly after enjoying real ice creams at the Lawrence Dairy in the company of handsome Chaffinches all dressed up for courting. Thank you to everyone for making these trips possible, enjoyable and worthwhile. I am learning so much.

**Adrienne Mulqueen**



## Otago Branch News

### **Weekend Atlas Trip to Wanaka, Labour Weekend, Friday 23 October to Monday 26 October.**

This is a great chance to get out of town for a few days and spend it birding with friends in the Atlas grid squares around the Wanaka area. There should be great crested grebes nesting in the marina, and John Darby has offered to introduce the Wanaka Grebe Project.

Accommodation has been booked at X Wanaka township <https://www.stayatbase.com/hostels/base-backpackers-wanaka> Birds NZ Otago has agreed to provide a subsidy from our reserves for each Birds NZ member towards the cost of the trip. Some members may wish to arrange their own accommodation.

We will have full days birding on Saturday and Sunday and allocate squares for the trips home on Monday. Hopefully some of our Central Otago members will be able to join in these field trips too.

**I need to confirm the accommodation so please contact me by Wednesday 23 September if you want me to book at X Wanaka** [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

### **Town Belt 5 Minute Bird Count Field Trip. Sunday 4 October at 9 am.**

Our October field trip will kick-start the Town Belt counts.

Meet at the Moana Pool Carpark at 9 am. This is a very good chance to practise our bird id skills by sound as well as sight, and learn from the more experienced among us.

We are also advertising this session to the public.

Our project to monitor birds in Town Belt involves doing as many 5 minute bird counts in the Town Belt at our 10 count stations any morning during October and November when the weather is calm and there is no rain. You can do these as individuals or pairs or groups; you can count at as few or as many stations as you like. The 10 sites take about 2 hours to cover.

If you have any questions please contact **Bruce at 027 224 7989**.

### **Dunedin Town Belt Survey Update for Spring 2020**

As we enter the third season of our project to count the birds along the town belt. It's good to know that with all that has happened this year we can still enjoy the study of birds close to home and with a minimal investment in equipment.

I'm on the list to talk about the project at the September meeting and I hope that this happens. But as we get to October it's time to remind everybody to get and count along the nine permanent stations.

The instructions have not changed from last year and I include the instruction form again.

Remember this is essentially a five minute bird study on fixed points. I've heard that some see it as a good day out with a bus ride at the end back to your car and others are cycling along

enjoying the town belt and counting birds. Whatever, it's a great opportunity to get out among a good range of birds and to enjoy the town belt.

I'm happy to accept data in whatever form you want to give it to me but getting it electronically is best. So thanks to everybody who submitted electronic copies: this really made compiling the data sheet a lot faster. Here is an example of the headings I'm using in the core data sheet. If you use these then that makes my life much easier.

Date	Observer	Cloud Cover	Wind	Precipitation	Location	Start Time	Comments	Cars	Species	Count
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	None	MaoriRoad	8:25	.	0	Blackbird	1
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	None	MaoriRoad	8:25	.	1	Dunnock	2
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	None	MaoriRoad	8:25	.	3	House_Sparrow	2
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	None	MaoriRoad	8:25	.	4	Silvereye	3
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	0	BB_Gull	1
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	10	Brown_Creeper	1
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	0	Dunnock	1
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	2	Grey_Warbler	1
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	3	House_Sparrow	2
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	4	Silvereye	5
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_5	8:45	.	5	Song_Thrush	2
04-Oct-17	Francie/ Pat	overcast	calm	Nil	QueensDr_4	9:00	Noise from cars	6	Bellbird	1

So what did we get last year and whats the overall pattern look like?

There will be a lot more details at the talk but here's a teaser.

We have completed 1123 counts with 284 completed in 2019. This is down a bit on previous years, but still good coverage. We have recorded 31 species; in 2019 Francie and Pat heard single birds on three times during October. The top five species based on total count remain silvereyes, blackbird, bellbird, redpoll and grey warbler, but inter-annual variation is starting to show up.

The 2020 Town Belt survey starts on 1 October and runs until 30 November. It's to be done in the morning and we can't get enough counts. A great opportunity to get out with family and friends.

**Bruce McKinlay**

# Birds NZ Dunedin Town Belt Survey Form

[illegible]

## Botanic Garden Birdwatching

Another very successful event at Botanic Garden. 41 people turned up to go on guided walks and we divided up into 8 or so groups and spent about an hour spotting birds all over the Upper and Lower Gardens, observing many different species of birds engaging in a range of behaviours. People were keen to identify birds and very grateful for the opportunity to learn more and to receive copies of Dunedin Botanic Garden Wild Bird Guide.

Thanks so much for all those who volunteered – Sue, Karthic, Nick, Petrina, Maureen, Maree, Martine, Mary, Oscar, Bruce and especially to Suzanne for all the organising behind the scenes: Health and Safety plans, publicity, fine weather on the day, etc. It was a glorious spring morning and afterwards us guides enjoyed coffee, shortbread treats, sunshine, and talking about the bird highlights. We saw twenty two species between us including a kingfisher.

“Our group had two highlights: the first was watching a very wet Sacred Kingfisher preening in a tree above Lindsay Creek. Kingfishers are uncommon in the Botanic Gardens. The second interesting observation was a pair of Paradise Shelducks in the creek who decided that they did not require privacy for a few brief seconds of copulation. This behaviour occurred just as I was saying that they often have large families of ducklings!” Petrina

“Throughout our forest walk, we were seldom out of earshot or eyeshot of Tui. We watched around 20 Silvereyes feeding and calling in some branches overhead, and came upon two Kereru in a tall tree. I think the participants found it interesting to put names to the calls and songs of familiar birds.” Maureen

“We managed to see nearly all the birds on the Wild Bird brochure; missed out on rosella, swallow and shags. Dunnocks were the most common bird on our walk, but it took ages to find just one chaffinch. We heard a Paradise Duck calling near the Italian terrace and one of our group found them high up in the branches of the macrocarpa. Our last bird of the morning was a Grey Warbler.” Mary

“I was surprised how the time flew and the variety of topics covered. I was impressed at the number of Kereru observed and that all of them seemed to be roosting. There was no active feeding in the birds we saw. I was also impressed (and I know that I should not be) at the number of Blackbirds. It would be a great sweepstake question to estimate the total number but even more fun to band them all and get a real number.” Bruce

“I took a group of three down along the Leith towards the Uni. They were pretty much new to birds and keen to learn- which was great. We spotted Redpolls on the bush, Pair of ducks mating, fighting in the river as a Little Pied Shag flew over. On our walk back it was great to see them all taking interest and spotting, listening and guessing which bird. We finished listening to the iconic song of Grey Warblers which Bruce & team had spotted.” Karthic

“I took my group up the hill, through the South African and Mediterranean plantings, past the aviary, and through the upper car park to the rhododendron section, along Cherry Walk and then back down the hill. Most of the group were in the habit of feeding birds over winter, were able to differentiate Tui from Bellbird song and participated in the garden bird survey. However Dunnocks were somewhat of a surprise to most, both in appearance and song...next year's survey should include a few more of these.” Maree

“My group was very enthusiastic, made up of a couple Brits, some visitors from Hawea, and a local mum and son, who was getting into photography. We saw the majority can be expected, including good numbers of Tui, Korimako, Dunnocks and Greenfinches, and a few Kereru, Grey Warblers, an Eastern Rosella, and one Kingfisher heard only (seen by Petrina). Overall a very pleasant morning.” Oscar.



Photos by Oscar Thomas



## Robin's nest at our Mopanui study site, Orokonui



Photos by Oscar Thomas

Please email George if you are interested in finding out more and / or would like to be added to our emailing list: [gpickerell@outlook.com](mailto:gpickerell@outlook.com)

## 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.

**At the meeting shared cups will be available to use but you are welcome, and perhaps encouraged, to bring your own mug for tea or coffee.**

### All planned events can proceed under Covid Level 1

#### **Wed 23 September Bruce McKinlay**

Findings from the Town Belt bird survey

#### **Fri 18 - Sun 27 September The Great Kereru Count**

<https://www.greatkererucount.nz/>

#### **Sunday 4 October. Town Belt Bird Count training field trip.**

Meet at Moana Pool carpark at 9 am. For more info contact Bruce, phone 027 224 7989

#### **Saturday 17 October. Global Big Day**

Count birds wherever you are for at least 5 minutes and submit complete checklists to eBird.

#### **Wed 28 October Susan Walker from Landcare**

Insights for native bird conservation from the Bird Atlas projects

#### **Wed 25 November Indoor Meeting. "Birds through the lens"**

Karthic will speak about filming wildlife and show his short-documentary films on conservation of endangered species - Yellow-eyed Penguins and Southern NZ Dotterels.

This will be followed by a celebratory end-of-year supper. Please bring along some festive food to share.

#### **Sunday 29 November Summer Wader Count. High tide at 16.09 of 1.9m.**

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](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz)

Offers and suggestions for talks or topics for Indoor Meetings would really be appreciated, please contact Mary [birds.otago@birds.nz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birds.nz.org.nz)

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

*Many thanks to all who contributed.*

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **20 October**