



Birds New Zealand
PO Box 834, Nelson 7040
<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz>

Regional Representative: Mary Thompson
197 Balmacewen Road, Dunedin 9010
birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz 03 464 0787

Regional Recorder: Richard Schofield
64 Frances Street, Balclutha 9230
cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Otago Region Newsletter 11 /2020

November 2020

Ornithological Snippets

A **Shining Cuckoo** at Hindon on 15th November was being mobbed by 2 **Fantails**. Shining Cuckoos have not been recorded laying eggs in Fantail nests, but a young cuckoo was seen being fed by fantail in Rotorua in 1973. Franny Cunningham reported a pair of karearea **NZ Falcon** flying over her house in Kaikorai Valley, calling to each other, on Saturday 24th October. A **Banded Dotterel** in a grass paddock beside SH87 at Clarks Junction on 15th November seemed a little out of place.

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, a **Pied Shag** was seen at Lake Hawea on 25th October. The ODT reported on attempts to relocate feral **Peafowl** in the Oamaru area <https://www.odt.co.nz/regions/north-otago/reports-third-peacock-loose>.

On the Catlins River Track on 18th November, **Yellowheads** were recorded in 11 consecutive 1km travelling counts. Finally, a **House Sparrow** in the compiler's garden on 2 occasions in early November, with white outer tail feathers, and white patches in wings, was highly reminiscent of female Chaffinch on a brief view.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

eBird News

The second spring atlas season ends on 30th November, and coverage over the last 3 months has been good. We now have spring visits in 230 squares (out of a total of 348), compared to 143 at the end of the first spring, and around 3000 checklists from 100 observers (1178/67 this time last year).

During the Wanaka atlas weekend 24/25th November, 122 unique checklists were submitted, which included 54 species in 23 different squares. A further 27 squares received some coverage during travel to and from Wanaka, which is almost 15% of Otago squares overall, so well done to all concerned.

The next Atlas field trip will be to the Lenz Reserve at Tautuku on **Sunday 6th December**, guided by Franny Cunninghame. Please contact me if you are interested in coming.

This is the last newsletter before the summer break, so hopefully people will be able to get out to some less well covered areas. Please check the Atlas Effort Map to see where the gaps are, or download the KML files from the Atlas webpage under "Handbook & Supporting Material". Alternatively feel free to get in touch with me if you'd like some suggestions of any areas that could use some further coverage.

Richard Schofield cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Otago Branch News

Wild Bird Guide included in international award

We have just heard that our Wild Bird Guide along with 3 other pocket-sized fold-up trail brochures produced last year by the Dunedin Botanic Garden were awarded third place in the site publication category of the media awards of the (USA) National Association for Interpretation. Otago Birds New Zealand provided the content and images for the Wild Bird Guide, so we have got some unexpected accolades.

Check out the webpage listing <https://nai2020.pathable.co/interpretive-media-awards>

October Atlas Challenge Winner

Many of us took up the challenge of submitting at least one checklist to the Atlas project each day for the month of October, ie 31 eligible checklists to qualify to be in the draw for a copy of the book 'The Brilliance of Birds'.

A great surprise that winner of the random draw was Mary Thompson! Mary submitted a total of 74 complete checklists. The 68 Atlasers, who qualified for this challenge, submitted a grand total of 5,444 complete checklists between them in just 31 days. If each one was just 5 minutes long that was over 450 hours of birding!

Birds of the water, wood and waste. By H. Guthrie-Smith, Whitcombe and Tombs, Second edition 1927

We have been donated this book by Kim and Jenny Morrison, members who now live in the north of Scotland; they want it to benefit our members. This is a classic collectors edition and an important historical work. This book is also a great read and records intriguing detailed observations that cannot be matched by many modern field guides. He observed and photographed breeding activities of native birds on his now-famous Tutira Sheep Station.

Second-hand retail copies currently sell for between \$30 and \$50, and a modern reprint of this classic is \$42.

There may be a member (or someone knows someone), who would like to obtain this copy in exchange for a donation to the Otago Branch to use for student travel grants. Let Mary know.



Mary baked and iced a congratulatory cake for Oscar

Otago Branch Birds NZ Projects Archive, 1980 to 2020

We have been going through our files and archives, and cataloguing the various projects that have been undertaken by our members over the last 40 years. Hope you can read the stuff in the table below. I thought some of you might like to see the variety of projects we have done, where the findings have been published, and in the final column of the sheet you will see what tasks remain to be done. We have several projects that need to be analysed and written up for publication: Harbour surveys, Hawksbury lagoon surveys and the recovery data from the silveryeye banding project. Some tasks are underway, for example, Bruce is organising for the field notebooks of George Grant to be tabulated in spreadsheets and asking for volunteers to help with this.

In addition, the records dating back to the 1980s are being entered on eBird where appropriate, as these long-term historical records will likely be important in the future when analysing things like effect of climate change. We are planning to archive the important original data sheets in the Hocken Library.

Mary Thompson

Project Name	Study Location	Year started	Year finished	Duration	Data Type	organised by	Published paper or reports?	submitted to eBird	Tasks remaining
Brown Creeper Survey	South Island	1981	1984	3 yrs	Incidental	Derek Onley	Report in OSNZ News 38, p 8 1986		Enter eBird?
Little Shags	Otago Harbour	1988			plumage phases	Peter Schweigman	nothing done		
Kaikorai Estuary	Kaikorai Estuary	1989	1991	2 years	Total count	Peter Schweigman	Notornis 1993	Yes	
Kingfisher Study	Otago and Southland	1989	1990	2 yrs	Incidental	Lesley Gowans	nothing done/partially analysed		analyse ?; Enter eBird
Okia Survey	Okia Reserve	1991	1992	2 years	Transsects	Peter Schweigman	Report written for YEP Trust	Yes	
Manuherikia River Survey	Otago	1991		2 Days	transect	Peter Schweigman	unpubl report to DOC		enter eBird
Cirl Bunting Survey	Otago	1992			incidental	Louise Foord		yes	
Flagstaff Bird Survey	Flagstaff	May-92	Mar-94	3 years	transsects	Peter Schweigman	maybe a report to DCC Forests	Yes	
Mohua Study	Waikaiti Forest	1995	1995	2 days	Total count in 100m2 grid	Malcolm Ford	Report for Waikaiti Forestry	Yes	
Robins of Flagstaff	Flagstaff	1995	2002		banding study	Peter Schweigman / Derek Onley	unpublished reports		biometrics
Green Island Landfill	Dunedin	2000	2001	1 year	area survey	Peter Schweigman	report to DCC		enter eBird
NZ Falcons in exotic forests	Dunedin	2009	2010		nest monitoring	Steve Lawrence	Southern Bird		
Ross Creek Survey	Dunedin	2009	2010		transsects	Alan Baker	Report to Ross Creek Care Group		
Otago Great Crested Grebes Cent	Otago lakes	2009		2 day	area	Mary Thompson	Southern Bird		
Moreporks	Dunedin	2013	2014		acoustic recordings	MPT and Murray Efford	nothing done with it		analysis
White heron watch	Tomahawk lagoon	2013			area	Mary Thompson	Southern Bird	Yes	
Livingstone Bush and Wetland	Taiari Mouth	2017		1 day	area survey	Mary Thompson	report to Stephen Green	Yes	
Waimataitai Lagoon	Moeraki	2017		1 day	area survey	Mary Thompson	report to Waitaki Regional Council	Yes	
Historical Notebooks									
Alan Wright		1983	1994	12 yrs	Incidental	Alan Wright	Entered in eBird (Bruce)	yes?	
George and Doreen Grant		1967	1993		Incidental	George and Doreen Grant	?		Enter eBird?
Peter Schweigman		1985	Present	34+ yrs	Incidental	Peter Schweigman	?		Enter eBird?
National Surveys									
Spoonbill National Census	national	2012		1 year	census	Mary Thompson	Southern Bird		
Spoonbill Colony Survey	national	2013	2014	1 year	census	Mary Thompson	Southern Bird		
Wader Surveys	Otago/national	1984		ongoing		Adrian Reigan/Peter, Maree	Birds NZ/Notornis		
Waitangi Day Spoonbill Census	national	1991	1995		census	Peter Schweigman	Southern Bird		
Red-billed Gull Survey	national	2014	2015		census of colonies	Peter Frost	Notornis		

Major Projects-Otago Branch																				
Harbour surveys	monthly area counts	1977	1978		census	Jill Hamel	report written by Jill Hamel on 1977 and 1988 surveys.													Enter eBird
		1988	1989		census	Peter Schweigman	never published													analyse
		2009	2011		census	Bruce McKinlay	paper at OSNZ conference; poster by Sue Odlin at OSNZ													publish
Hawksbury Lagoon	seasonal surveys	1987	1990	4 years	area survey; all species	Derek Onley/Jim Wilson														
Hawksbury Lagoon	seasonal surveys	2008	2015	7 years	area survey; all species	Derek Onley	Some entered in eBird (Jim)	yes												
Dunedin Bird Distribution Maps	Dunedin	1985	1987	2 years	atlas 1km grid	Bruce McKinlay	maps published													mostly
		1991	2012	20 yrs	Movement and longevity	Peter Schweigman/data analysed by MPT	Notornis 2014													
		1992	2000	8 years	banding/resightings	Peter Schweigman	data available for analysis													analysis
Beyond Orokonui	north east Otago	2014	2015		SMBC in various habitats	Landcare Trust; Kelvin Lloyd; Maree Johnstone	published in Biol. Conserv.													
Bittern Survey	Sinclair Wetlands	2011	2015		acoustic recordings	MPT and Murray Efford	Southern Bird													
Sinclair Wetland	seasonal surveys	2015	2018	3 yrs	waterfowl (total), bush birds(SMBC).	Mary Thompson	Entered in eBird. Reports to Sinclair Wetland Trust	yes												Notornis; in preparation
Town Belt Survey	Dunedin	2017	5 years		SMBC at 12 stations	Bruce McKinlay														ongoing
Robins beyond the fence	Mopani	2017	2024	5+ years	banding, nest monitoring	Georgina Pickerell														ongoing



Kaitaia
Northland



The Wanaka Weekend

Labour Weekend Atlas Trip to Wanaka (23-26 Oct 2020)

My trip started on a beautiful note. With the sun shining bright on Friday 23 Oct mid-day, Mary came over to my place shortly after lunch to pick me up. After I handed her half a dozen of Oscar's newly published book which I have bought as gifts, we set off for Wanaka via the Palmerston-Ranfurly-Alexandra route, and picked up George at her place along the way. As good birders, we stopped en route to do some bird counts at Dunback, Green Valley and Kyeburn to fill in some gaps in the Bird Atlas, and encountered mostly farmland birds, such as chaffinches, goldfinches, yellowhammers, redpolls and skylarks as well as paradise shelducks, magpies, harriers and spur-winged plovers, but also spotted a pair of California quails, a sacred kingfisher, some SIPOs, a couple of rock pigeons, pied stilts and a group of welcome swallows.

Upon arriving in Wanaka, we checked in at XBase Backpackers and settled in for the night before we gathered with the rest of the birdwatching contingent on Saturday 24 Oct morning at the hostel reception area. There, we were split up into groups and I had the privilege of joining Richard and Dawn to survey Motatapu Station, where a long-term ambitious plan has

been undertaken since 2009 for predator control and habitat restoration with a vision to re-establish the once-common buff weka. At Motatapu, we traversed through a variety of habitats, including matagouri scrubland, beech forest and open paddock, and came cross birds of the bush such as tomtits, bellbirds, grey warblers, fantails and silvereyes in addition to countryside birds.



Dawn inspecting the memory card on a camera used for predator detection

Dawn showing us the entrance to the weka enclosure



Dawn also took the opportunity to take us into one of the fenced weka enclosures which was used for soft release of the buff wekas, and it was heart-wrenching to hear from Dawn about the setbacks encountered in the project due to predator infiltration of the enclosures. We also had the opportunity to get our feet wet in the rivers and I had the chance to experience my first river-crossing. Some of my interesting bird encounters for this leg of the atlas trip were hearing a buff weka call in the distance, seeing a juvenile SIPO with its parents at the Motatapu river, spotting a NZ falcon with prey, and watching a couple of black shags soar care free in the



Finding the best spot to do the river crossing

wind next to a towering rock bluff. My wonderful day ended with a lovely Indian dinner with the rest of the group at The Spice Room restaurant in Wanaka.

The next day, on a slightly showery Sunday 25 Oct, I joined Maree, Rowena and Brian to cover the grounds at Lake Hawea near The Neck, Kidds Bush and Hunter Valley. We were in mountain beech forest and also in pasture land, and saw an array of forest birds such as bellbirds, brown creepers, riflemen, tomtits as well as open country birds. Some amusing observations were 2 kererus feeding on the lawn (possibly feasting on dandelion) near the entrance to Kidds Bush, 4 Indian peafowl in a paddock trying to escape from us by running, and a big family of 8 California quails which very quickly managed to hide from our view by going under the cover of some small trees and flying up to the lower branches. We also enjoyed viewing a white-faced heron, a pied shag, a couple of black shags and a pair of black-fronted terns on the waters by the lake.

The most memorable experience for me on Sunday was hearing the call of the long-tailed cuckoo on the Sawyer Burn Track in Kidds Bush. Maree and I thought it was a very loud greenfinch initially and walked passed, but we were fortunate that Rowena had recorded the call on her phone, which was later verified with Richard when we returned to base. On our way back, we stopped by the marina at Lake Wanaka to view the great crested grebes, and was surprised to find that they were not yet nesting on the platforms. Our day was completed when we joined the rest of the group for an enriching evening talk by John Darby about his marina grebes project and the challenges faced, such as a recent storm affecting water levels and noise from current building works by the lakeside, which could have contributed to the disrupted nesting season of the grebes.

On the last day of the trip on Monday 26 Oct, we gathered at the Beanie cafe at Wanaka Hotel for morning tea, and Rachel from the Aspiring Biodiversity Trust gave some of us an overview of the work that was being done at the Makarora braided river for bird monitoring and protection. The group then parted ways and I returned to Dunedin with Mary and George, but we managed to stop by the Bendigo picnic area beside the Clutha River and spotted another grebe and a few more aquatic bird species for our list, such as the black swan, NZ scaup and Australasian shoveler. Overall, my trip was a fruitful one for me. I have realised how much I have improved in my bird call identification skills since my first weekend birding trip to Lake Ellesmere in Feb 2018 with Richard and Maree, but I still have lots to learn.

The trip also made me appreciate the importance of being familiar with bird vocalisations. I could never have identified the long-tailed cuckoo's call back at Sawyer Burn Track because I

didn't know how a long-tailed cuckoo sounded like in the first place, though my Merlin Bird ID app came in handy. More memorably, at Motatapu Station, I recalled how Dawn's eyes brightened up when I affirmed what she had heard – a buff weka calling out in the distance. To her, it was not just another bird call to be identified, but a beacon of hope that the efforts and dedication that many had put into the project were not entirely decimated by feral cats, ferrets and stoats. Challenges abound, not only for Motatapu, but also for the Wanaka marina grebes project, but it is exactly these challenges that give us meaning in what we do and push us to grow to greater heights. COVID-19 has added another dimension of difficulty this year, but I believe we can still continue to pursue what we all love and have passion for, and overcome all odds.

Ivan Lin



Martine Darrou

Photos
Martine Darrou



Rowena East and Maree Johnstone

Labour Weekend Atlas Trip to Wanaka (23-26 Oct 2020)

We may call it Labour Weekend, but the truth is.... it is the last weekend before Halloween....

We followed the path steadily upwards from the camping ground. It was Kidd's Bush, (the pirate?). Southern beech, the trunks blackened, the dead ones covered in tiny bracket fungus, like scales on a giant reptile. The sky, dark and gloomy, threatened rain. My intrepid companions climbed on up the looming mountainside and I turned to descend with a trusty pole (thanks Maree). Suddenly a loud and piercing shriek shattered the stillness of the bush.

"What the hell was **that**?" asked a passing couple. "I HAVE NO IDEA!" embarrassingly. The shrieks continued, intermittently, scarily, defying my attempts to record the awful noise. It must be a Very Big Bird I thought. Back at the car I racked my brains unsuccessfully. Finally my companions returned, and suggested it was a greenfinch. WHAT??? A huge greenfinch with a terrifyingly massive bill???? Yikes! But comfort was at hand in the text for the day, from the Book of Birds of NZ, p. 439... "the distinctive call (of the greenfinch) is reminiscent of a Long Tailed Cuckoo call.." Of course! In native bush. In company with the brown creepers we had heard. And far less terrifying than a Mega Greenfinch – what a relief, and very exciting – a Long Tailed Cuckoo. Heard but not seen. Just as well – it might have looked scary too...

Other highlights? Spotting a large breeding colony of Black-billed Gulls on the Matukituki river; finding a Pied Shag on Lake Hawea, near the Neck; seeing Wild Turkey near Kyeburn (I suspect they might become a threatened species next month). And the wonderful story of the Wanaka grebes told by the expert and enthusiastic John Darby on our last night.



Long-tailed cuckoo. © Adam Clarke
<http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/?q=node/493>



Grebes on Lake Wanaka 2017
editor@thewanakasun.co.nz

Most of all I appreciated the friendship, advice and expertise of my fellow birders, the company, and conversations about almost anything. It was interesting, entertaining, educational, inspiring, and always fun. Thanks, everyone.



John Darby
Photo Martine Darrou

Rowena East

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 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.

<http://www.birdandmoon.com>

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

Sunday 6 December Atlas Field Trip

The Lenz Reserve at Tautuku guided by Franny Cunninghame.
Contact Richard on 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Offers and suggestions for talks or topics for Indoor Meetings would really be appreciated, please contact Mary birds.otago@birds.nz.org.nz

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

Many thanks to all who contributed.

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