THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

OSNZ—Birds New Zealand

December 2020

http://osnz.org.nz/ and http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/

Greetings

2020 is fast coming to a close, a year which has been dominated by Covid-19. While New Zealand with its team of 5 million has escaped much of the devastation occurring in Europe and North America many have been adversely affected by the pandemic. There have been significant job losses, major interruptions to education and greatly restricted travel opportunities. Birds New Zealand was forced to cancel the 2020 annual conference at a relatively late stage in the planning process. Locally, the Wellington Region has adopted Zoom technology which has the benefit of enabling more members to enjoy the monthly meetings.

The hope for 2021 is that the world-wide epidemic will be brought under control as the vaccines become widely used. The return to "normality" will also provide conditions for implementing changes to the running of the Wellington Region of Birds New Zealand (OSNZ). The region for the entire period of 2020 has operated without a Regional Representative. This situation needs to change to enable the region to be rejuvenated and new programmes initiated.

Best wishes for 2021

Geoff de Lisle

Monthly Meetings

There will not be a meeting in January 2020

Monday 1st February – Member's Night.

There will be short presentations (10 minutes max) given by members. The only restriction for the presentations is that they have an avian theme. They can be shorter than 10 minutes and the showing of as little as 2-3 pictures is most welcome. Members wishing to present at this meeting should contact osnzwelly@gmail.com

While the meeting will be held at the Te Papa Collections building, 169 Tory Street it will also be Zoomed, Theoretically members who wish to connect remotely will be able to present remotely.

Monday 1st March – to be announced.

The meetings for 2021 will be arranged by Rod Hitchmough in conjunction with the group of experienced / professional ornithologists.

The re-introduction of kaka to Abel Tasman National Park, Ron Moorhouse, 5th October, 2020.

Ron has a wealth of experience studying kaka having carried out his PhD studies on kaka on Kapiti Island. In his talk he summarised the project to re-introduce kaka into the Abel Tasman National Park as part of Operation Janszoon. The major objective of Project Janszoon is to restore and preserve the Abel Tasman's rich wildlife for all to enjoy. There is an extensive predator-control programme which targets stoats, rats, possums and feral cats. The success of the predator control programme has enabled the introduction of yellow-crowned parakeets (54), saddleback (41), pateke (337), whio (11) and kaka (35). Prior to the release of kaka there was a debate as to where the birds

were to be sourced. The decision was to transfer only South Island sourced birds and the majority of them were to be captive reared. This decision was made even though there is genetic evidence of natural movement of kaka between the islands. The initial transfers to the Park included release of females with the hope that they would pair with the few remaining males in the Park. The transfer of kaka was based on a soft release technique with birds being held in aviaries in the park before being released.

Kaka Taxonomy

The 4th Edition of the "Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand" (2010) lists two species of kaka, *Nestor meridionalis* and the extinction Norfolk Island kaka, *Nestor productus.* The last Norfolk Island kaka died in captivity in 1851. The two subspecies of *N. meridionalis* listed are the North Island kaka (*N. meridionalis septentrionalis*) and the South Island kaka (*N. meridionalis meridionalis*). This subdivision was based on morphological and behavioural characters with *N. m. septentrionalis* being smaller than *N.m. meridionalis* . However, these phenotypic differences were not mirrored by genetic differences (2015). The genetic studies indicated significant migration of birds from the North to South Islands. The phenotypic differences with the larger kaka being present in the South Island was taken as evidence for Bergmann's rule'

> **Bergmann's rule** *is an ecogeographical* **rule** *that states that within a broadly distributed taxonomic clade, populations and species of larger size are found in colder environments, while populations and species of smaller size are found in warmer regions. Wikipedia*

Evidence for Bergmann's Rule and Not Allopatric Subspeciation in the Threatened **Kaka** (Nestor meridionalis).
Dussex N, Sainsbury J, Moorhouse R, Jamieson IG, Robertson BC.J Hered. 2015 Nov-Dec;106(6):679-91. doi: 10.1093/jhered/esv079. Epub 2015 Oct 7. https://academic.oup.com/jhered/article/106/6/679/2622879

Kea Conservation, Josh Kemp, Department of Conservation. 2nd November, 2020.

Josh's talk summarised 25 years of research on kea, especially the factors threatening their survival. The major predators of kea are cats and stoats with chicks in nests being particularly vulnerable. There is a marked difference in kea survival between the West and East coast of the South Island. This difference most likely relates to feral cats not being a problem on the West coast. The loss of kea at Arthur's Pass and Lewis Pass most likely related to prey switching from mice to other quarry including kea. Predation of kea in these regions was by both stoats and feral cats.

There was not sufficient time for Josh to summarise his work on the use of 1080 to control predators and the effects on kea populations. This work has been summarised in the publication, "Kea survival during aerial poisoning for rat and possum control" (2018) https://newzealandecology.org/nzje/3351.pdf.

Filling in the gap, 5 years of shorebirds in North Korea, Keith Woodley, Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalist Trust. December 7th, 2020.

Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust, founded in 1975. The objectives of the trust include;

- To establish and maintain an observatory for the study of natural history, especially birds, in the Firth of Thames and adjacent areas.
- To collect information on the ecology of the Miranda Coast with a view to its conservation.
- To encourage and promote education for the greater knowledge and enjoyment of the natural life heritage of New Zealand.

In 1990 the Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre opened. Keith became manager of the Centre and over many years has developed an extensive knowledge of shorebirds and migrant seabirds. Early studies with colour bands showed that the Yellow sea was an important part of the flyways for bar-tailed godwits. Use of electronic tags were central in mapping the migration routes and stop-over re-fuelling areas. There are major concerns regarding loss of areas from reclamation and development which are used for re-fuelling. One of the big unknowns what was happening in North Korea to the areas used by shorebirds. Thanks to the diplomatic efforts by Winston Peters members of the Pukorokoro Miranda trust were able to go to North Korea to study shorebirds. Annual visits to North Korea have established an awareness of the North Koreans of the importance to shorebird of parts of their shoreline. A documentary on the work of New Zealanders can be seen on the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWWITlSgToM T

Cook Strait Pelagic Birding Trip Sunday 14th February, 2021.

Please let Geoff de Lisle know (osnzwelly@gmail.com) if you wish to go on this trip.

This is a great opportunity to see a range of different pelagic seabirds, especially albatross and mollymawks. Details of the trip are as follows;

Cook Strait Fishing Charters Ltd operates from Seaview Marina, Port Road in Lower Hutt. The vessel 'Seafarer II' is located on Pier D.

Please ensure you are at the boat 15 minutes prior to the **7am departure** time to allow for a safety briefing and prompt departure from the wharf.

Map link: http://www.cookstraitfishingcharters.co.nz/location

The trip will be 5-6 hours and the skipper provides snacks, tea/coffee and a barbecue lunch.

People can pay either by cash or EFTpos on the boat. The cost of the charter is $1800. So if we get 20 people it will be $90 each but if we are short by one or two then we can split it up evenly across 19 people ($95 each) or 18 people ($100 each). We are aiming to have 20 people. These were the prices for 2020 and will be confirmed in the new year.

The skipper also asked that we let people know that if they want to do some fishing while we are out in Cook Strait he charges $30 per person to use one of his fishing rods with all bait provided. Note, this is a birding trip and not a fishing trip. Any fishing will be secondary to birding.

Health and Safety: This trip is not suitable for people who are susceptible to sea sickness. Participants must follow the instructions of the skipper.

Regional Representative: **This position is currently vacant**. osnzwelly@gmail.com

Regional Recorder: Peter Hodge peter.hodge@gmail.com

Birds New Zealand Regional Roundup: Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop (04) 527 0929 osnzwelly@gmail.com

Wellington Harbour Survey: Geoff de Lisle, Stuart Nicholson

Mist netting – Matu Booth, manager@ngamanu.co.nz Nga Manu, Waikanae

Ross Pickard ross.pickard@hexagonsi.com Wellington

Bird Snippets

Waikanae estuary New Zealand dotterel

There a number of reports of up to 5 New Zealand dotterel present at the Waikanae estuary during the last 3 months.

Alan Tennyson, Thu Dec 24, 2020
3 tiny downy chicks with a pair on the spit today. BirdingNZ.net

Otaihanga Boardwalk

Imogen Warren, 8 Oct, 2020. Fernbird, Waikanae estuary, eBird.

Michael Burton-Smith, 17 Oct, 2020. Fernbird, Waikane estuary eBird.

Wellington City biodiversity

CMKMStephens » Mon Oct 19, 2020
Long-tailed skua or Arctic Skua bobbing off Mana Island (17 October 2020). BirdingNZ.net

Wellington City biodiversity

ledzep » Sun Oct 25, 2020 5:06 pm
Whitehead singing in a pine tree on the Grenada to Horokiwi Road track near the Horokiwi end (GPS -41.191954 174.851635) not that far from Belmont Regional park but showing that the birds are spreading

Wellington City biodiversity

Saw one having a go at a Black-backed Gull a few days ago, and recently witnessed one peeling the thin bark off a Manuka to use as nesting material.

Finn Davey » Sun Oct 25, 2020 Tui are definitely getting into breeding habits.

Lake Puketewhaino, Waikanae Scientific Reserve
Spotless crake

Hugh Robertson, Thu 12 Nov, 2020. Spotless crake Seen flying across gap in vegetation after responding to broadcast calls from mobile phone. eBird.

Fairy Tern – Manawatu Estuary

On the 18th December Imogen Warren identified a fairy tern at the Manawatu Estuary. This is a significant observation as fairy terns are New Zealand's rarest bird. They were last recorded at the Manawatu Estuary on December 1999 and this is the only accepted previous record of the Records Appraisal Committee of fairy terns occurring south of the Kaipara Harbour.

New Zealand Bird Atlas

30 Dec 2020	Wellington	New Zealand
Atlasers	220	844
Total squares	105	3232
Squares with data	102 (97.1%)	2676 (82.8%)
Total checklists	11163 (113.9 checklists/ square)	96951 (30 checklists/sq uare)

Te Papa Blogs

14,000 images on New Zealand Birds Online – Marlborough special

: Colin Miskelly, On: 16 Oct 2020

https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2020/10/16/14000-images-on-new-zealand-birds-online-marlborough-special/

The 14,000th image loaded on New Zealand Birds Online was of a recently-fledged banded dotterel chick, taken by Derek Templeton. The image was taken near Blenheim, where Derek is based. Here, Derek answers a few questions about how he got involved in wildlife photography, and why he started contributing images to New Zealand Birds Online.

A plethora of islands – surveying breeding seabirds in Fiordland

By: Colin Miskelly , On: 2 Dec 2020

https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2020/12/09/a-plethora-of-islands-surveying-breeding-seabirds-in-fiordland/

A team comprised of staff from Te Papa and the Department of Conservation (DOC) recently spent a week surveying islands in northern Fiordland. In this second blog based on the trip, vertebrates curator Colin Miskelly describes some of the sites visited and discoveries made.

After landing on 217 islands, we now know that there are at least 165 petrel colonies in Fiordland, and probably more than 66,000 breeding pairs. This is far more than anyone expected, and provides a great springboard for these populations to recover as rats and stoats are cleared from more and larger islands, and from the adjacent mainland.

Storm petrels in the spotlight

By: Colin Miskelly, On: 9 Dec 2020

Five Te Papa staff recently joined Department of Conservation colleagues on a boat-based survey of islands in central and northern Fiordland. One of the species they were hoping to learn more about was the mysterious grey-backed storm petrel. Vertebrates curator Colin Miskelly explains why this tiny bird was on their radar, and what they found.

We encountered grey-backed storm petrels at all six sites that we moored or anchored, including an astonishing seven birds at the entrance to Milford Sound (two captured, with another five visible at once). Storm petrels were present both near the open sea, and at the furthest inland where it is possible to travel by boat, at the head of Hall Arm, Doubtful Sound.

Deaths of Little Penguins

Matiu / Somes Island is the stronghold of nesting little penguins in Wellington harbour with approximately 300-400 nesting pairs which have been extensively investigated for many years. Over the last 8 years Mike Rumble has led a study on the breeding success of penguins and population trends. During the breeding season nesting boxes (176) on approximately half the island are surveyed every two weeks by a group of experienced volunteers. In addition to recording the number of adults, eggs and chicks, all adults and large chicks in the study area are banded with a metal flipper band which have a unique number so that individual birds can be monitored. During the survey on the 14th of November 54 (23%) dead chicks were found out a total of 238 chicks present in the study area. Currently the total chick losses for the 2020 breeding season is 83 (36%), which is double the total chick losses of any of the last 4 breeding seasons (5-18%). In addition to dead chicks, the growth and development of the live chicks was delayed. Currently there is no evidence of associated deaths in adults nesting on Matiu / Somes Island but this may not become evident until the next breeding season or dead birds occur on beaches. Little penguins banded on Matiu / Somes Island have been recovered from not only Wellington harbour but also the Kapiti coast, as far north as Napier on the East Coast, the top of the South Island , and as far south as Kaikoura.

Photo Mike Rumble. Little penguin with flipper band. This is/was a recently fledged chick, found wandering along The Esplanade Petone by a caring passer-by in November 2019.
The bird was cared for at The Nest before being banded and released at the Penguin Haven, Days Bay.

If you find a dead banded little penguin

Write, email or ring the National Banding Office or complete one of the online band reporting forms. They will need to know the following details:

(a) Band number
(b) Date when the bird was found
(c) Where the bird was found – as much detail as possible
(d) Was it freshly dead or dead a while. Is there any evidence of how it died.

Either send in the band or you may keep it if you wish, but if the numbers are hard to read, the Banding Office would like it returned.

Banding Office Contact details;
Email: bandingoffic@doc.govt.nz
Phone: 04-471-3248
Address: National Banding Office
Department of Conservation
P.O. Box 108, Wellington

On December 14th DOC issued a press release concerning the recent reports of dead little penguins being found on beaches across Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland. Many of the birds died from starvation and exhaustion. DOC Biodiversity Ranger Shelley Ogle said the high level of deaths may have been due to recently fledged chicks failing to find adequate food supplies or due to La Nina a weather occurrence which results in warmer oceans and a change in the penguins' food supplies. The discovery of a very large number of dead chicks on Matiu/Somes Island on 14 November occurred prior to the deaths reported in the Auckland area. However, they are likely related as weather changes such as La Nina would have widespread effects in New Zealand, including the waters round Wellington Harbour.

In 2018 there was a widespread die-off of little penguins on East Coast the North Island which was associated with a La Nina weather event. Graeme Taylor said that the 2018 die-off was a one in twenty year cycle. He said "The last really-big die-off occurred in 1998, when about 3500 penguins washed up on beaches. The sort of numbers we're hearing about could indicate we're up around that several thousand range."

https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2020-media-releases/reports-of-dead-penguins-around-auckland/
https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/354729/hundreds-of-blue-penguins-die-off-starved-by-la-nina
https://www.sunlive.co.nz/news/93575-starving-penguins-washing-up.html

Reg Cotter, 1930-2020

Reg, a long-tine member of the Wellington branch of Birds New Zealand, died on the 16th of October. There is an obituary for Reg in December issue of Birds New Zealand. Reg played a leading role in the initial stages of the penguin studies on Matiu / Somes Island described in this newsletter.

Photo – Dallas Bishop, March 2004, Mana Island – Reg Cotter & sooty shearwater chick.

Wanted – Wellington Correspondent for the Birds New Zealand Magazine

Time for a change. After more than 10 years as the Wellington correspondent for Southern Bird and now the Birds New Zealand magazine it is time for a change. The correspondent is required to write 4 reports each year on birding activities and sightings occurring in the Wellington region. The reports are short with a maximum of 500 words. Please contact Geoff de Lisle at osnzwelly@gmail.com if you would like to be the new Wellington Correspondent.

East Harbour banded dotterels – 2020 breeding season

The 2020/2021 breeding season at the Eastbourne study site has once again been dogged by large-scale predation. The good news was that there had been no recorded cases until very recently of predation of nests by domestic cats. While there has virtually no predation of eggs, nearly all of the chicks have been predated prior to fledging. The major culprit this season appears to be black-backed gulls. A black-backed gull was observed killing all three chicks from a nest. Unfortunately, there have been recent sightings of two domestic cats in the nesting area. On the nights of the 21st and 22nd of December a domestic cat was observed by trail camera predated a nest.

Black-backed gulls are recognised as a major predator of black-fronted terns, wrybill and banded dotterels nesting on braided rivers in Canterbury. They are known to predate both nests and chicks. To reduce the predation, the Canterbury Regional Council have recently been reducing gull numbers on the Hurunui River by poisoning using bread baits laced with alpha chloralose. In many parts of New Zealand black-backed gull numbers have increased from scavenging food sources through human settlement. Most notably, poor management of landfill sites has resulted in a major expansion of gull numbers in many areas.

The breeding of banded dotterels at the study site at the outlet of Lake Kohangapiriri (Pencarrow Lakes) has been more successful but not without problems. MIRO and the Greater Wellington Regional Council have an active trapping programme to remove potential predators such as hedgehogs, stoats, rats and feral cats. Large numbers of rabbits have been present in the study area in 2020. In October 2020 a stoat was observed on several occasions in the fenced area where banded dotterels were nesting. On the 4th of November a stoat was seen (picture) in the fenced nesting area taking two well grown juvenile rabbits from their burrow. Subsequently, five stoats have been killed as part of the predator control programme.

There is limited evidence that spur-winged plovers predate banded dotterel nests and chicks or other ground-nesting birds. A group of 6 (3 pairs) of banded dotterel adults was observed harassing a pair of spur-winged plovers. They eventually drove the spur-winged plovers away from the area which contained banded dotterel chicks.

Trail cameras have identified both harrier and black-backed gulls as nest predators at the Lake Kohangapiripiri site.

MIRO have added 5 SA2 traps to target cats along the coast road to stop them heading south to the lakes. They may be adding more in the monitoring area if they prove their worth. Cats both feral and domestic are an ongoing concern as predators of banded dotterels. They have caused devastating effects on the nesting success of banded dotterels at Kaikoura. The latest edition of New Zealand Geographic has a feature article on cats and includes summaries of predation by cats of banded dotterels at Kaikoura and Eastbourne.
https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/our-love-affair-with-cats/?source=homepage

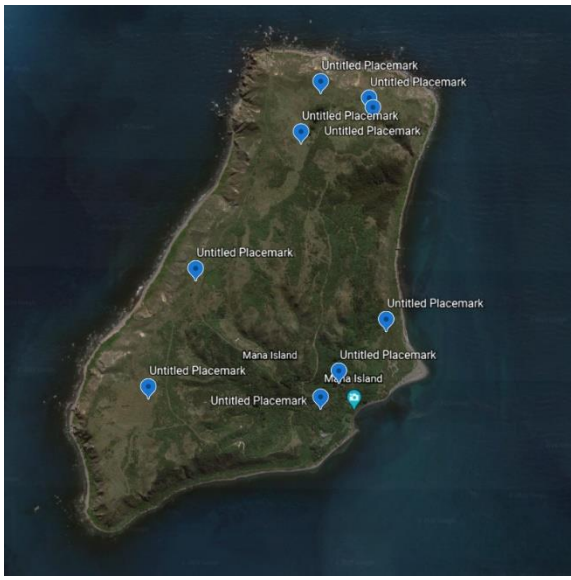
https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2018/control-of-black-backed-gulls-to-protect-rare-braided-river-birds/ https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/black-backed-gulls/

Mana Island Observations

Falcon are well known as a highly specialised, avian predator. One is often alerted to their presence from the reaction of other birds species, such as alarm calls of tui. The picture is of a falcon on the trig at the Lighthouse, Mana Island being harassed / attacked by a group of welcome swallows. They eventually drove the falcon from its perch. Subsequently, the falcon was seen vigorously but unsuccessfully chasing a yellow-crowned parakeet. The picture (left) is the result of a more successful chase by falcon on Mana Island of yellow-crowned parakeet.

The concrete gannet colony on Mana Island has recently had some feathered visitors. Two gannets were observed by FOMI members during their visit on 28th of November. Subsequently, a single gannet has been observed over a number of days at the colony. This bird returns to the same area of the colony and appears to have some favourite concrete gannets. In addition to the concrete gannets this colony also has a couple of speakers broadcasting gannet calls. There is only a single real gannet in each of the following pictures.

Dallas and I during our recent stay on Mana Island (29/11/2020 – 4/12/2020) recorded observations of fernbirds while carrying out various other duties for DOC (cleaning takahe water troughs). The map summarises our observations which are notable with birds being widespread. The blue markers represent where one or a pair of fernbirds were observed. This was not a comprehensive survey of the island but the indications are that the transfer of fernbirds is successful with suitable habitat over much of the island.



Canada geese are not commonly seen on Mana. The pair photographed were seen on the grass by the boatshed and moved off to the sea. They are likely to be residents usually occupying the western beaches.

Other interesting observations on our recent visits to Mana include the presence of one or two reef herons and on the 29th of November a shining cuckoo. Ironically, very few grey warbler, the hosts of shining cuckoo, were seen/heard during this visit whereas whitehead, the hosts of long-tailed cuckoo were numerous. Long-tailed cuckoo have only once been recorded (December 2008) on Mana Island in eBird.

Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop

Pied Shag Nesting Colony – Lake Kohangatera (Pencarrow Lake)

In January 2017 pied shags were discovered nesting on *Coprosma proquinqua* at the outlet of Lake Kohangatera. This colony was unique in the Wellington region as all the other pied shag colonies were based on trees (macrocarpa and pine trees). Pied shags have continued to use the Lake Kohangatera site which has expanded upstream. The most prominent change at the site has been the loss of vegetation and the nests are now sitting directly on the ground. In December 2020 there were 10 active nests. Pied shags nest throughout the year.

January 2017

December 2020