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Otago Region Newsletter 3 /2021

March 2021

Ornithological Snippets

We may be into autumn, but it seems the breeding season has not yet finished. On 9 March Alan Baker saw **Brown Creepers** feeding very vocal fledged young in the Dunedin Town Belt, by the Lachlan counting station. Meanwhile a pair of **Grey Teal** with 5 small young were at Henley on 3 March, and Suzanne Schofield reported **Black Swans** nesting in Balclutha early in the month.

A **NZ Pigeon** in Ranfurly on 20 Feb by Petrina Duncan was a long way from any other records in eBird, with one seen at Hyde in October 2020 the only other record within 50km or so. Nick Beckwith & Adrienne Mulqueen found and photographed a **Marsh Crake** at Upper Tomahawk Lagoon; other observers later in the week increased the number to 3.

An article in the ODT on 2 March relates the tale of a **NZ Falcon** in Alexandra which was hooked while trying to catch a fisherman's bait which was being cast. <https://www.odt.co.nz/regions/central-otago/catch-and-release>.

Satellite tracking has revealed that a juvenile **Bar-tailed Godwit**, which spent 440 days in Otago, set off on its northward journey from Blueskin Bay on 6 March <https://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=10830>

Black-fronted Terns returned to Balclutha on 20th February, with 48 there three days later. Also on 20, a "small grey wader" was seen by Suzanne Schofield on the lagoons in Balclutha. Unfortunately it disappeared before its identity could be established.

Finally, while investigating a no exit road near Tuapeka Mouth (for Atlas purposes!) the compiler found himself in a farmyard surrounded by chooks, one of which jumped on to the back of his bike, as if to say, "Tick me, I'm a Red Junglefowl!" The offer was declined.

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

eBird News

We're now into the second autumn period of the atlas, and as there were significant restrictions due to covid last year, most areas have scant coverage so far. Due to the first weekend of April being Easter, there is not going to be an organised Atlas field trip next month. However, there follow some suggestions of squares that have little or no autumn coverage so far, if you have some spare time at any stage.

No data

DZ31 south of Brighton. This square is mostly sea, but there is about 3km of coast to explore, and Big Stone Road appears to be accessible, and goes past plantation (access from DY31)

Little coverage

DX31 North Taieri. Habitats here include lifestyle blocks/farmland (not exciting, but generally a good variety of birds), forestry along the Silverstream Valley Road, and native bush at Chalkies Track.

DW30 & DW31 Hindon/Mt Allan area. I explored this area with a friend in November, and had a very pleasant day's birding. Access from George King Memorial Drive – we went as far as Hindon Station, then across to Clarks Junction, going down several dead end roads towards the river. DW30 is mainly open country, but the SE half of DW30 has a fair bit of forestry, and it might be worth heading towards Mt Allan from North Taieri.

If you feel like venturing further afield, there are whole swathes of empty squares (coverage wise, not birds, hopefully) north of Middelmarsh and around the Maniototo, and along the Pig Route to Palmerston. Alternatively, if you're heading away to Queenstown or Wanaka, the whole of SH6 from Milton to Alexandra is almost untouched.

In the Queenstown-Lakes District, the area around Lake Hayes is fairly well covered, but anywhere else in the region would reward a bit of time spent counting. Even Queenstown has some obvious gaps. Check the Atlas Coverage map, and my personal recommendation is to look at the Species Observed map, as yellow shading on the Effort Hours map can be anything from a 5 minute count up to 5 hours of coverage.

Wherever you may go, please be sure to check out different habitats, especially keeping an eye out for wetland areas, and take care.

Over the last few weeks the eBird filters for Otago have been completely revamped, and are now hopefully more accurate. Many of the filter limits are now more conservative than previously, so if you do get a request for more details because of a high count, state how you arrived at the figure, or at least confirm that the count is accurate. Please don't discard the count, or amend it downwards - remember, the filters are based on actual counts, and not the other way round! They will then be adjusted if necessary.

Richard Schofield cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Toko Mouth Atlas Trip

I must admit that at rise-and-shine time that 7 March Sunday morning, with a forecast of strong cold sou'westers, and thundery showers, maybe turning to rain, I was feeling less than enthusiastic about atlasing. Last month's necessary but uninspiring trip to Lawrence (highlight- icecream!) still had its demoralising claws in me. But, cheered by recent godwit and marsh crake spotting, I made up my flask and lunch and headed for Bunnings. Two carloads of birders set off for the Toko Mouth rendezvous with Richard. The weather was not looking good. But this birding trip was just a joy....

At the self-proclaimed 'Toko Mouth Beach Resort' a cold and blowy visit to the beach found White-fronted Terns, Black-billed Gulls, assorted shags, and a lot more excitement over the Southern Ocean. Gannet, Sooty Shearwaters, an Arctic Skua (thanks to Oscar and Ela for the identification) and mollymawks (I could JUST see one on the very lumpy horizon!), an abundance of riches. At this point we split into three teams to diverge and conquer the adjacent squares. One group walked further down the beach, another checked out the wetland on the other side of the river.

Our group drove south initially through farmland (ok, a pretty skimpy count here in the teeth of a squall!) then happened upon a bush-filled gully which clearly extended some distance. Stunningly, after a quiet start, we first heard a Fernbird call and then saw one, then two, in a pittosporum, right next to the road. Bellbirds were calling, Brown Creepers whizzing about, Silvereyes twittering, Grey Warblers singing, a Sacred Kingfisher was spotted – oh, the value of these bush remnants for our birdlife. Further on a small wetland and pool, with a Grey Teal and a Scaup keeping company, and a family of startled Pukeko. Vigorous viewing sadly failed to flush out a Marsh Crake for a hopeful Mary. No matter. On to Measley Beach.



Petrina fearlessly walking along the road south of Measley Beach into the approaching storm

Measley Beach, a delightfully ill-named (sorry!) settlement, with Variable Oystercatchers, Pied Stilts, assorted gulls, White-fronted terns, more Sooty Shearwaters, a positively identified Arctic Skua (yesss..!) and a Black Shag which seemed to be struggling in the water. Fortunately the shag eventually managed to take off and head to shore. (It would not have been a good day for a seabird rescue.)

We headed back to the car and spotted a couple of Royal Spoonbills snuggling in the creek. I understood why they head north in autumn. Our last stop before lunch was at a bridge over the same creek, only a little further south, (but in the next square, Richard!) Lots of birds here and on the surrounding farmland, a Sacred Kingfisher (to Petrina's great delight!), two very "Grey" Ducks and plenty of Paradise Shelducks, Starlings, Mallard, Welcome Swallows, Redpolls, and even a couple of Gannets showing up beautifully against the approaching blackness. The squall hit as we leapt into the car and headed for the lunch rendezvous.



Back at the Toko Mouth Domain BBQ shelter we all seemed to have had a rich morning's birding. The Arctic Skua was picked as highlight bird for most of us. It was a first for me, so definitely my personal favourite. After a group photo, off we went to find some more feathered friends. Much slimmer pickings for our group this time, but good counts of Redpoll, Goldfinch, Pukeko, and Paradise Shelducks, and as a final flourish, a large flock of Spur-winged Plovers as we approached Milton.

We stopped briefly on the way home at the old Ewing Phosphate building, in the hope of seeing a rumoured Little Owl, but there were none.

So here are the summary figures from a pretty chuffed Richard
Counts in 4 separate squares, 10 observers, 30 checklists, 52 species seen in total. A great reflection on an area with a good range of quality habitat, and the guidance of top-notch birders. For me, it is always a joy and a privilege to go birding with so many experienced, knowledgeable, enthusiastic people.

I learn so much, and afterwards, I enjoy my own birding even more. Thank you all.

Rowena East

BirdsNZ National News

Birds NZ Conference and AGM, Queen's Birthday, 5 - 7 June, 2021 Thames



The annual meeting of Birds NZ is being held in Thames at the Civic Centre. This is a great chance to visit a different and warmer part of NZ in the middle of winter.

There will be two days of presentations on recent bird research and a variety of field trips around the Coromandel area and to Pokorokoro Miranda to see where all our SI oystercatchers and wrybills go in winter.

Check out details and registration and accommodation options on the Birds NZ website www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/

Birds NZ Youth Camp April 2021



Birds New Zealand Youth Camp www.birdsnz.org.nz

Introducing basic birding skills and good birds
April 18th – 24th
Napier area

Ages: 14-18
Cost: \$200 per person

Find out more -
YouthCamp@birdsnz.org.nz



Otago Branch News

A week in the life of the Marsh Crakes at Tomahawk, 1 – 5 March 2021

Nick was the first to spot them on Monday, 1 March, about noon. He was heading down peninsula so stopped in at Tomahawk (behind hall) for a look. There were a few pukekos wandering around in the raupo; it looked like a good spot for a marsh crake so he stood there for 30 mins and one appeared! Watched it for about half hour, wasn't visible all the time and very difficult to see even when you knew where it was. He then showed them to Adrienne.



Then Oscar went to explore early Wednesday morning (8am) and spotted 2 within 5 minutes of arriving and after an hour or so thinks there may have been 4 individuals. The crakes made foraging excursions out from the raupo for damselflies and the like. Maureen saw them at 12.20 on Wednesday. Mary spent 1.5 h at the lagoon Thursday morning before spotting 2 briefly among the raupo. Rowena had good views on Friday morning. I wonder what the crakes have thought of their continual stream of visitors.

If you are signed up to eBird Alerts, then these sightings will have automatically come to your email Inbox.

While waiting, there were other birds to watch – pukeko feeding the pith from raupo stems to young one, white faced heron fishing, flotilla of juvenile shoveler (2 broods this season-first for lagoon), new scaup ducklings (3 or 4 broods this season at the lagoon) and a white heron (Nick and Oscar).

Tomahawk Lagoon 3 March





Photos from a dawn trip. Marsh crake seen well behind the Tomahawk hall and a kōtuku between the lagoons - thanks to Nick and Adrienne for the tip off!

Oscar Thomas



Oamaru Penguin Symposium May 2021

6 and 7 May

at the Opera House in Oamaru

The event will include two days of scientific presentations about penguins and an excursion to the Oamaru Blue Penguin Colony. It is a meeting for all penguin researchers, rehabilitators, students, field workers, volunteers, basically anyone with an interest in penguins.

We will accept presentations from speakers on any species of penguin and even would love to hear from presenters about other seabird species.

For information or to register, visit: www.oamarupenguinsymposium.com

Wild Dunedin Festival 22 - 28 April 2020

There's a lot happening during this year's Wild Dunedin Festival with events for all ages during the April school holidays. This year there's a focus on rewilding.



Get to know Pakake, the NZ sea lion with DOC and the NZ Sea Lion Trust, join children's entertainer Allie Simpson for a story and yoga about sea lions at Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, or try your hand at the NZ Sea Lion Pub Quiz.

Photo: Alex Weller

If you have children or grandchildren to entertain during the school holidays, check out the Wild Dunedin Festival's programme for many nature and wildlife focussed activities.

Orokonui Ecosanctuary is holding a Walk for Wildlife, and on Earth Day you can explore the Ecosanctuary for \$5. Two free Wild Buses will be taking people without their own transport to the Ecosanctuary on Earth Day, plus there's an opportunity to take the Wild Bus to Penguin Place, and on the final night of the festival the bus will run to Sinclair Wetlands for a look at the night sky with astronomers and telescopes.

There are field trips to a covenanted property Possums End at Portobello, and the Halo team are running a trip to learn about Source to Sea, a project designed to enhance forest and freshwater habitats, with information about funding.

A panel will be discussing Otago Peninsula post possum at Portobello, and on Anzac Day in the Upper Botanic Garden there will be a range of activities and workshops for adults and children on pest detection, trapping and bird identification, plus the DCC will be giving away trees.

Paul Sorrell and Glenda Rees will be discussing the secrets of capturing great bird images, and Paul will be talking about his new book *Getting Closer: Rediscovering Nature Through Bird Photography*, and Birds NZ will be running the popular annual Tomahawk Birdwatching event.

There will be an information session on the Kei Hea Ngā Kākā project at the Waitati Community Hall and sessions for children on kākā at North East Valley School.

This year's festival has several opportunities for boat trips on the Otago Harbour – to Quarantine Island on Port to Port's Sootychaser, story time for young children on the Monarch, a trip to explore Dunedin's ancient volcano, a hands on opportunity for intermediate age children to take scientific measurements while out on the Monarch, and trips to and from the Marine Studies Centre activities at Portobello via Sootychaser embarking from Back Beach at Port Chalmers.

Larnach Castle is running a Native Plant Detective activity throughout the school holidays, with prizes, and free entry for children. The Royal Albatross Centre is putting on express tours at a bargain price, Blue Penguins Pukekura will have excellent family deals, and Penguin Place and Monarch Wildlife Cruises are offering discounts for their tours. This is a great time to visit these local wildlife attractions, when tourism is winding down.

Many other wild activities will be available at Otago Peninsula, Otago Museum, Toitū, Dunedin Public Library and the Art Gallery. And special guest Suzy Cato and local musicians will be celebrating nature through music and song.

For all Festival information visit www.wilddunedin.nz. And you can follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

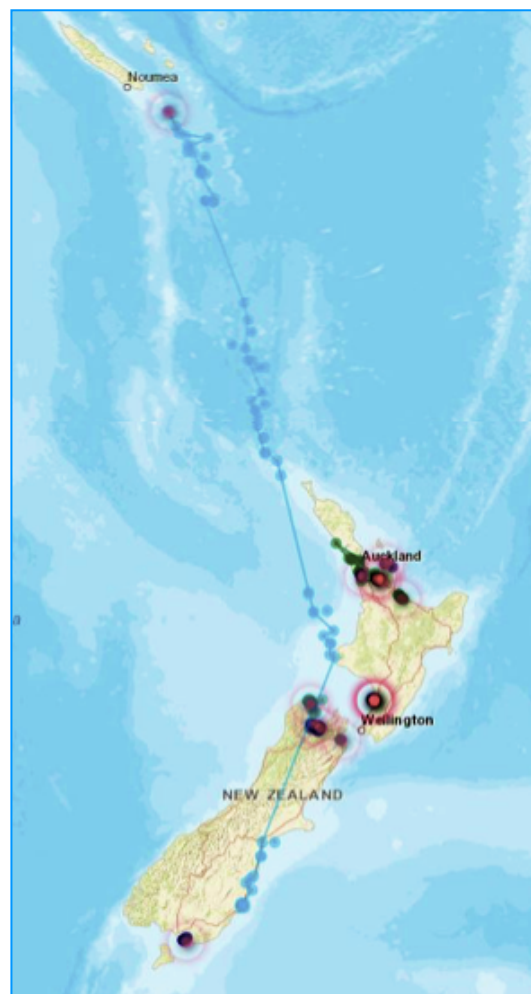
Suzanne Middleton



Godwit tracking time again!

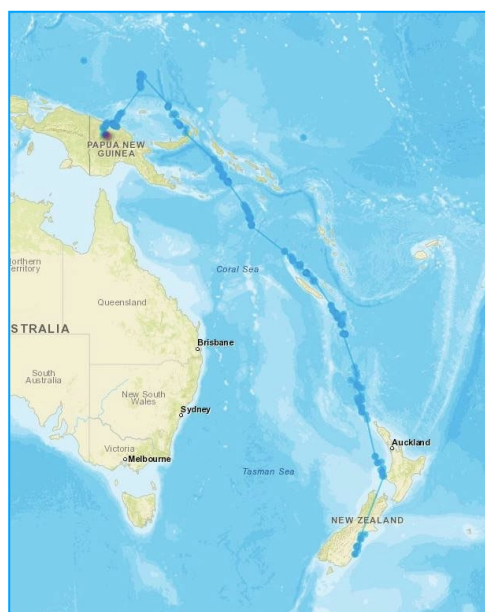
Postby [philbattley](#) » Mon Mar 08, 2021 3:29 pm
Right, godwit tracking time again. It's going to be interesting this year as we still have a bunch of adults transmitting that we tracked last year, along with a bunch of juveniles from 2019, some of which could be embarking on their first northward migration this year. We may even have wagers on how many of those young birds will go. So, with that anticipation...

It's on! The first bird to be tracked has departed, and it's a youngster from the Manawatu that relocated to Otago and spent >440 days there until Saturday, when it took off and headed up the coast. While there is a delay of a few hours between tracking and those data coming up on the Max Planck tracking site (http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019_BTGO/) this bird should have passed New Caledonia by now. So this is a 2-year old bird that will be flying with a bunch of adults (much like the juvenile that joined in last year before seeing sense and backtracking at New Caledonia), hopefully all the way to the Yellow Sea. It departed exactly around when Otago birds are leaving in numbers. If you want to know more about variation in migration timing in godwits, read this: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fevo.2020.00052/full>.



Adults will be visible on the same website as last year:

<https://www.globalflywaynetwork.org/flyway/east-asian-australasian-flyway/map>



Postby [philbattley](#) » Fri Mar 12, 2021 12:39 pm
Every time we track, we learn. This time we learnt that a first-time 2-year old godwit may reconsider its decision! With no contrary winds, 4RYRY decided to stop in Papua New Guinea, after 7000 km. Will be interesting to see whether it carries on or treats this as enough for the season, and summers in the tropics.

Phil Battley

Updates about the migration of juvenile godwits extracted from emails from Phil Battley and Jesse Conklin

Nick won't be seeing 4RYRY at Blueskin Bay again for a while, as she left on its northward migration for the first time in its life about 5 pm on Saturday 6th March! This is the first of the 2019 juveniles that were fitted with GPS transmitters to start migrating. Nick found and photographed it on Warrington Beach last summer and has spotted it every so often through the winter and last photographed it on 11 February 2021.

We only expect a few of these young birds to migrate, and this one being the first fits with the early departures from down south. This brave 21-month old 4RYRY flew on past the Solomon Islands in only a few days but turned around in the Bismarck Sea and has spent her time since then in estuaries in northern PNG. Will she stop migrating and spend another year there before heading to the Yellow Sea? Will she return to Warrington? These tagged birds are providing incredible new information about migration patterns.

The route the godwits travel can be tracked by GPS and maps can be seen at the Max Planck site, where you will be able to keep track of it: http://behavioural-ecology.orn.mpg.de:3838/NZ2019_BTGO/

As of 17 March, two other juveniles have started on their migration north. Map below shows tracks past Solomons. 4BYBY is the turquoise track staying around PNG.

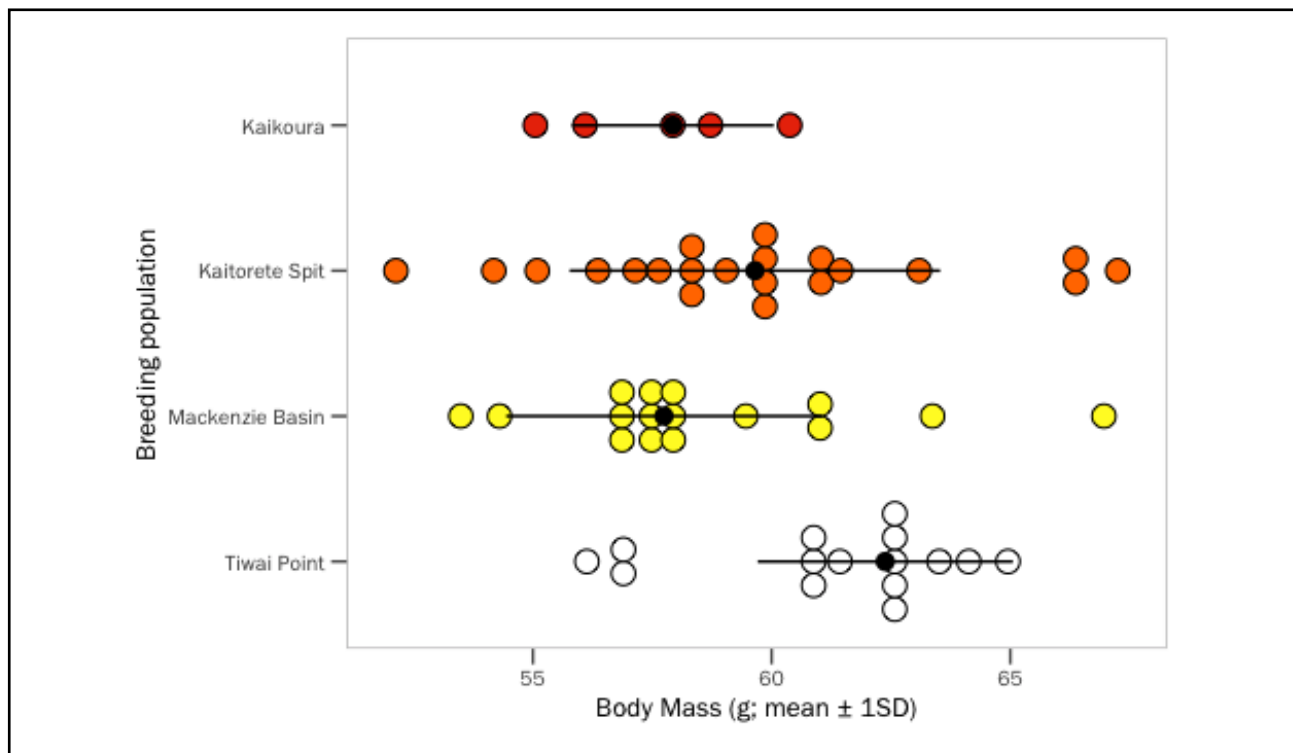


Banded Dotterel

Dear Banded Dotterel / Double-banded Plover enthusiasts,

I'm reaching out to you to share the Banded Dotterel / Double-banded Plover data I collected in October last year at four breeding sites throughout the South Island. My motivation in sharing these data with you all is to initiate a range-wide collaborative effort to resight colour-marked individuals and build upon the curious insights about the species' domestic and trans-Tasman movements made by Ray Pierce, Clive Minton, et al. in the 1980's. I am working closely on this project with Emma Williams and Colin O'Donnell of the DOC Christchurch office.

The four sites I chose to focus colour-banding efforts were: Kaitorete Spit, Kaikoura, Lake Tekapo, and Tiwai Point. I chose these sites as they form the latitudinal and ecological extremes in the South Island corresponding with the migratory/resident phenotypes shown in Ray Pierce's 1999 *Notornis* paper (found [here](#)). At each site I conducted nest and brood searching, and captures of chicks and adults. It was a relatively short field season in 2020, as I was mainly there this time to network with local collaborators and assess logistics for future work. I started fieldwork on October 1st and finished on November 1st. In total I colour-banded 99 individuals (54 adults, 45 chicks). The attached plot demonstrates an apparent latitudinal trend in body mass (following Bergmann's Rule: albeit sample sizes are extremely low at this point!).



To access the data and make your own entries in a standardised format, I've made a Google Spreadsheet found here: [Banded Dotterel Database](#). The "ReadMe" sheet contains all the column definitions for each data table.



Birds banded at Kaitorete Spit have an orange (O) darvic on their upper left tarsus, Kaikoura have red (R), Lake Tekapo have yellow (Y), and Tiwai Point have white (W) – as used in the attached plot. I banded all adults with a unique combination of four colour bands (two on each tarsus) and a standard alpha-numeric metal band on the left tibia. Chicks received a single

colour on their right tarsus and a metal on their left tibia. If you happen to go out in dotterel / plover habitat for birding or surveys it would be lovely if you could keep an eye out for any of these banded birds! I've described in the spreadsheet how to enter resightings – please let me know if you have any questions. I've set up the spreadsheet to allow users to enter data freely.



I'm looking forward to seeing how this capture-mark-resighting project matures. It would be wonderful if we can compile enough records to further understand migratory schedules and space use of the species over the annual cycle and compare these trends to the earlier works conducted in the 1980's. I aim to continue colour-banding at these four South Island sites annually for the foreseeable future, so we should be able to build up a decently-sized colour-marked population. For those of you who are already colour-banding dotterels/plovers, I welcome you to contribute your own capture data to increase our sample size and coverage. If any of you have any further columns to add (or remove) from this database, no worries, I'd be happy hear your ideas for improvement. Furthermore, if you have any questions about the format of the data, just send me an email and I can help clarify. Please feel free to circulate this spreadsheet widely amongst your avian research community – ideally we get as many eyes in the field as possible searching for colour-marked birds.

Big thanks to Allanah Purdie, Hazel Holmes, Emma Bardsley, Simone Cleland, Julia Gibson, Richard Maloney, Ailsa and Ted Howard, and of course Emma Williams and Colin O'Donnell for helping facilitate the collection of these data.

I look forward to seeing what we discover in these data over the coming years!

Luke Eberhart-Phillips (NZNBBS 0811)

luke.eberhart@orn.mpg.de

P.S. – click [here](#) to view a short video I captured of a courting pair assessing a potential nest scrape at Kaitorete Spit, enjoy!

Programme for 2021

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held on the 4th Wed at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

Wed 24 March	Oscar Thomas Birding from The Chathams to Here.
Sat 24 April	Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching, 10 am to noon. This is our event for Wild Dunedin Festival; we plan to have telescopes to let the public see birds close-up and we will help identify them Contact Andrew if you can help; phone 454 5830
Wed 28 April	James Hunter Chasing takahe and making maps.
Saturday 8 May	Global Big Day and Bird Atlas Field Trip. To Hawksbury Lagoon, Karitane and surrounds. Leaving Dunedin at 9am. Please register with Richard (027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com) to receive more travel info and updates.
Wed 26 May	Scott Forrest Understanding the movements and behaviours of the Orokonui kaka.
Wed 23 June	Myrene Otis The foraging ecology of Tawaki in Milford Sound.
Wed 28 July	Georgina Pickerell The Robins of Mopanui.
Wed 25 August	Lara Urban Using DNA analysis to help conservation of takahe and kakapo.
Sun 12 September	Dunedin Botanic Garden Guided Birdwatching Walk , starting 10am. 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 22 September	Bruce McKinlay Birding experiences in Costa Rica. Update and plans for Town Belt Bird Count (October and November).
Wed 27 October	Rachel Hickcox. Where hoiho go foraging at sea and why? – results of research mapping and modelling hoiho presence and preferences.
Wed 24 November	Members night..

Suggestions of locations for field trips and atlassing trips, and offers to help lead trips would really be appreciated, please contact Mary birds.otago@birdsnnz.org.nz

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

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