



Birds New Zealand
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Otago Region Newsletter 4 /2021 *April 2021*

In Memory of Lesley Gowans



*It is with sadness that we acknowledge
the death of long-time Birds NZ
member and friend, Lesley Gowans.*

Lesley is an important part of the history of our branch. She was actively involved in all aspects, from monthly meetings, field trips, research projects to attending conferences.

For over 20 years Lesley did the twice-yearly counts of waders at Aramoana. She also spent many hours out on the estuaries with fellow birder, Peter Schweigman, to resight banded godwits and spoonbills, which provided important data to learn about their migration patterns.

For over 10 years, fortnightly during spring, she was part of teams that counted birds at Orokonui, both before and after the fence was constructed.

For 5 years, Lesley took part in many surveys throughout Otago, gathering bird sightings for the previous NZ Bird Atlas. Lesley coordinated our Millennium Project, a survey of kingfishers throughout Otago.



5 Minute bird counts at Mt Watkins



Peter, Lesley and Lala counting at Hawksbury Lagoon



Counting Godwits on Aramoana Saltmarsh

Lesley's enthusiasm and delight in watching birds made her great company on the many field trips we shared. Her Birds NZ friends will each have their own happy recollections of birding with Lesley.

Ornithological Snippets

In addition to the **Marsh Crakes** at Tomahawk Lagoon mentioned last month, which have been seen by numerous observers, Mary Thompson saw 2 at the north end of Lake Dunstan on 21st March. A **White Heron** has been seen regularly at Tomahawk Lagoon throughout the period, while another was at Lake Tuakitoto on 11th April. Jane & Jim Young saw about 50 **Spoonbills** by Catlins Lake on 8th April. A **Spotted Shag** was reported from Ross Creek Reservoir on 21st March by Alan Baker

Not quite in Otago, but still on the Otago eBird list, a **Song Thrush** was seen from a passing ship 380km SW of Dunedin on 13th March. A **House Sparrow** roost at South Otago High School in Balclutha comprised over 1000 birds on 17th April, while 700 **Starlings** at a roost near Te Houka on 26th March had transferred to an alternative site 2.5km away on 10th April.

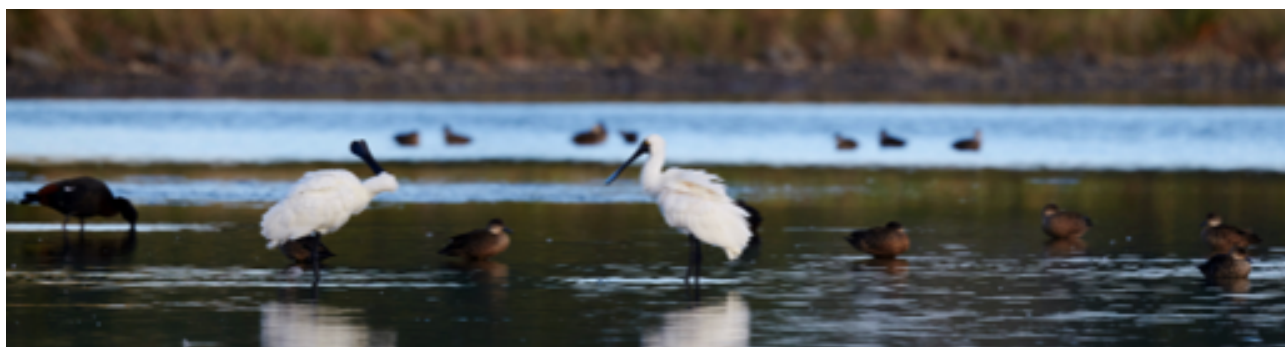
Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com Richard Schofield

Marsh Crake at Bendigo end of Lake Dunstan

Two weeks after Mary spotted a Marsh crake, Nick visited and enjoyed watching and photographing them for about an hour. More photos will be shown at the next meeting.



eBird News



Global Big Day and NZ Bird Atlas Field Trip Saturday 8 May

Global Big Day is an international birding event to see how many species can be seen on one day, world-wide. The total for 2020 was just over 6500 species. The NZ Bird Atlas is a nation-wide bird survey, which aims to map the distribution and abundance of all bird species in NZ. The data for both these surveys is being collected digitally.

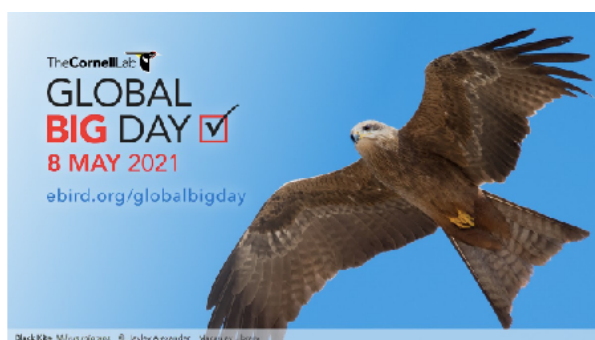
The Otago Branch of Birds NZ is holding this field trip to help participants learn more about the project and how to take part, as well as contributing NZ native species to the list for the Global Big Day!

Perfect for: all those who enjoy birds and want to improve identification skills, learn how to survey birds for the NZ Bird Atlas using eBird mobile app, as well as compete for the most birds seen in one day.

Location: Hawksbury Lagoon, Karitane and surrounding area

Transport: Carpooling from outside Bunnings, Otaki Street at 9am (\$10 fuel contribution to driver). If finding your own way there, meet at Hawksbury Lagoon at the end of Stewart St, Waikouaiti at 10am. Bring own lunch and refreshments and expect trip to last most of the day.

Registration essential: contact Richard (027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com)



New Zealand Bird Atlas 

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/home>



Oscar Thomas is organising two full-day pelagic trips with Ezifish Charters out of Moeraki to visit the offshore canyons on Saturday July 3rd, and Sunday 4th 2021.

The Saturday trip is fully booked (you can ask to go on the waiting list), but places are still available on the Sunday trip. The cost will be approximately \$120 each. Contact oscarkokako@gmail.com for more information or to secure a spot on a voyage.

This is a fantastic time of year for a winter foray into the cooler waters of our southerly seas. Naturally no guarantees on what will be seen, but old favourites the Cape, White-chinned and Giant Petrels are likely to hang around, and there is potential for rare and sought after subantarctic species such as Grey Petrel, Broad-billed Prion, Grey-backed Storm Petrel and up to 10 species of Albatross. Marine mammals including Hector's Dolphin, Long-finned Pilot Whales and Shepherd's Beaked Whales have also all been observed in the area.

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/

Otago Branch News

Wild Dunedin Festival



Birds NZ offered birdwatching through scopes at Tomahawk Lagoon. Thanks to Andrew Austen for organising the birds, the helpers and the visitors (will report at next meeting).

Some of you may have seen our ad in the double-page spread in the ODT; thanks to Petrina Duncan, who used her design and communication expertise to help design our ad, which was rather striking, I thought.

Emma Salmon and Suzanne Middleton, two of our members, have done a great job on the organising committee for the festival-well done. Karthic is showing his film of Sniper – the yellow-eyed penguin dog.

Congratulations to Lala Frazer, who was presented with the Wild Dunedin Wild Hero 2020 award for all her work on conservation, especially on the Otago Peninsula.

Snippets from the Sea - Seabirds

Friday, 23 April at 3.30pm

NZ Marine Studies Centre, 185 Hatchery Rd, Dunedin

Join a variety of experts who are connected to the ocean, marine science, climate change, and sustainability fields for short presentations, films, afternoon tea, and knowledge sharing. Book your **free** ticket at

<https://www.eventbrite.co.nz/e/snippets-from-the-sea-seabird-science-tickets-138709250101>



Birds of Arthur's Pass – Oscar Thomas

Earlier this month, Ela Hunt and I and joined Christchurch birders Noah Fenwick and Greg McKenzie on a trip over the divide from Arthur's Pass National Park to the stunning Otira Valley. We were hoping to find a local pair of New Zealand Rock Wren/pīwauwau that had gone undetected for over a year. As our only true alpine bird, it is unknown exactly how they survive the harsh climate above the tree line all year round. Some think they may even have a period of semi-hibernation. The pīwauwau are poor fliers and ground nesters making them easy targets for stoats and other predators, so we weren't certain if they could still be found in Otira.

A leisurely amble up the mountain valley quickly turned hot with the sun shining down, along which we came across some interesting fauna and flora including endemic copper butterflies (*Lycaena* sp.), alpine grasshoppers (*Brachaspis collinus*), and sundew (*Drosera arcturi*). Eventually the sloping rocky trail levelled out into the 'rock garden' - a beautiful array of alpine plants and spectacular boulders. It didn't take long before I heard a sharp peeping sound, and realized it wasn't my imagination this time. There stood a pair of pīwauwau bobbing up and

down curiously at us, mere metres away! The mossy green male was considerably more showy than the drab female, who spent most of her time beneath the rocks out of view. An awesome time taking photos was had for nearly an hour, and a Kea flew high overhead as we descended Otira back to the carpark, ready for our next mission.



NZ Rock Wren/pīwauwau (female)



NZ Rock Wren/pīwauwau (male)

Ela, Noah and I were then dropped off in the middle of nowhere with the intention to venture up the breathtakingly serene Hawdon Valley in Arthur's Pass National Park in search of the critically endangered Orange-fronted Parakeet/kākāriki karaka. Despite being declared extinct twice before (most recently in 1990) and now mostly living life in captivity (100-300 estimated wild), we held out hope.

While finding small green parakeets in a huge green valley seemed achievable, we discovered just before the trip began that captive-bred kākāriki karaka are no longer being released in the Hawdon. A catastrophic beech mast event in 2014 was deemed responsible for the collapse of the Hawdon population, after which only three wild pairs could be found. A release of birds there not long after seemed hopeful, but no sightings have been reported in the Hawdon since

2019. Priority currently lies with the Hurunui South Branch stronghold, but even there the birds remain at constant risk of predation.



Orange-fronted Parakeet, Auckland Zoo

Hawdon Hut is located 9km up the Hawdon Valley, sleeps twenty people, and is first come first serve. Fingers crossed it's not full (there was only one other person there!). It boasts stunningly lush

mountain beech/tawhai rauriki forest with scattered patches of red beech/tawhai raunui, grassy plains and braided riverbeds weaving down the middle. Starting at 2pm, we set off. For the first river crossing we took a very cautious approach, but the slippery red algae was easy enough to avoid and the fast-flowing water stayed below our knees. I think we tallied at least 20 stream crossings total, lucky that there was no rain at all the week prior. It would be a potentially dangerous tramp otherwise. All the way down birdlife was booming, with great numbers of South Island Robin/kakaruwai, Tomtit/ngirungiru, Rifleman/tītiti pounamu, and Bellbird/korimako. Once the clock struck 3pm, the shade of the mountain range to the east began to envelop the valley, and sunlight slowly faded until we found the hut at about 7pm greeted by a Kea calling from the mountaintops above.

We spent the night recovering from lugging heavy packs all the day long (sore shoulders all round) and enjoyed a nice light meal of rice and dhal. The roroa/Great Spotted Kiwi then began to call as we had our hot drinks under the (many) stars. Not too far away, but too far to justify a search after such a long day already.



Mohua

The next morning, we set off at 8am and soon discovered a couple kiwi feathers minutes from the hut, a sign of good things to come I reckon. Our efforts were now focused on patches of Red Beech/tawhai raunui, as they are apparently favoured by the kākāriki. Surprisingly we encountered more flocks of mohua/Yellowhead than we did pīpīpi/Brown Creeper overall, totalling an incredible 21 of these endangered \$100 bill birds!



Yellow-crowned kākāriki

Pest-control as we know pays off, so we still had hope there might be a kākāriki karaka hiding somewhere. Meanwhile, two New Zealand falcons/kārearea made an appearance, at the start and end of the walk, as did a pair of kawau/Black Shags and a rather lost Canada Goose. We chose an open area of Red Beech and decided to stop for lunch. Every now and then a kākāriki call would send everyone into a frenzy, and we tracked down and scrutinized almost a dozen birds only to find that each one was a Yellow-crowned kākāriki. Somewhat disappointing but not unexpected, we still got some lovely views and photos of them while there. So we made it out of the Hawdon (relatively) unscathed, with some incredible experiences and a range of birds, to meet friends Dan and Bobby Phuong in the Shelter carpark. We had promised to find them their first Rock Wren/pīwauwau too, and with yesterday's good luck we had to give Otira another look.

Clouds had started to appear and descended on the valley as we reached the rock garden, and despite a brief shower the pīwauwau pair popped out from their hidey-holes once again to put on a show! With that we headed back to Christchurch, and despite the sad absence of kākāriki karaka, a satisfying and successful trip. Next stop will be Blumine Island. Ngā mihi nui!

Oscar Thomas Writer and Photographer



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

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.

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@birds.nz.org.nz

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

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