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Otago Region Newsletter 5 /2021

May 2021

Ornithological Snippets

In the Queenstown area, Tony Habraken was surprised to see an unseasonal **SIPO** on the Lower Shotover River on 13th April. 2 days earlier he had come across 2 separate **Kea**, about 4km apart, both roadkill. A **Pied Shag** was seen at Diamond Lake near Paradise on 8th May, while 5 were reported from Newhaven, on the Catlins River Estuary, on the same day.

After a blank year in 2020, there have so far been 2 **Cattle Egret** reported this autumn: one at Makarora on 29th April, and another at Waikouaiti, first seen on 8th May, Global Big Day, and seen by numerous observers. (Up to 7 birds were seen near this location in 1991.) A **Bittern** was seen and photographed on the Maclellan River near Papatowai on 11th March.



Cattle egret Oscar Thomas

Finally, a **Fernbird** at Tomahawk Lagoon on 25th April would appear to be the first at that location.

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

eBird News

Global Big Day

A report on the Global Big Day field trip is elsewhere in this newsletter, but a few statistics about the day may be of interest. In addition to the 23 participants who assembled at Hawksbury, a further 10 observers visited various other parts of Otago. A total of 67 species were recorded, which is pretty impressive for the time of year. This put us fourth in the national standings, behind Canterbury (80), Wellington (70) and Manawatu/Wanganui (68). 117 unique checklists were submitted for the day (221 including shares) and 36 atlas squares visited. In New Zealand as a whole, 743 checklists were submitted, covering 125 species; and worldwide the figures were 7256 species from 137,094 checklists. Quite appropriately, the one billionth eBird observation was recorded on the day, being 3 Australasian Swampheens (Pukeko to you and me) in Sydney.

Winter atlassing

In case you hadn't noticed, winter is almost upon us, and so begins another season (and indeed another year) of Atlas fieldwork. So far winter coverage along the coast has been fairly good, though there are still a few gaps to be filled. DX30 (Outram), DX31 (N Taieri) and DY30 (Momona), in particular, are a bit sparse, but if you get the chance to travel inland then you have almost a blank canvas. Check out the Atlas Effort Map <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/effortmap> for opportunities.

There will not be an Atlas field trip at the start of June, due to the Birds NZ Conference in Thames over Queen's Birthday Weekend. The next trip will be to the Middlemarch/Macraes Flat area on **Sunday 27th June** (weather permitting). Please let me know if you are intending to come along.

Looking ahead a little bit, we are planning an Atlas Weekend Field Trip at Labour Weekend (23rd-25th October). We will be based at Alexandra, staying at the Alexandra Holiday Park. A variety of accommodation is available on site, and elsewhere in town. It would be great to have an idea of interest at this stage, so we can book the most suitable accommodation. Please get in touch with me if you are keen.

Winter birding tips

At this time of year, a lot of birds tend to flock, so there can be large areas seemingly devoid of birds, followed by a glut in favoured locations. This is usually where the food is, so look out for crops that have gone to seed, or where stock have been fed silage. If you do come across a large mixed flock of finches – don't panic! Just do your best to get an idea of the relative numbers of each species, and make a note of your best estimate. Some advice on counting large flocks can be found at <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48000838845-how-to-count-birds>. Also at this time of year birds move around, and may be found in areas where they don't breed. Keep an eye out for falcons – listen out for mobbing calls from starlings and Tui – and pipits.

Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com

BirdsNZ National News

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



© Craig McKenzie

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

In Memory of Frank Austin



It is with sadness that we acknowledge the death of long-time Birds NZ member, Frank Austin. He was an active member of Birds NZ for over 40 years.

Frank was one of the first people to be involved in studying the yellow-eyed penguins on the Peninsula. I asked long-time friend and birding colleague, John Darby, to write some of his recollections of working together on the initial yellow-eyed penguin studies initiated by John that underpinned the conservation work that has been done since those early days.

Here are some of his memories of Frank:

"Frank was a quite wonderful companion to have in the field. If I still had access to my field notebooks, I could give you dates, but I no longer have those.

If I were to place a date on the first time that Frank accompanied me in the field it would be during the YEP breeding season of 1983. By 1982 the small amount of field work I had been able to carry out indicated that not

all was well and Frank's offer to help was readily accepted. It takes sometime to get to know any area well enough to be able to memorise all the nest sites, and Frank proved to be a real find in this respect. Papanui Beach and Fuchsia Gully were the areas that we worked together, but we moved to wider fields by 1986 and Frank gathered a great deal of the breeding records from Okia Reserve (Victory Beach) from then onwards well into the late 1990s. I don't believe he missed a single census event every October and December through to 1998.

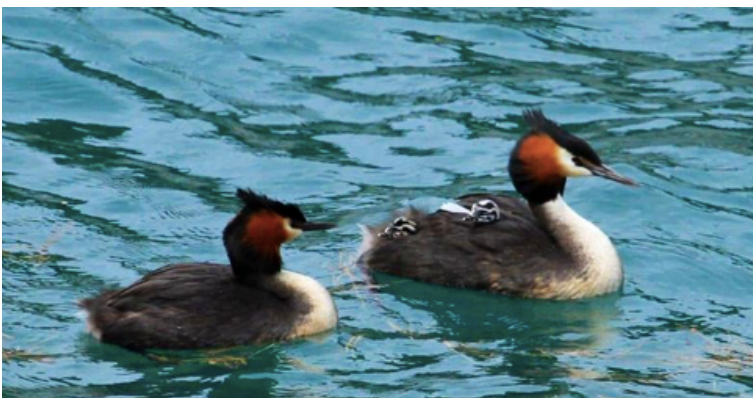
There were memorable events, one particularly I think in 1984 when Frank had been away and joined me late in the breeding season. I was doing Fuchsia Gully and Frank the main area of Papanui Beach. I joined him about an hour later and was concerned to see how pale he was, shaking and very uncertain on his feet. I watched him carefully as he went to check one of the nests as he walked quite casually through a clump of nettle. It was not unusual for us to do that, but early in the season nettle stings were not a big deal and we took on a sort of tolerance to them. It was the only time I ever told Frank what to do as I got him back up the hill, into my truck and headed for Dunedin Hospital. I managed to get him through the Cumberland Street entrance on the way to casualty and we were only part way there when we were spotted by a staff member who made Frank sit down until a wheel chair arrived. All of this under protest from Frank from the moment we left the beach. He was suffering from anaphylactic shock and spent that night in hospital. He made me promise not to tell anyone.

At the end of each afternoon or evenings work, weather permitting we would sit on a high spot and compare notes. He was a most companionable person to be with, a great listener and always very encouraging and someone who I respected enormously for his gentleness and patience. As recently as 2008 he was still actively interested in the welfare of yellow-eyed." – John Darby.

Others with long memories will recall other birding exploits: the days spent camping on Motuara Sanctuary Island to look after the new translocations to the island, and the trapping and banding of 100s of silvereyes that Frank did at his place on Highgate.

The Wanaka grebes 2020-21

Towards the end of this year's breeding season I noted in my March grebe diary to the "Wanaka Sun" that we still had three nests 5, 9 and 10 under observation with a total of 7 eggs between them. However I noted, much to my surprise that there was a new pair at nest 3 fiercely defending the site, but yet to lay. Eventually they did, the latest on record with a three egg clutch completed on the 12 March. They hatched on April 7th. A lot of interesting things happened before and after that hatching.



The season was relatively late in starting, but such breeding efforts that had been made prior to the end of December were almost completely destroyed in very strong gale force winds mostly with eggs being tipped out of nests. Within a week of that mass destruction most birds had re-nested. It was hectic!

Back to nest 3 for a moment. Such was their enthusiasm for breeding they added copious amounts of lake weed to their nest such that I eventually had to intervene and remove material from one side of the nest to counter the huge weight that had been added on the other side, thus over balancing the nest and resulting in a substantial part of the nest being submerged. In the process of restructuring the nest, I found an egg caught up in the weed (very cold) and popped it back into the nest, being aware that it was unlikely to

hatch. Two of the three eggs hatched and surprisingly, one of the birds, I suspect the male, swam away with the chicks leaving the female on the nest to continue incubation. After five days she too departed for other parts leaving the egg behind. Examination of the egg revealed a near full-term chick. Thus for at least five days, a single bird took care of all the chicks.

We have some evidence to suggest that this may be more common in this species than first thought..

That has come from observations of a pair of birds on Lake Hawea. I had been aware of birds attempting to breed on Hawea in earlier years, but such breeding attempts mostly fail, most likely due to fluctuating water levels, caused by Hydro and strong winds, but there is also a significant lack of good habitat. I was alerted late last year of a pair attempting to nest at ANZAC cove with a question “what should we do”. I took one of our nesting platforms over to Hawea and in less than 24 hours, birds switched from their earlier shoreline attempts to the platform, improved on our efforts at nest building, and duly produced a clutch of four eggs. Three chicks were produced and both adults left the nest and went into the wider and boisterous Hawea, with their offspring in tow.

Six weeks later both adults with chicks, met up at the original nest platform, added to the nest with some additional housekeeping followed by the female settling on the nest and laying three more eggs. This seemed to be the signal for the male, to depart to wider spaces with the chicks and take on solo parenting for almost four weeks.

The male returned to the nest in time for the second hatching, which produced three chicks. While it appeared that the adults attempted to divest themselves of the first brood, chicks of that brood appeared to be very persistent, with both adults departing for wider spaces in opposite directions on the lake with their respective broods.



My observations of multiple broods by grebes is that almost immediately the first and second brood meet up, the adults disown the first brood, at times quite viciously, and invest in the second brood exclusively. It seemed quite remarkable that in this instance, we had firstly the male and then almost four weeks later the female nurturing separate broods simultaneously!

Overall, it was a successful season with 32 nesting attempts, 106 eggs and 48 chicks, bringing the Wanaka contribution to the grebe population over the last eight years to a total of 206 nests, 676 eggs and 304 chicks.

To the many eager minders and watchers on Lake Hawea, especially to Jane Forsyth, Ian Turnbull, Amie Capell and John Langley my grateful thanks.

John Darby

Bird Books for Sale at May Meeting

The family of Lesley Gowans has donated some of Lesley's bird books to Otago Birds NZ. These will be for sale by a minimum donation of \$5 each at the next meeting (May 26th). Bring cash or you can donate by internet banking to Ornithological Society Otago 03 0903 0392455 00.

The proceeds will go towards our Student Travel Fund so please be generous. There are some very nice picture books as well as bird guides for several countries and some other specialist and quirky books.

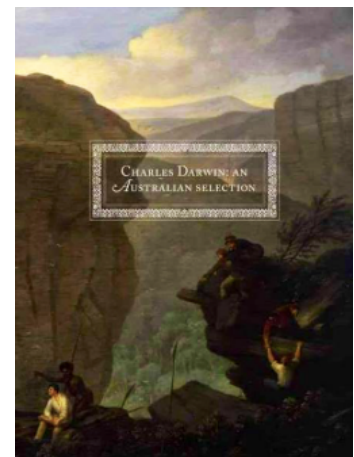
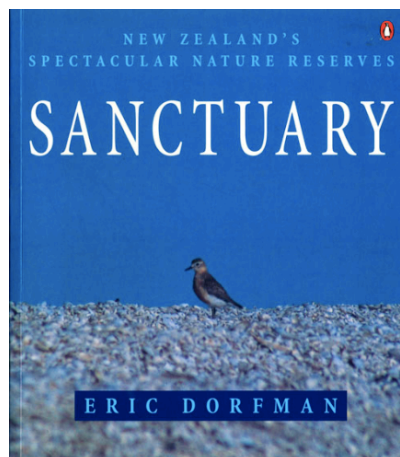
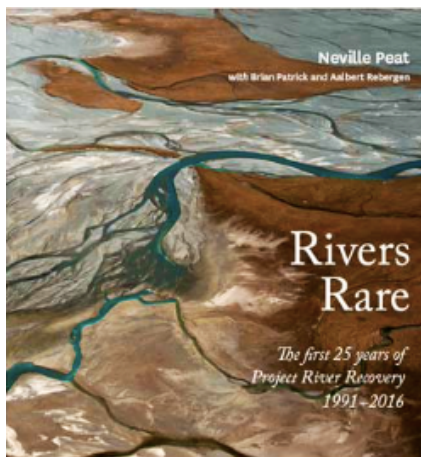
Here is a sample of the titles:

Guides

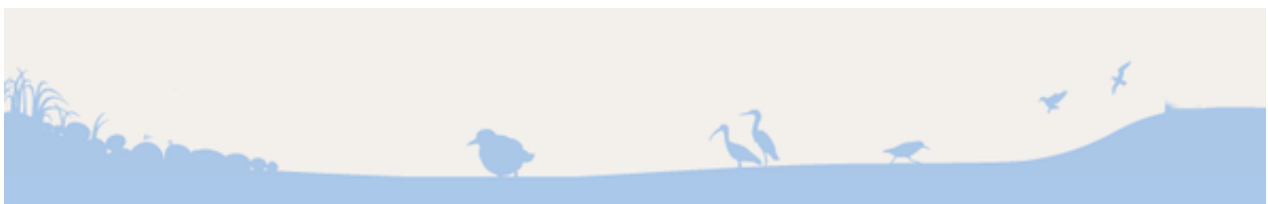
Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds
 Simpson and Day Field Guide to Birds of Australia
 Birds of the Chatham Islands
 Birds of the Kruger National Parks
 Field Guide to the Common Birds of the Indian Subcontinent
 Birds of Southern Africa

Special books

Rivers Rare by Neville Peat
 Charles Darwin: an Australian selection
 The Hoiho
 Sanctuary by Eric Dorfman
 Highland Birds
 Wildlife of Galapagos



Wader count Counters are needed for 20 June. High tide (1.95m) at 11.46am. (4 July back-up day in case of bad weather) New counters are most welcome. Please contact Maree Johnstone to be allocated to a team. mareej@kinect.co.nz



George and Doreen Grant Notebook project: Call for volunteers

Peter Schweigman received from Doreen Grant a notebook with a large number of observations of birds that Doreen and her husband George made throughout the Southern South Island during the 1970's and 1980's. These observations come in about three types. One is a large set of general observations for various species from through out the South Island. Second is a large set of observations of cattle egret from the Taieri Plains and elsewhere. Third is a similar set of observations for black fronted dotterel which in the 1980's were breeding on the Taieri River near Outram.

The object is that I want to digitise the data and enter it into eBird. For the cattle egret and black-fronted dotterel there is enough data to investigate a formal analysis and write up. There is potential to cross check these observations with the already published records in the Classified Summarised Notes of the day.

The notebook has been scanned and now needs to be entered into a spreadsheet. Each page is a separate file so the work has been broken down into bite sized chunks. This a project designed for evenings and wet Sundays. I've identified all the easy pages for volunteers and have got a template of how the data needs to be entered.

Emma Salmon has made a start but there is plenty to go around. If you would like to give a hand for this work give me ring and we will sort out how to get you started. You will need to have an internet connection and a willingness to work with excel.

Bruce McKinlay 027 3891477

The Black-billed Gull:

When the world's most endangered gull comes to town



Christchurch's population of endangered tarāpuka/black-billed gulls may have a new home.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/440640/the-black-billed-gull-when-the-world-s-most-endangered-gull-comes-to-town>

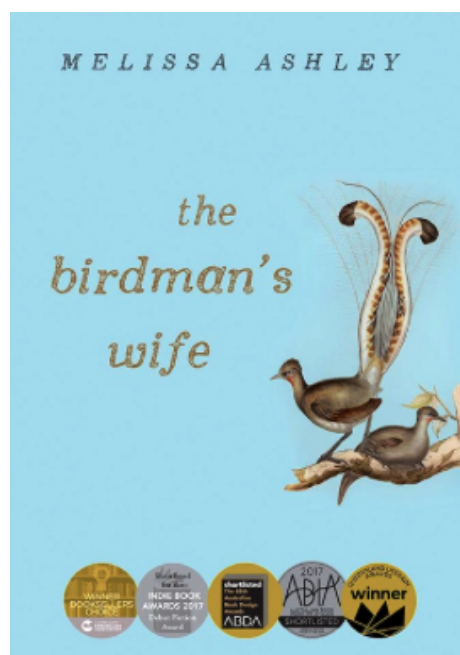
Book Review

I am writing about two books – *How to watch a bird* by Steve Braunias and *The Birdman's Wife* by Melissa Ashley. There is a reason for my combining the reviews of these two books.

I first read *How to watch a bird* back in 2007. I thought that I should read it again after hearing Steve read excerpts from the book earlier this year on Kathryn Ryan's weekday morning programme on RNZ National. He read a chapter each day—each is a stand alone, separate story. The chapter that made an impression on me was “The Trouble with Walter” (Walter Buller). Buller's contribution to New Zealand ornithology is well recognised through the magnificent book *A History of the Birds of New Zealand*, first published in 1875. But it is the cost of the publication that made such an impression on Braunias—the number of birds that Buller killed. He would have killed thousands of birds to gather sufficient bird skins for his illustrator Johann Keulmans to paint his accurate and wonderful paintings. Braunias concludes the chapter by stating the Buller “remains the wrongest person in the history of New Zealand birds” – in 1888 Buller claimed that the huia was “now far more plentiful.”



I am disappointed that there is not a table of contents at the commencement of the book. Without this it is difficult to go back to find parts that strongly appeal. And there are plenty – such as “If you want to know how to watch a bird, what you do is borrow someone else's eyes.” And by this he means binoculars and a knowledgeable birder – in Steve's case it was Aucklander Gwen Pulham. He writes about “plucking up courage” to attend an OS (read Ornithological Society) meeting in Auckland and writes so warmly of the wonderful and helpful people he met. If you have already read *How to watch a bird* I encourage you to read it again – you will enjoy it.



And so to the other book, *The Birdman's Wife*. Although a historical novel, it is a thorough and I am sure accurate account of the life of Eliza Gould, wife of John Gould, the famous 19th century English ornithologist and considered to be the father of bird study in Australia. Like Buller, he blasted his way through thousands of birds, particularly in Australia. It's what they did then and all in the name of science. He was rewarded for this was to be made a fellow to the Royal Society. He is honoured in Australia by having the Gould League of Australia named for him. The Gould League is an organisation that was founded in 1909 to promote environmental education. I was a member for some years and this inspired me to form the New Zealand Association of Environmental Education back in 1987. It too is still in existence.

The Birdman's Wife however is not about John Gould, but his wife Eliza, who illustrated his books and manuscripts. Gould received all of the kudos but it was Eliza who ensured that his discoveries were seen and appreciated by the scientific community and the wider public. This book portrays her dedication to her work and her self-effacing nature. "Behind every successful man is a great woman." This book is proof of that saying.

(Footnote – Mary Thompson is now reading the book. Maybe she should also review it. Mary told me of the Gouldian Finch – a spectacularly coloured Australian native. Google told me that it is also known as the Lady Gouldian finch. I am sure that it has a part to play in the book.)

Warren Jowett

Global Big Day and Bird Atlas trip 8 May 2021

We arrived at Bunnings just before 9am to join the convoy up to Hawkesbury Lagoon Wildlife Refuge, where a couple of dozen birdwatchers eventually gathered to take part in the May Atlas field trip, combined with the Global Big Day count.

A small party went down to investigate the beach, but I joined the larger group going round the lagoons to count the large numbers of ducks, waders and other visitors – pied stilts, mallard, shoveler, grey teal and the like. The benign weather and the sedentary behaviour of the birds made the counting relatively easy. At the far end of the Refuge, among the red billed gulls, were a small group of Caspian terns; distinctive and impressive sea birds, and always a pleasure to see.

Then on to Anderson Lagoon, north of Bobby's Head. Here we encountered most of the field birds we would have expected to see – blackbird, song thrush, greenfinch, a flock of goldfinch feeding on seed heads in an adjacent field, and eventually, a redpoll. A more distant field contained about twenty spur-winged plover while a lone kingfisher occupied a hawthorn tree by the track. Eleven pukeko foraging by the water's edge and a small group of Canada geese gliding lazily across the lagoon added to the list. Two richly coloured grey teal attracted some attention, but on closer examination that's precisely what they turned out to be - their colour possibly the result of iron staining – rather than that much rarer species, the vagrant chestnut teal.



The day ended at Shag Point, with white-fronted terns, Otago shags and spotted shags either flying around or perched on the rocky outcrops with feral pigeons occupying the coastal cliffs.



Despite the rising wind nothing could be seen out at sea. A rather grumpy fur seal kept us company. Too busy looking at the horizon, I failed to notice the seal and nearly trod on it.

My personal species count for the day was just under half the Otago count. Nothing of any particular note, but that is beside the point. It was a most rewarding day out; participating with like-minded companions in recording birds in some very attractive Otago countryside, on behalf of national and world-wide projects. If this in any way protects our international birdlife or promotes its survival, so much the better.

Jon Bailey

Royal Spoonbills/kōtuku ngutupapa (Platalea regia)



20 May 2021

The Royal Spoonbills/kōtuku ngutupapa (Platalea regia) seem to be overwintering in the [#Hutt](#) this year. Perhaps we can look forward to the clattering of little [#spoonbills](#) in the spring. We found a group of 5 feeding up Te Mome Stream on Sunday.

Louise Thomas @Louthesciwriter

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.

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Wed 26 May | Scott Forrest
Understanding the movements and behaviours of the Orokonui kaka. |
| Sun 20 June | Wader count (4 July back-up day in case of bad weather)
High tide (1.95m) at 11.46am. New counters are most welcome. Please contact Maree Johnstone to be allocated to a team. mareej@kinect.co.nz |
| Wed 23 June | Myrene Otis
The foraging ecology of Tawaki in Milford Sound. |
| Sunday 27 June (weather permitting) | Atlas field trip to the Middlemarch/Macraes Flat area
Please let me know if you are intending to come along.
Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com |
| 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). |
| 23-25 October | Weekend Atlassing Field Trip , Labour weekend based at Alexandra. We have booked accommodation for 8 people (twin share, \$45 each per night) and this will be our base at the Alexandra Holiday Park. You may wish to book other accommodation at the park or in town.
More info from Richard cluthaphotos@gmail.com |
| 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 June newsletter to:
Sue Odlin sodlin@gmail.com

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **15 June**