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## *Otago Region Newsletter 6 /2021*

### *June 2021*

#### **Ornithological Snippets**

It has been a quiet month, possibly because of people being away at Conference, or maybe the weather has kept people indoors. **Marsh Crakes** have been seen at Tomahawk Lagoon on 12 June and Bendigo (Lake Dunstan) on 27 May. **South Island Pied Oystercatchers** had returned to paddocks around Balclutha by 5 June, and an **Antarctic Fulmar** was seen close inshore at Long Point in the Catlins on 30 May. **Brown Creepers** have been seen (and heard) several times in the compiler's garden in Balclutha, where they are normally a very infrequent visitor.

Please send any interesting reports to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com) **Richard Schofield**

#### **eBird News**

A reminder that it's not too late to take part in the June Atlas Challenge. For each grid square that you submit at least one **complete** nocturnal checklist, you get an entry into the draw to win the book "Oceanic Birds of the World: A Photo Guide". Checklists submitted during the month of June between 1745 hours and 0645 will qualify for the draw. (Because of the variance across the country, these times have been chosen as the best average). As always, these checklists must include counts for every species reported (no X's!) and should follow the best practices to increase their scientific value. Full details can be found **here**, or see the NZ Bird Atlas Facebook or web page. If it provides any incentive, I have recorded 5 Little Owl (in 2 squares) and 10 Morepork (all different squares) since I took up the challenge.

KML files are now available to show **all points** for year one and two, for **winter**, **spring**, **summer**, and **autumn**. These can be imported into Maps.Me, Google Earth

or any other mapping programme to then focus your Atlasing effort more to areas not surveyed. If using this, we strongly encourage this to be used in tandem as a supporting tool with the Atlas Effort Map! Remember, just because someone has gone somewhere doesn't necessarily mean they've detected all the possible species.

The next field trip will be to the **Middlemarch/Macraes Flat** area on Sunday 27 June (weather permitting). Please let me know if you are intending to come along.

Also get in touch with me if you are keen to participate in the **Atlas Weekend Field Trip to Alexandra** at Labour Weekend . It would be great to have an idea of interest at this stage, so we can book the most suitable accommodation.

### **Use maps with caution!**

Usually, the major habitat change between checking maps and being in the field is the clearance of pine plantation. I was filling in gaps in a fairly local square a few weeks ago, and having covered all the obvious habitats I was on the lookout for a pond of some sort, in the hope of adding a waterbird or two. Suddenly I glanced out to my right and saw a large expanse of water (3 hectares from a later measurement), adorned with vast numbers of geese and ducks of varying species. Further investigation showed that it was not marked on the Topomap (online or paper), nor on the Outdoor Access Map; it is shown on the Atlas Effort Map, but looks like just another patch of forestry.

Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## **BirdsNZ National News**

### **Report on NZ Bird Conference, Thames**

This was the largest conference so far with over 220 attendees. 14 members from Otago Branch made the trip north and for our relatively small size, Otago made quite a splash. Bruce McKinlay is of course President of Birds NZ, and Natalie Forsdick (a recent past student member of Otago) was appointed Vice-President, the first women in such a role for decades.

There were 2 days of research talks and speakers had to fit their findings of years of research and their passion for their topic into 12 minutes! The Otago contributors were excellent. Richard Seed and Thomas Mattern presented beautifully illustrated talks on Korora survey methods and erect-crested penguin numbers (Kalinka was involved in this study too). Lara Urban, who will be talking to our meeting later in the year, presented genetic studies on kakapo. Scott Forrest and Taylor Davies-Colley used their 12-minute slots to very effectively present their work on movements of Orokonui kaka (Those who were at our last meeting were treated to all the intriguing details of what our Orokonui kaka get up to; please remember to report any kaka sightings on [kakdatabase.orokonui.nz](http://kakdatabase.orokonui.nz)) Oscar Thomas presented a poster on his counts of seabirds from his sub-antarctic trip last summer. He also bagged the prize for the best photo voted by conference participants for his photo of a skua swallowing prey in the behavioural section.

My favourite talk was by Brian Gill, whose research was low tech. ie using callipers to measure thickness of 6036 moa egg shell fragments – yet discovered that 4 species of moa could be inferred from this parameter. All the Abstracts are available to read on the Birds NZ website.

The Coromandel area is centred on birding hotspots so we were looking forward to the field trips but the area was hit by another cyclone just in time for the field trips on Monday. Seabird watchers were pleased with the wind and headed to the east coast to look for subantarctic birds pushed out of their normal range. The wetlands trip would have been wet. A small group of us lead by Bruce headed up the peninsula to count Atlas squares. Squalls of heavy rain between light drizzle was the order of the day but a great time was had. We got counts for 10 squares and 42 species. For the South Islanders even the common species were a treat: pied shags, NZ dotterel, wild turkey, pheasants and mynas. The highlight was a flock of 33 brown teal on a stream north of Colville so the long wet trek was worth it.

Another highlight of the weekend was being able to visit Miranda on the Thursday at high tide and witness the beautiful spectacle of many hundreds of wrybill flying in formation in the late afternoon sun, along with godwits, NZ dotterel and spotting flagged SIPO (these had been canon-netted the previous day at Thames by a team from Birds NZ, DOC and Landcare; we need to check for flags later in the season to contribute to movement studies).

### **Regional Representatives Meeting**

All the RRs get together annually before the conference. The main topics discussed were: the Atlas and its funding; the Beach Patrol Scheme and Zoom meetings.

Atlas: Birds NZ members have contributed 72% of all data and 88% of squares have some coverage. We now need to finish 'easy' areas and devise strategies to get to the difficult areas- suggestions of using 4WD clubs, tramping clubs, helicopter drops and to apply for funds from Project Assistance Fund.

Beach Patrol: this is probably the largest and longest running such scheme in the world. Otago is not active in this scheme but perhaps we should target our beaches after easterly storms; beach wrecks are a chance to see subantarctic birds in-the-hand.

Zoom: some regions used zoom meetings during lockdown and have continued them. We may explore whether these would work for Otago, especially for out-of-town members or speakers.

Promotion of Birds NZ: some regions put monthly articles on birds in local paper, Youth Bird Camps, conference scheduled for Dunedin 2026. The website and promotional material is continually being improved - check it out.

**Mary Thompson**

### **Citizen Science challenge! Colour-flagged SIPOs**

A collaborative study between the Department of Conservation, Manaaki Whenua/Landcare Research, and the Ornithological Society of New Zealand is focusing on the movements of South Island Pied Oystercatchers (SIPO) to identify nationwide flyways and stopover sites. We would like to put out a call for any sightings of SIPO (or other oystercatchers) wearing flags of various colours that have letters and numbers engraved on them.

They have been colour-coded by the region where they were caught, and we are particularly interested in any birds that have moved between regions.

Colour codes for engraved flags on SIPO:

- RED flag: North Island
- BLUE flag: South Island
- GREEN flag: Rakaia
- ORANGE flag: Rangitata
- YELLOW flag: Nelson / Golden Bay

If the flag only has two letters or numbers, the bird was marked as a chick, and if there are three letters/numbers, then it was marked as an adult.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## **BirdsNZ Otago Branch News**

### **Forest and Bird Tītī news**

The Forest and Bird 'Bring Back the Seabirds' project has been active and has good news to report. Five sooty shearwater chicks have fledged from the Prion Fence. Still no success with the prions.



Graeme and Sue playing tug of war trying to extract tītī from nest box for banding  
Franny Cunninghame

Out at Sandfly Bay we (Franny Cunninghame, Shannon Ritter, Myrene Otis, Nich Kelly, Stephen Bowler, Nick Beckwith, Adrienne Mulqueen, Jim Fyfe, Torea Scott-Fyfe, Tom Hadley, Paul Smale, Sue Maturin, Jorge Jimenez, and Niko Jimenez-Cunninghame) had a great season and were able to band sixty-five chicks during five nights over a 12 night fledging period. There were clearly many more chicks fledging on the nights we were not out there and we hope to have a better system next year, however, the night time activities take their toll on sleep.

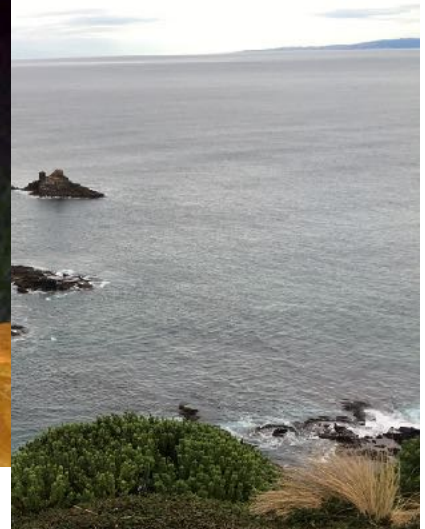
Fledging was tailing off on the evening of 12 May when the team of six saw only two chicks remaining. Conditions at sea must have been favourable for tītī foraging with the chicks being in good condition and no evidence of pre fledging starvation.





Handling the tītī

Franny Cunningham



This has been the most successful fledging season recorded at this colony since Forest and Bird initiated monitoring in 2016/17.

While trail camera monitoring and burrow scoping showed that some nest burrows did fail earlier in the season, at least one due to predation, we found no evidence of predation at the colony during the pre-fledging rama period.



Sue Maturin placing pegs on burrow to check on activity



Chick in burrow

Franny Cunningham



Rama chick

Paul Smale



Intensified trapping around the colony (live capture cage trapping) during the rama period was successful with the most significant captures being a ferret and two feral cats, these mainland remnant colonies are still very vulnerable to introduced species predation and trapping is not always sufficient to protect the birds, their eggs and chicks during the duration of the five month breeding season.



While we are delighted with the success of this season we still acknowledge challenges with the on-going protection of this, and other, mainland colonies.

It is a tough world out there to go from burrow to open ocean. Some do not make it and the drop outs would have been a major source of seasonal food for large predators in the past. This turned inside out body washed up at Sandfly, most likely after coming to the attention of a sealion.

After the wonderful Oamaru Penguin Symposium twelve unsuspecting people followed me out to Cape Wanbrow to check the titi colony there. It is still active which is great news and may have fledged some chicks. Being in the near urban area there is a great pressure from cats which is always problematic.

On another excursion with Ben Goldsworthy of YEPT we went to Otepahi to locate and check on the titi colony there. We re-discovered it on a rib above the east end of Allans Beach. It is still active but probably quite diminished. The strongest evidence was a recently carcass of an adult that got tangled around the right wing with the stiff and straight sedge *Ficinia nodosus*. A plant I am quite surprised anything could get tangled in.

**Graeme Loh and Franny Cunninghame**

## **Portobello Power lines being replaced**

The power lines across the harbour suspended from Goat Island and Quarantine Island are being replaced by underwater ones. This is great news for birds as the harbour is a migrating bird flyway and people on Quarantine Island regularly find maimed birds underneath. Good work Aurora.

## Gazillions of Krill

There have been several reports in the media about the abundance of krill this Autumn. When the *Polaris* was returning to the coast 22nd March I could see large work ups of birds to the south about 4km east of Taiaroa Head. Sue and I had the opportunity to take our boat out 6th of April and followed the lead of gulls returning to shore to where they came from.



There were several hectares of gulls, tens of thousands. Must have been all the black-backs in the southern South Island and most of the red-billed gulls. The water was dark with masses of krill which were disrupted sporadically by small barracouta schools. A couple of dozen large male fur seals appeared to be loafing in the melee and I was puzzled when ten or so mollymawks and albatross would go into a short frenzy only to dissipate abruptly. Not until I got home and reviewed the photos did I discover the drama was about fur seals bringing slender tuna they caught to the surface. See the unhappy fish in the middle of the picture.



Other birds present: White-fronted terns 100, Black-fronted terns 10, Black-billed gulls present cryptic, Cape pigeons 30, Sooty shearwaters 500, White-chinned petrels 2, Buller mollymawks 2, Shy mollymawks 15 Southern Royal albatross 4.

Of course we revelled in being able to hang out with two humpbacked whales for a couple of hours as they tail slapped and gapped ballooning mouths into the krill. But the birds took little notice.



Only three spoonbills were present at Taiaroa on the 6th, in contrast to the 14 present 29th March.

What was so great about the day was seeing birds congregating on a natural food abundance with natural behaviours in huge numbers like they might have in the old days. No hanging around behind fishing boats or squabbling at the dump.

**Graeme Loh**

### **Bird Books for Sale at June 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. 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.

### **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**

**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](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz)





## Seabirds on Polaris II Otago Canyon Transect 29/03 – Oscar Thomas

I accompanied fellow birders Graeme Loh and Nicholas Winterle Daudt on the University of Otago's March voyage to collect water samples out beyond the Otago Canyons in conjunction with NIWA. We three spent the majority of the 12-hour day on the top deck in foggy conditions, but it became clearer into the afternoon and more and more seabirds were seen. The full list is below:

Long-tailed Skua - 1  
 Silver Gull - 1200  
 South Black Backed Gull - 1600  
 Black-fronted Tern - 13  
 White-fronted Tern - 40  
 Little Penguin - 20  
 Buller's Mollymawk - 20  
 Shy Mollymawk - 100  
 Salvin's Mollymawk - 1  
 Campbell Island Mollymawk - 2  
 Southern Royal Albatross - 40  
 Northern Royal Albatross - 22  
 Antipodean Albatross - 1  
 Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 1  
 Grey-backed Storm-Petrel - 15  
 Black-bellied Storm-Petrel - 3  
 Northern Giant Petrel - 2



Grey-backed Storm-Petrel



White-chinned Petrel

Cape Petrel - 20  
 White-headed Petrel - 1  
 Mottled Petrel - 3  
 Cook's Petrel - 1  
 Fairy Prion - 380  
 White-chinned Petrel - 30  
 Buller's Shearwater - 2  
 Sooty Shearwater - 1000  
 Fluttering Shearwater - 1  
 Common Diving-Petrel - 1

**Oscar Thomas**

## Variable Oyster-catcher - pied phase(?)

Seen at Long Beach 26 May 2021



Ali MacArthur

## Godwits in China

Morena,

This link is to a video about the values and current issues facing wetland in China. These include the places where birds from NZ migrate.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFPVrW6mxPw>

Feel free to watch and share with friends.

Bruce



## Programme for 2021

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

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Sun 20 June                         | Wader count (4 July back-up day in case of bad weather)<br>High tide (1.95m) at 11.46am. New counters are most welcome. Please contact Maree Johnstone to be allocated to a team. <a href="mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz">mareej@kinect.co.nz</a>  |
| Wed 23 June                         | Myrene Otis<br>The foraging ecology of Tawaki in Milford Sound.   |
| Sunday 27 June (weather permitting) | <b>Atlas field trip</b> to the Middlemarch/Macraes Flat area<br>Please let me know if you are intending to come along.<br>Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or <a href="mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com">cluthaphotos@gmail.com</a>  |
| Wed 28 July                         | Georgina Pickerell<br>The Robins of Mopanui.  |
| Wed 25 August                       | Lara Urban<br>Using DNA analysis to help conservation of takahe and kakapo.   |
| Sun 12 September                    | <b>Dunedin Botanic Garden Guided Birdwatching Walk</b> , starting 10am.<br>We will be guiding groups of 10 or so, helping members of the public to spot and identify birds. Contact: Suzanne Middleton<br><a href="mailto:smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz">smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz</a> ph 022 601 8579 if you can help.   |
| Wed 22 September                    | Bruce McKinlay<br>Birding experiences in Costa Rica.<br>Update and plans for Town Belt Bird Count (October and November).   |
| 23-25 October                       | <b>Weekend Atlassing Field Trip</b> , 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.<br>More info from Richard <a href="mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com">cluthaphotos@gmail.com</a> |
| Wed 27 October                      | Rachel Hickcox.<br>Where hoiho go foraging at sea and why – results of research mapping and modelling hoiho presence and preferences.   |
| Wed 24 November                     | <b>Members night..</b>  |

**Suggestions of locations for field trips and atlassing trips, and offers to help lead trips would really be appreciated, please contact Mary [birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz)**

Please send all contributions for the July newsletter to:  
Sue Odlin [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **14 July**