

## **Hawke's Bay Youth Camp 2021**

A group of 13 young birders participated in the 2021 Birds New Zealand Youth Camp organised by the Hawke's Bay Branch between 18th and 24th April. During the camp, students aged 13-18 learned valuable bird identification skills and bird surveying methods, as well as hearing about local conservation efforts.

After an introduction from camp leader Ian Southey on the first afternoon we headed to Anderson Park in Taradale to see the only Plumed Whistling Duck in New Zealand. On the second day we met Brent Stephenson early at an orchard to set up mist nets for bird banding. All of the students had a go at getting a bird out of a net, weighing it, banding it, and taking measurements. After lunch we headed to Ahuriri Estuary with Brent, armed with spotting scopes. We soon saw Pied Stilt/Poaka, White-faced Heron, Variable Oystercatcher/Tōrea Pango, and Bar-tailed Godwits/Kuaka. As we walked along we began to see more of the smaller wader species such as NZ Dotterel/Tūturiwhatu, Wrybill/Ngutuparore, and Black-fronted Dotterel.

Next day we met Sav Saville and John Berry at Waitangi Regional Park and split into two groups; one group checked out the beach and the other the wetlands. We spotted many good birds including Black-fronted Dotterel, Banded Dotterel/Pohowera, New Zealand Dotterel/Tūturiwhatu, Black-fronted Tern/Tarapirohe and Royal Spoonbill/Kotuku Ngutupapa. We also had terrific views of an incredible Australasian Bittern/Matuku Hūrepo at Waikahu Wetlands.

Then we drove to the Cape Sanctuary where we were guided by John Berry, a volunteer there. In the absence of most invasive predators, the birds at this sanctuary have a great chance of survival. While there we saw good numbers of Kākā, Red-crowned Kākāriki, NZ Tomtit/Miromiro, and North Island Robin/Toutouwai. We also checked a pond in the sanctuary and were delighted to see Brown Teal/Pateke, NZ Dabchick/Weweia, and NZ/Scaup/Papango.

For the last activity of the day we met Rachel Ward who manages a captive breeding facility for critically endangered NZ Shore Plover/Tūturuatu. It was a real treat to be shown the aviaries where this vital conservation work is being done to restore the Shore Plover population.

On the fourth day we started with an early trip to Pekapeka Swamp to meet Brent Stephenson. Splitting up into groups we headed out around the boardwalk where we saw Paradise Shelduck/Putangitangi, Grey Teal/Tētē Moroiti, and Australasian Shoveler/Kuruwhengi. Eventually we found what we had been looking for, the elusive Spotless Crake/Pūweto. It was very exciting to get glimpses of these cryptic birds through the raupō. After lunch we visited some scrapes where the group was delighted to see three Royal Spoonbills feeding at close range. The last activity of the day was a trip to some different scrapes in the hope of finding Marsh Crake, but alas it wasn't meant to be.

On the fifth day we drove to Boundary Stream, stopping en route at Lake Tutira and then Lake Opouahi Kiwi creche where we called in a Fernbird. We arrived before lunch and met Bernie Kelly who works at Boundary Stream and is the Hawke's Bay Branch's Regional Representative. That afternoon was spent walking around the Tumanako Loop Track learning about forest birds and familiarising ourselves with their different calls. We saw and heard Bellbirds/Korimako, Whitehead/Popokatea, North Island Robin/Toutouwai and NZ Tomtit/Miromiro, and had a brief encounter with a NZ Falcon/Kārearea as it flew swiftly through the canopy above us making its distinct 'kek-kek' call. In the evening Bernie spoke to us

about the pest control work in the reserve and the translocation and monitoring of Kokako.

We got up before the sun on the sixth day and returned to the Tumanako loop track, splitting up into two teams that took different routes in search of Kokako. Every 200 metres we stopped to conduct a five minute bird count that was entered into *eBird*. Then we played Kokako calls, listened for another five minutes, and moved on. Both teams saw a Kokako; one group called a bird in and the other came across one while walking. Everyone was very happy to see these beautiful and notoriously shy birds.

In the afternoon we set off along Bell Rock Loop Track. On the walk up we saw all the bush birds of the previous day plus a new one, a tiny Rifleman/Titipounamu. Bernie met us at the top and took us to an area surrounded by a predator-proof fence. Inside was a seabird colony with artificial nest boxes. Cook's and Mottled petrels were translocated to this site and the Cook's Petrels have successfully returned. We were told that this is the most inland seabird colony in New Zealand. In the evening we went looking for Morepork/Ruru at the Tumanako track where we heard many calling and saw two.

On the last morning a small group of us got up before dawn and walked along the loop track. We sat down and listened as the birds woke up around us. At first we heard Ruru and then a Kākā screeching in the distance, and slowly the bush came alive with the other birds. As we were packing up a Kārearea was spotted being harassed by a pair of Australian Magpies over nearby farmland and this time everyone was able to have a proper look at it. After lunch we drove back to Napier where we said our goodbyes and all headed home. We had recorded 75 bird species during the Youth Camp.

The Youth Camp was an incredible experience that we all thoroughly enjoyed and we are very grateful to everyone who made it happen. We would like to thank Ian Southey, Angie Denby and Lynne Anderson, who initiated this Youth Camp and made it happen, and David and Vicky Melville for driving all the way from Nelson to spend the week with us. Thanks to David we were able to catch and band birds under his watchful eye, and were treated to many incredible stories and laughs. Vicky also played a vital role by being an amazing chef. cooking up a storm each night with Anne Keown, Deborah Ives, Clare Plug and Liz Jackson. A huge thank you also goes to those who came along and shared their knowledge, including Brent Stephenson, Sav Saville, Rachel Ward, John Berry and Bernie Kelly. Last but not least huge thanks to all the students that came to enjoy a great week full of lots of great birds. We really appreciated your enthusiasm, it is very encouraging to see the next generation of Young Birders starting their first *eBird* checklists.

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