

## Rotorua Atlasing Week Report

From the 7th to 11th of this month we finally had the opportunity to undertake our first Atlasing trip, inviting along [BirdsNZ](#) members to come and help fill in effort gaps in the [Effort Map](#) around Rotorua after the BirdsNZ Conference in Thames.

After an inspiring conference, myself and 16 other keen Atlasers set off in the rain down towards Rotorua from Thames to begin the week of Atlasing in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty areas. The rain couldn't dampen our spirits though, quickly getting a solid 23 species, [including 70 SIPO](#), foraging in flooded paddocks just over the bridge from Thames. We had decided to all meet down in Rotorua, Atlasing along the way to break up the two and a half hour journey. The premise of the trip was to fill in data gaps for Rotorua, particularly for the winter as much as we could. We knew there was a limited amount of Winter effort in the area surrounding Rotorua, with grid squares having a range of survey effort, and a particularly low level of nocturnal effort. With that in mind we knew there wasn't going to be enough time to do everything we wanted but we gave it our best efforts!

Keswick Camp provided a great central basecamp for us to reconvene each evening to chat and set out the plan for the following day. Using the [Atlas Effort Map](#), [Topo Maps](#), [KML points of Winter](#) survey points and local knowledge, each day was oriented towards targeting priority grid squares or areas to rapidly build up effort and species detected. Over the week all 17 of us split off into pairs or groups, changing who we surveyed with each day. One of the many wonderful aspects of the Atlas is that it gives you a large amount of freedom to survey when you want, who you go with and where you go, and it was fantastic to bird with new people, and to see exchanges of ideas, tips and tricks within the group. With a wide range of expertise and experience, it was awesome to see people pairing up and supporting each other to assist with bird ID, Atlasing techniques and eBird tips and tricks. Survey methods that myself and the rest of the Atlas team have personally found effective include dropping one person off along a back road, driving 1 or 2 km up the road to undertake a short looped travelling count, whilst the other person walks to the vehicle undertaking travelling checklists. Additionally, dropping one individual off at a track head and meeting them at the end of the track further down the road has also proved effective in spreading effort and maximising our time and group size.



*Sam exploring Arataki Track © Wendy Hare*

Many of us enjoyed Atlasing in a totally new part of the country. There is something inherently refreshing about waking up in, or driving to, a new area, and picking up the binos to note what you're seeing and also to be hearing different species. This is even true if the species you are encountering are very similar to what are found on your home patch, as I

find it provides a rewarding sense of value collecting data for undersurveyed and sometimes undesirable birding areas, such as heavily farmed landscapes or pine plantation areas. Chatting with Atlasers over the course of the project has revealed that many of you have found new favourite spots to go to because the Atlas encourages spreading out into further areas. In the same breath there are also places I know some of you wouldn't want to go back to again if you had to!

The week wasn't all about just data data data though. As noted above, it provided a great opportunity for everyone to pick up ideas for their personal Atlasing, as well as future Atlasing trips or camps that Regional Representatives, or Atlas Coordinators may hold. For myself and the Atlas team, it was a chance to actually spend time with some of the wonderful Atlas community and share/soak up that passion and buzz people get when Atlasing.

The week flew by (excuse the pun) but as a consequence of everyone's concerted effort that week, the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions received a much needed boost for Winter, with over 1300 checklists collectively submitted by the team to over 100 grid squares, noting over 70 species. All in that small 4 day period. We knew there was always going to be a need to strike a balance between what we wanted to get done and what was realistically achievable in that week, but all of the group put in a huge amount of effort and we cannot thank them enough! Only one grid square, [AQ83](#) remained out of reach and unsurveyed unfortunately. If you're in the area and keen to fill in a gap then please do go and explore AQ83!



*Sian looking for NZ Falcon at Kaingaroa © Wendy Hare*

Birding all day for four straight days provided some wonderful memories and some of the group's highlights are shared below. Simon and Andrew got us off to a great start with a [bittern sighting](#) on the Tuesday at the Orakei Korako Geothermal Park. [Stephen Legg](#) & [Kirsten Olsen](#) managed to see a spotless crane whilst enjoying one of the many hot pools in the area and also wrote; "*we were driving along a road in AO83 where a sign said 'No through road'. It was pretty rough. We stopped to do a count when we came to a sign from the other side that said only four-wheel drives beyond this point. We stood for a while when [two New Zealand falcons came flying overhead](#). A minute or so later two birds came back the other way. We thought first it was the two Falcons, but when we saw them through the binos it was a New Zealand Pigeon being chased vigorously by one of the Falcons! This was our reward for driving along the 'No through road'!*"



*Tomtit* © Kirsten Olsen

Wendy Hare's highlights were a surprise [booming weka](#) near Lake Matahina, which forced her to do some mental gymnastics to ID something she doesn't hear very often! Wendy loved seeing [28 dabchicks at Lake Aniwanuiwa](#) as well as finding NZ falcon and yellow-crowned kakariki in [Pureora Forest](#) along the Aratiki Track with Sam. Finally, wandering the road to Ruatahuna in the misty forest with Sian, and finding a flock of [50 black shags](#) near Ruatahuna was an unbelievable sight before scoring another [NZ falcon](#) on Friday in agricultural land SW of Rotorua.



*Nigel & Richard by Lake Rotorua © Wendy Hare*

[Richard Schofield](#) loved doubling his Morepork observations during the week, as well as getting some great ideas for upcoming Otago Atlasing trips. Teams did a fantastic job at picking up spotless crake in several areas that they had not been previously reported in eBird and were certainly a highlight for many including Nigel, Pat, Mike and myself. New reported incidences of spotless crake included this [report](#) from Wendy, Richard and Nigel, and Pat's [report](#). [Pat](#) noted surprisingly large number of tomtits in habitats he wouldn't normally expect to see them in, and many of us visiting from the South Island were loving seeing whiteheads so frequently.

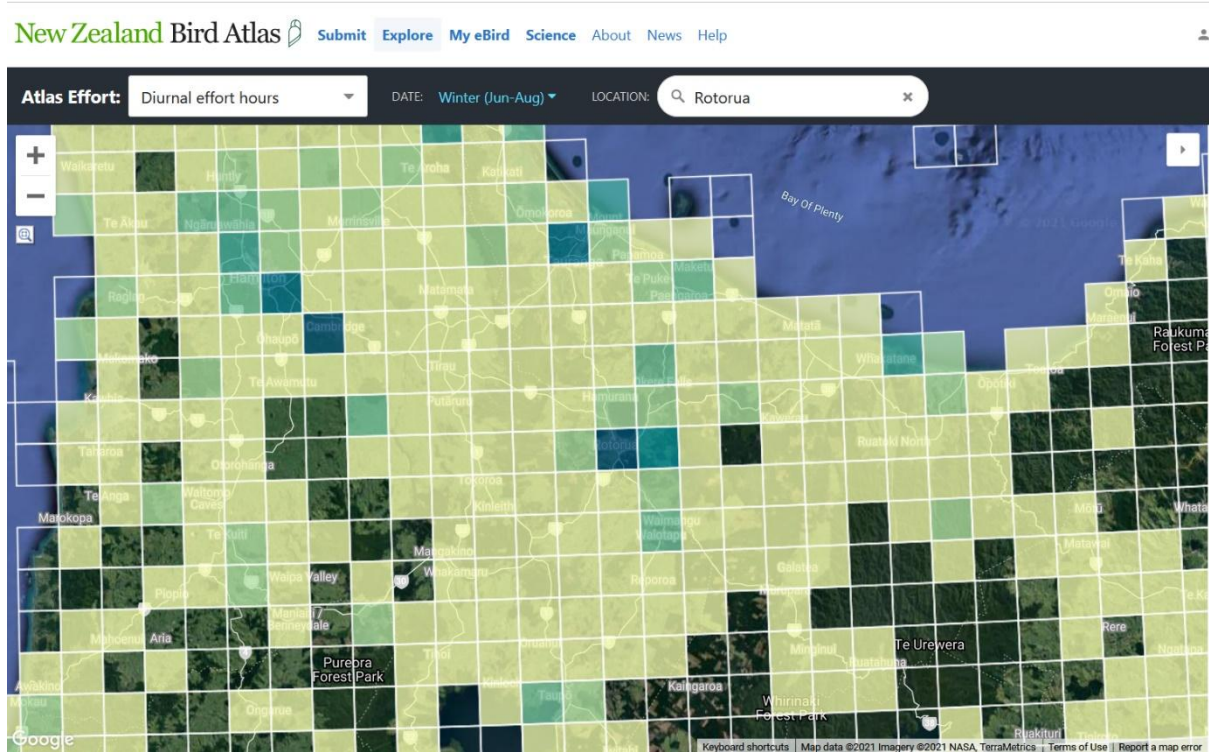


*Te Pona A Pita Track in the Matahi Valley © Dan Burgin*

My personal highlights were exploring Matahi Valley with Baylee and [Keegan](#), splitting off to walk several tracks in the area such as the Te Pona A Pita Track where I was checked out by a couple of [inquisitive whiteheads](#) as I enjoyed stunning views of expansive bush down the valley (above). Baylee was blown away when she was suddenly surrounded by a social flock

of [titiponamu/rifleman](#) on her travels along the Otamatuna track, whilst Keegan managed to get the first sighting of a [North Island Kokako](#) in the adjacent square AS87. The 'Kiwi Zone' signs were wonderful to see yet gutting we didn't have more time to spend some time surveying the area at night to hear them...next time!

With kokako the hot topic that night, we planned to go and listen to the dawn chorus in the nearby Mokahihaha Ecological Reserve on the final morning. Pat and Hine had explored this area the previous day, with Pat getting some [audio recordings of kaka and kokako](#) in his checklist. He loved seeing endemics thriving and showing first hand that sustained predator control at scale has positive impacts for native and endemic birds. Slowly walking along the track the following morning, myself, Baylee, Keegan, Simon and Sue ventured into the bush at dawn and our ears were serenaded as the first of the morning's pale light was greeted with not only tui, kaka, tomtit, rifleman and N.I. robin calling, but the ethereal calls and song of [three North Island kokako](#). The thick morning fog that was swallowing the bush that morning made it a magical moment for us all.



*Atlas Effort Map showing post trip Winter effort for the region*

There is still plenty left to survey in the area and across the country, and that is a challenge that continues to excite us. After this trip, we are already starting to look at where and when we can plan future Atlasing trips. For those who couldn't make it this time, or weren't sure about whether it would be fun, we hope you are able/keen to next time. We'd love you to join us. We all had a blast not only enjoying a solid week of Atlasing, but also spending time with like-minded passionate people. We wish to thank BirdsNZ Council for providing a grant to offset fuel and accommodation costs for the Rotorua Atlasers.

From my standpoint as part of the coordination team, it was an awesome week and I am immensely grateful to those who came along and gave their time and efforts to help gather



data for the Atlas. Thank you to Stephen, Kirsten, Richard, Nigel, Wendy, Sue, Sian, Andrew, Tony, Mike, Pat, Hine, Baylee, Keegan, Sam and Simon. This was off the back of a fantastic weekend in Thames catching up with many of you who put in a huge amount of your time and effort into gathering data and spreading the Atlas love.

We can't wait for the next trip and continuing to work with you to gather more data that we know will continue to support better conservation policy at local, regional and national scales.

As always, happy Atlasing!

Dan