



Birds New Zealand  
PO Box 834, Nelson 7040  
<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz>

Regional Representative: Mary Thompson  
197 Balmacewen Road, Dunedin 9010  
[birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz) 03 464 0787

Regional Recorder: Richard Schofield  
64 Frances Street, Balclutha 9230  
[cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## *Otago Region Newsletter 2 /2021* *February 2021*

### **Ornithological Snippets**

During the recent Atlas field trip at Gabriels Gully, Lawrence on 6<sup>th</sup> February, a pair of **Paradise Shelduck** were seen evading an approaching paddle board by diving and swimming a considerable distance underwater. The female was timed at 17 seconds on one dive. Sharon Roberts reports a family of **NZ Scaup** residing on her garden pond near Alexandra for a week in early February. She think they bred on a neighbour's pond. A **White-faced Heron** also visited around the same time. Hamish Spencer & Abby Smith had god views of a **Reef Heron** at Picnic Point, Papatowai, on 7<sup>th</sup> February. On 13<sup>th</sup>, Shawn Herron counted 62 **Royal Spoonbills** by Catlins Lake.



On 7<sup>th</sup> February Maureen Howard saw and photographed a banded NZ Falcon at Albert Town; Graham Parker confirmed that it was a female who fledged with her two female siblings from the Albert Town Reserve, where the Cardrona River meets the Clutha. It was banded on 12 December last year. An article about the birds appeared in the [ODT](#) on 17<sup>th</sup> February.



A late report (naughty!) was of an influx of **SIPO** in Balclutha on 30<sup>th</sup> December, with 86 counted; they had been feeding on the freshly-mown airfield, and were roosting on the gravel islands on the river. More impressive, but slightly more normal, Nick Beckwith counted 590 oystercatchers at Warrington Spit on 11th February.

Finally, Janet Ledingham was entertained by a **Black-backed Gull** dealing with a flatfish, probably a sole, at Aramoana on 29<sup>th</sup> January.



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

Richard Schofield

## eBird News

Users of the app (Android) will have noticed that setting the location for a checklist has now changed. The first option given is for the nearest existing location, but if this is not representative the suggested location for a checklist is now the midpoint of the route, rather than the start point, as used to be the case. You can still manually select the start point (or any other point) if you wish, but by defaulting to the middle it's providing data that are of higher quality in general. This option is coming to IOS soon.

Another recent change is when adding notes to a species observation. It is now much quicker to add extra details, especially breeding code (now that the breeding season is almost ended!)

I mentioned a couple of issues ago that to remove a "0" count from a checklist, you should use the backspace key instead of the zero. Another method is to select and hold the species, then press "Clear Data". This only removes the data from the selected species, and not the whole checklist!

There is plenty of scope to cover new ground in Autumn, which is just around the corner; many relatively local squares have no coverage, especially north of Dunedin, but also including DX31 (North Taieri). The next field trip will be on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March, to Toko Mouth. Please contact me if you are interested in coming.

And finally, a reminder to please keep travelling counts down to around 1km or less, or when there is a change of habitat. This helps to maintain the accuracy of the Atlas.

**Richard Schofield** [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## Waitahuna and Lawrence Atlas Trip

On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February, 7 bird atlassers went to cover 4 grid squares in Waitahuna and Lawrence. We all met at the small fire station in Waitahuna, and hovered around the maps to work out the squares. We split up the three squares between us, covering a lake, farms, exotic and native forests. Among the birds seen/heard here was a tomtit, kahu, korimako and many chaffinches.

Once everyone had finished these squares, we met for lunch at Lawrence where we basked in the hot sun and divvied up the last square. In this last square, we covered Gabriels Gully and



Photo - Ivan Lin

outer Lawrence. Birds of note in this square were a rifleman, bellbirds, grey warblers, paradise ducks, a black fantail and a brown creeper. 4 of us met back in Lawrence for a much deserved ice cream.

Overall, the 7 of us submitted 36 unique checklists from 4 squares totalling 34 species. Thank you to Adrienne, George, Ivan, Mary, Rowena and Richard for a great day out. I learnt a lot more about atlassing and had an enjoyable Saturday.

**Emma Salmon**



## 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/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/) **Early Bird Registrations by 28 February**

Abstracts of talks and posters should be submitted to [conference@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:conference@birdsnz.org.nz) no later than **28 February 2021**.

### Subscriptions 2021 – reminder!

The annual membership subscriptions for Birds NZ were due 1 January 2021. It is all too easy to overlook this during the Christmas New Year period. Remember that you can pay subs by direct banking online. Or ask your RR for a printed form. Thanks.

**Mary Thompson**, Regional Representative

## Otago Branch News

### Bird films screening at Dunedin Film Society

Raphael Richter-Gravier, who talked at one of our meetings last year on the cultural significance of birds in Pacific region has organized for a couple of classic bird films to be screened by the Dunedin Film Society. He has got in touch as he thought some of us may be interested. It would also be a good introduction the Dunedin Film Society as well. Please consider joining the Dunedin Film Society to ensure its continuing survival.

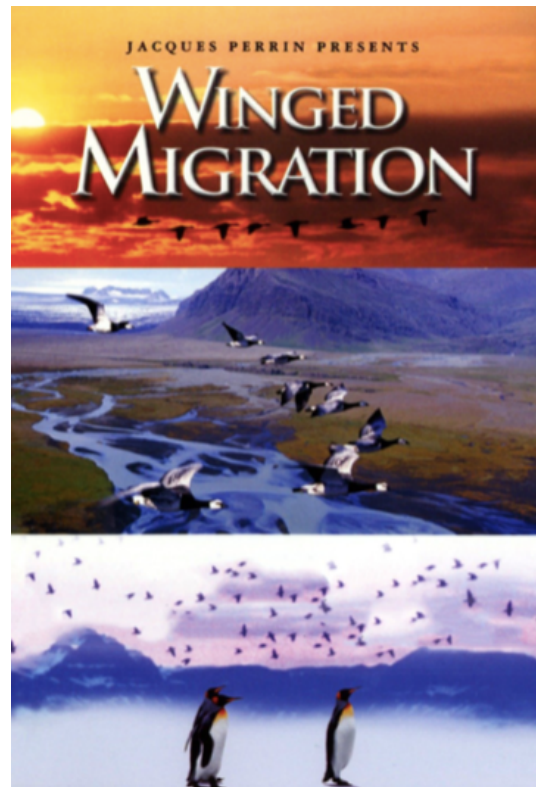
The Dunedin Film Society's programme for 2021 is on their website <http://www.dunedinfilmsociety.org.nz>

They will be showing Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* on Wednesday 3 March at 7.30pm, and Jacques Perrin's *Winged Migration (Le peuple migrateur)* on Wednesday 17 March at 7.30pm.

<https://dunedinfilmsociety.org.nz/2021-schedule/the-birds/>

<https://dunedinfilmsociety.org.nz/2021-schedule/winged-migration/>





No individual tickets can be sold, but a 3-Movie Pass only costs \$25, it can be shared by up to 3 people, and has no expiry date, so get together with friends. The screenings take place in the Red Lecture Theatre (located by the side entrance of the Scott Building, 260 Great King Street, near the intersection with Hanover Street) at 7.30pm.

## Banded Godwit sightings on Warrington Beach

Godwit departure time is fast approaching Having been unable to get down earlier this season and check for banded birds, Thursday 11th Feb with the high tide later in the afternoon provided an opportunity.



Blue over yellow flags

There were 573 godwits present. 7 banded or flagged birds were sighted, checking back through records most of these birds had been sighted in recent years. There was one bird present that was of some interest, two flags, blue over yellow, Adrian Riegen provided the following details.

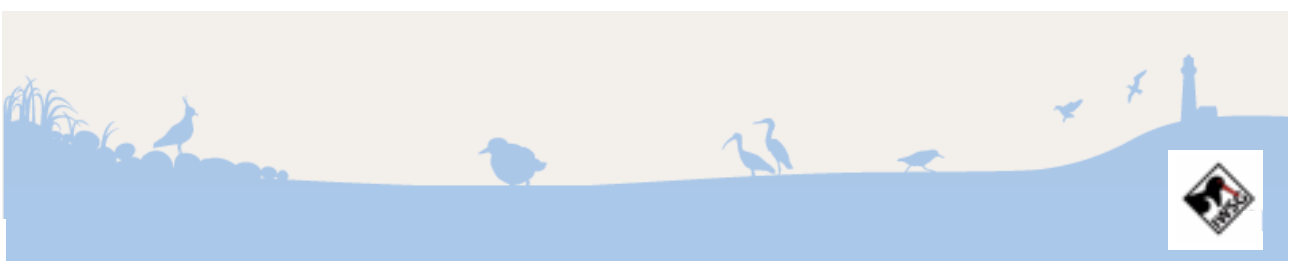
"The Blue over yellow flag is from the Bohai Bay in China and this is only the 2nd godwit banded there to be seen in NZ. This is not surprising as most of the NZ godwits stick to the eastern side of the Yellow Sea with very few making it to the Bohai on the west side of the Yellow Sea."



Also present were two orange flagged birds which are banded in Victoria Australia. Have only recorded 1 orange flagged bird in previous years (that doesn't mean two weren't present).

Another interesting fact came back from Rob Schuckard that is that 48 godwits were banded here at Warrington between Oct 2005 and Dec 2008.

**Nick Beckwith**



## Mopanui robins 2020 season summary

The 2020 robin breeding season was notable not only for producing the most fledglings we have ever recorded, but also for the level of enthusiasm and involvement so many Birds NZ members (20 in total) brought to the project. Quite simply it made an already enjoyable project even better. Thank you to everyone who helped out over the 2020 season.

The information we collected on nest success and banded bird resightings is helping to build up a picture of whether robins are establishing a self-sustaining population outside of Orokonui Ecosanctuary. The number of robins at our study site continues to increase, with at least 8 known pairs and up to another 10 territories. Having many unbanded robins at the site means it is impossible to get an accurate number of birds present. At the start of the breeding season, we resighted 4 out of 5 birds banded in 2019, including one banded as a fledgling, which suggests a reasonable overwinter survival rate for last year. The missing fifth banded bird was an adult female. In addition to her disappearance another of our banded females disappeared early on in the 2020 season.

Five pairs of robins and nine nests were monitored in 2020 and 6 of these nests fledged young. A crude Mayfield estimate put nest survival rates at 55% (compared to 27% in 2019 and 4% in 2018). This year was also the first time that we had recorded 3 nesting attempts by the same pair. They fledged 2 of their clutches.

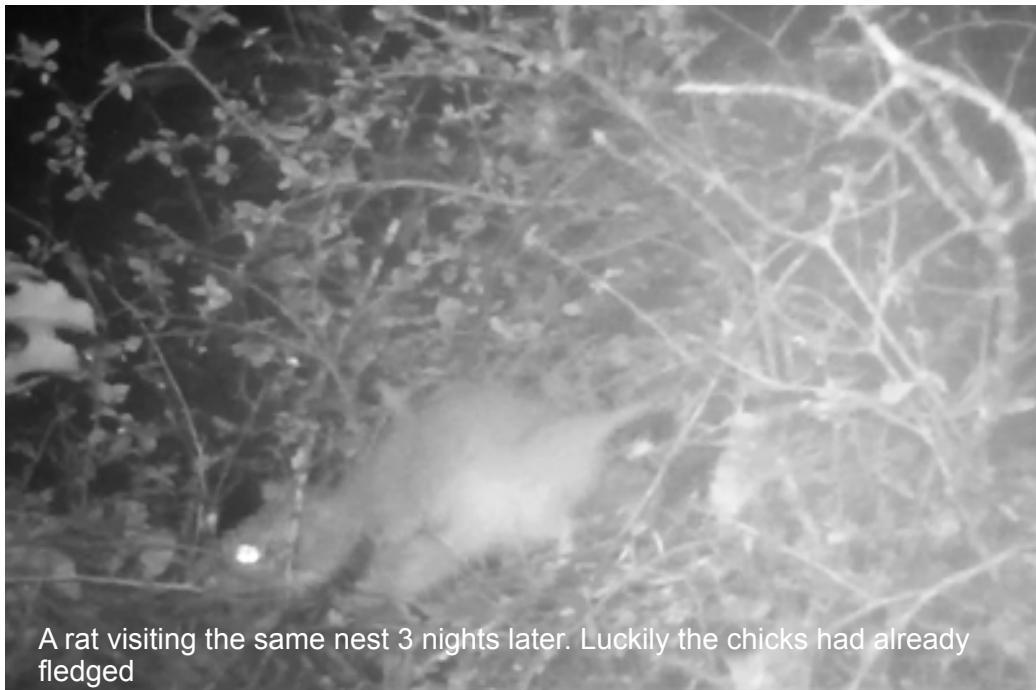
In another first for the project, we were able to use nest cameras, generously lent to us by the Halo Project.



A nest camera image of a grumpy looking nestling just prior to fledging

We put cameras on 3 nests that were low enough to reach. Two of these nests failed due to predation but the cameras did not capture the event. One of the predation events was during the day in a 5-minute window between camera recordings.





At the 3<sup>rd</sup> nest, the camera was able to confirm that the 2 chicks fledged before one of them was predated upon, most likely by a rat. Using the cameras is a learning curve for us, and there is always a tradeoff between capturing every single movement in front of the camera and having the battery and memory card capacity to store the tens of thousands of images this would generate. A huge thank you to Nick Beckwith for taking the time to look through literally thousands of images and video clips.

Seven robins (5 adults and 2 nestlings) were colour banded in 2020. This brings the total number of banded birds to 12. Thank you to Graham Parker for coming out to oversee the banding and his support for my application to become a Level 3 robin bander. Fingers crossed.

Karthic also generously donated his time and expertise to film some of the work we did for the project. Filming gear isn't the most portable thing to carry whilst chasing robins through forest! The film is a work in progress and we look forward to seeing it one day.

A final big thank you to Nick, Jan Littleton and the Zoology Department at Uni for the most important thing of all – supplying the mealworms that we need to get the job done, and to Jill and Ruth for letting us follow robins around their lovely forest at Mopanui.

And the most promising sign for population self-sustainability? Our 2019 banded fledgling found a territory and a mate and successfully fledged his own chicks in 2020.

P.S. The 2021 season is only 6 months away.....

**George Pickerell**



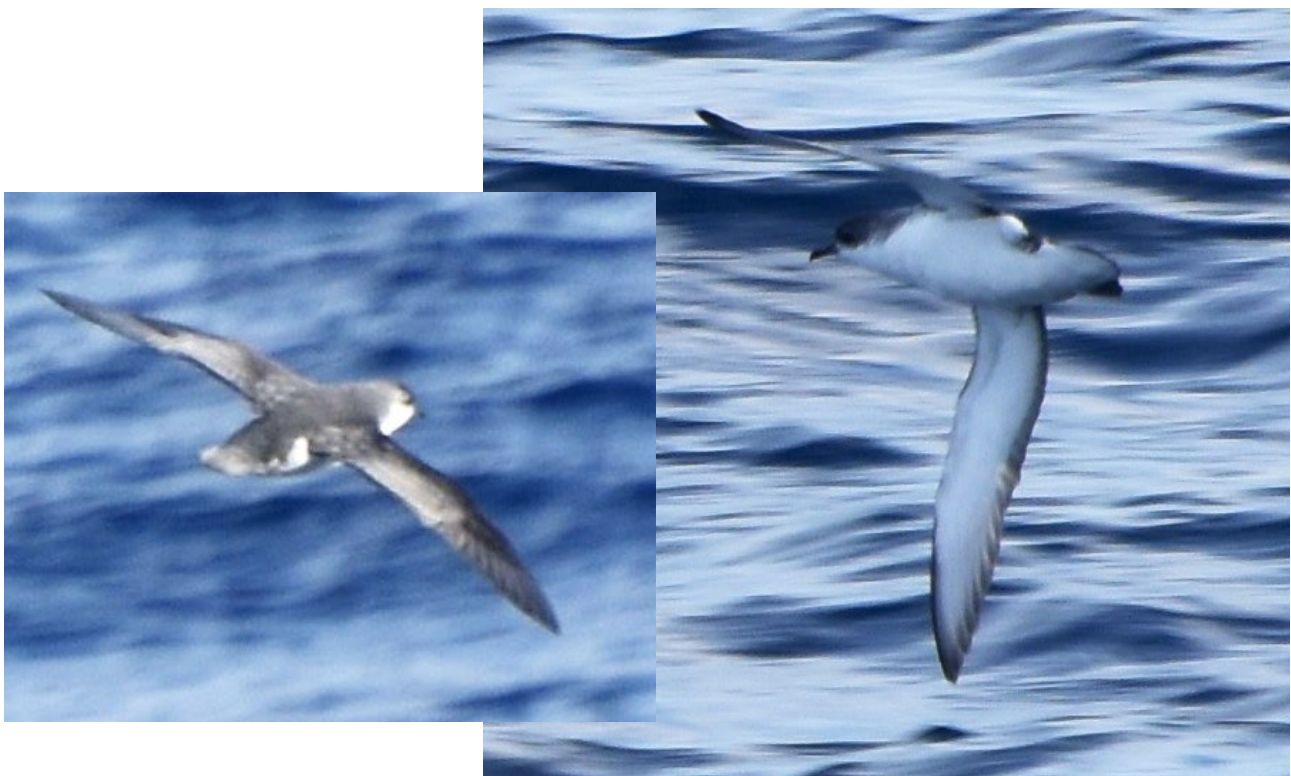
## Exploring the wide open Southern Ocean.

A trip to the Antipodes to pick up the wonderful seabird scientists Graeme Elliott and Kath Walker realised a long held to ambition to find out what happens in the wide open Southern Ocean.

The Evohe left Otago at dusk so viewing did not start till dawn when we were over a hundred kilometres from land. White-chinned petrels were the signature bird of the voyage, being recorded from most of the 179 ten minute counts conducted over five days.



Graeme and Kath did a survey and estimate fifty thousand white-chinned petrels breed on the Antipodes Island. My particular friends the prions were regularly present and sometimes I was able to positively identify one as broad-billed. The rest are too complicated to put a specific name to.



Antipodean albatross were seen on all days with them being common in counts when we were within three hundred kilometres of the Islands.

The interesting things I observed were that there was no following of the boats wake. Some individual albatross could be seen to visit the boat in several counts. Only one count had no birds, most had four to six species recorded. There were no flocks of birds seen until we got back to Otago waters. In fact it was rare to see even four of the one species in the counts. There were very few aggregations of birds for feeding or social reasons. But all of the way there was bird activity.

Wonderful modern cameras mean you can see things that are too fleeting for the naked eye. Like this black-bellied storm petrel taking what looks like a ski turn.



What was it doing exactly? I apprehended three events like this.

And the antipodean albatross female soaring.



There were many fleeting views of gadfly petrels particularly in the Cookkilaria group. Some were easily resolved as mottled petrels but there were unsatisfactory pics of others. Here are some for other peoples opinions.





Gadflys outside the Cookilaria group were satisfactorily resolved as soft plumaged petrels that breed on Bollons Island in the Antipodes islands and white-headed petrels. There was a period of excitement when I thought I had some very dark relatives of the soft plumaged, maybe Taiko. But examination of the pics did not support that.



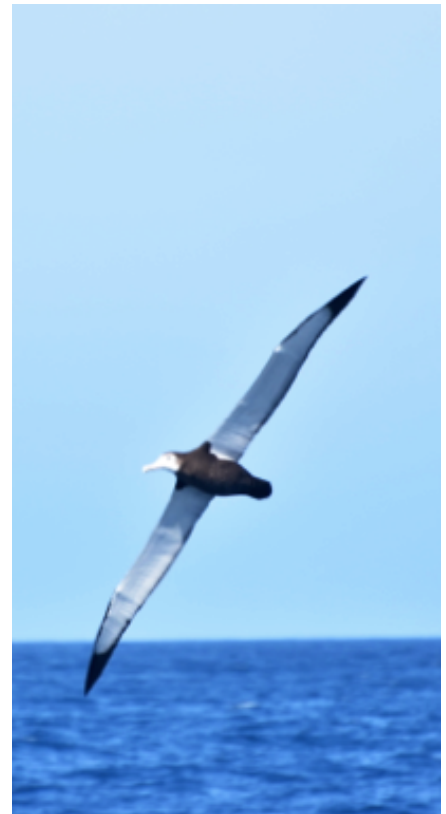
It was only in returning to Otago waters that flocks of seabirds were seen. Just off Taiaroa there were thousands of gulls feeding red-billed, black-billed and black-backed. Just a few hundred sooty shearwaters and individual southern Royals and two Hutton/fluttering shearwaters.

Many hundreds more red-bills were roosting at the Onekapua gun emplacements one km SE of Taiaroa and the next headland east where there had been breeding colonies last summer.



### The list of species seen in the open ocean.

Albatross:	southern Royal, Antipodean wanderer, white-capped, Salvins, Campbell, black-browed, Buller.
Petrels:	northern giant, southern giant, white-chinned, soft-plumaged, white headed, Cape, mottled, other Cookilaria
Shearwaters:	Sooty, subantarctic little
Prions:	broad-billed, other
Storm petrels:	black-bellied, white-faced, grey-backed and one brown skua.



### Note

The traditional method for seabird observations on ocean voyages is to do one ten minute count every hour. The diversity of species results shown in consecutive counts shows that only one count per hour would greatly under report the species diversity present in that hours travel and the lack of boat following increases the independence of the counts from observer vessel bias.

**Graeme Loh**

## Oamaru Penguin Symposium May 2021



The Oamaru Penguin Symposium will be held at the Opera House in Oamaru, on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2021. 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](http://www.oamarupenguinsymposium.com)

## Otago Summer Wader Count 29 November 2020

	Kaitiaki	Blueskin Bay	Ara-moana	Harbour West	Harbour East	Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Catkins	PBello-Taiaroa	Toma-hawk	Total Nov. 2017	Total Dec. 2018	Total Nov. 2019	Total Nov. 2020
Pied Oystercatcher	42	233	44	206		120	127	67			724	270	437	839
Variable Oystercatcher	16	16	4	2	11	8	5	8	14	1	137	45	76	85
Pied Stilt	2	10	12			21	15	90		16	82	97	40	156
Banded Dotterel								3			15	43	7	3
Spur-winged Plover	3	16	2	2		15	2	78			95	30	44	118
Bar-tailed Godwit	153	569	282				625	353			2017	1723	2435	1982

Thank you everyone for returning the counts to me promptly.... much appreciated!

The weather was very kind to us, warm and sunny.

The number of nesting red-billed gulls was roughly double that of the previous year. The southern breakwater was almost completely covered with nesting birds including approximately 50 white-fronted terns.

The two large inlets (Shag and Burkes) were almost devoid of birds save for the odd gull and little shag. No ducks were present, probably due to earthworks in the construction of the cycle/pedestrian pathway.

**Maree Johnston**



## 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.

- |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wed 24 February | Abby Smith<br>Birds of down-east Maine.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Sun 7 March     | <b>Atlas Field Trip to Toko Mouth</b><br>Contact Richard (027 281 8701 or <a href="mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com">cluthaphotos@gmail.com</a> ) to register interest.                                                                                  |
| Wed 24 March    | Oscar Thomas<br>Birding from The Chathams to Here.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Sat 24 April    | <b>Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching, 10 am to noon.</b><br>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<br>Contact Andrew if you can help; phone 454 5830 |
| Wed 28 April    | James Hunter<br>Chasing takahe and making maps.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Wed 26 May      | Scott Forrest<br>Understanding the movements and behaviours of the Orokonui kaka.                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Wed 23 June     | Myrene Otis<br>The foraging ecology of Tawaki in Milford Sound.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 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.                                                                                                                                                                           |

**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 March newsletter to:  
Sue Odlin [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

***Many thanks to all who contributed.***

**Final date for copy for next newsletter: 16 March**