



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 11/2021*  
*November 2021*  
*Pt 1*

**Wednesday 24 November, 7.30**  
**Maori Hill Community Centre, 607 Highgate**  
**Bird Quiz night and festive end-of-year supper**

Unite  
against  
COVID-19

## Ornithological Snippets

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

## eBird News

The next field trip will be to the Middlemarch area on Saturday 4th December. Meet outside Bunnings at 8.30, or Outram 4 Square at 9am. Please register your interest with Richard.

If Nigel's account of the spring visit to Motatapu has whetted your appetite, we have another trip there scheduled for 17-19<sup>th</sup> December. I'm not quite sure of the accommodation arrangements at this stage, but we may have space for 1 or 2 more, so if you are interested in going let me know and I'll put you on the shortlist.

December will be the start of the summer Atlas season, and there is plenty of scope to go out and make a difference. Looking at the Atlas effort map, there are plenty of gaps in most parts of Otago; if you select coverage based on species seen, you will see that there are large areas with fewer than 10 species per square. If anyone is heading away over the holidays and would like some ideas, drop me a line and I'll give you some pointers as to where your efforts can be concentrated.

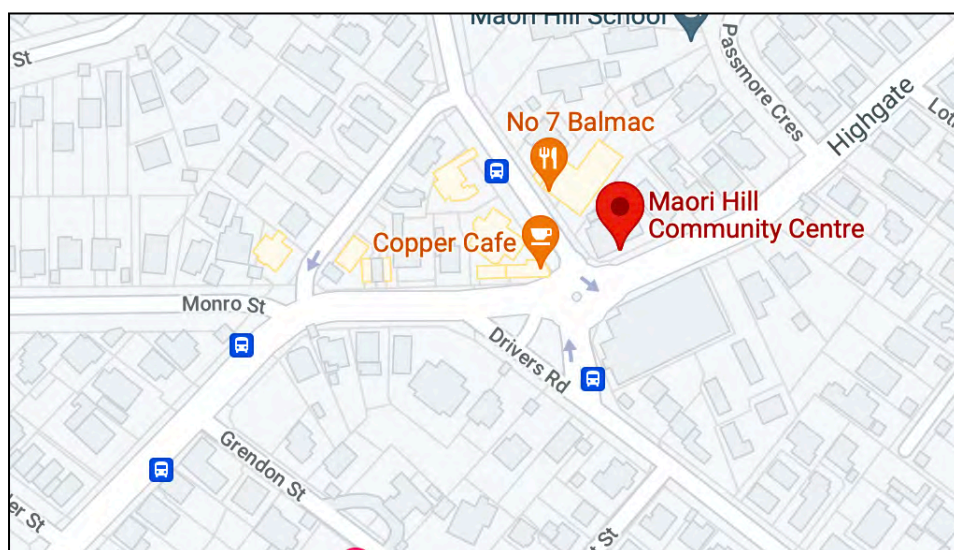
Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

### Bird Quiz Night, Wednesday 24 November

**For the November meeting, Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November**, we will meet together at the Maori Hill Community Centre at 607 Highgate, near the Maori Hill round-about at the top of Drivers Road. It's easy to find but you may need to search around for parking as one side of Highgate is no-parking; look on Drivers Road, Monro Street and Balmacewen Road. Bus #50 gets you there.

We have a birdy quiz planned for entertainment and enlightenment, and it should work social distancing-wise if we mainly stay in our 'bubbles'. The hall can hold 50 people and there are great facilities for supper, so as usual please bring, if you can, some festive food to share for supper.



Mary

## George and Doreen Grant Notebook: Progress Report

Last year I put out the call for volunteers to transcribe the contents of a note book compiled by George and Doreen Grant, late of Outram.

I'm pleased to be able to report that the first part of this project has been completed due to the efforts of Francie Beggs and Emma Salmon. Thanks to these two patiently reading some very dodgy handwriting we now have a completed spreadsheet of some 930 rows of data. The notebook includes reports of some 52 species including odd records for some rare vagrants. The largest number of reports are for black-fronted dotterel and cattle egret both on the Taieri Plains and now both species absent from the Taieri.

I'll now tidy up the sheet and prepare it for uploading to eBird. For the dotterels and the egret I'll be investigating to see if more formal reporting is justified.

I'll continue to report in as things proceed.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## Motatapu atlassing weekend, 8 - 10 October 2021



A small team of 6 of us spent a weekend of beautiful weather targeting 4 squares for the atlas project. Richard (from Balclutha), Dawn (Queenstown), Oscar and Ela (Dunedin), and my wife Wendy and I (Coromandel peninsula) met on Friday evening at Glendhu Bay to drive in to this huge, scenic, station with our sights set on DL19, DL20, DM19 and DM20.

Richard and Dawn had organised everything with the very helpful people from Motatapu (usually off limits) who provided us not only access, but the use of a very comfortable hut for 2 nights. Not

long after we arrived at our accommodation it started raining which didn't deter us from trying to get a Morepork to respond to our playback, though was likely instrumental in our lack of success!

The main task of Friday night though was making a plan for Saturday. Richard, Dawn and Wendy were to explore the areas up toward Roses Hut, whilst Ela, Oscar and myself were to follow Highland Creek up to the Highland Creek Hut (both these named huts are on the Te Araroa and Motatapu Trails) and get into the tussock country in both DM19 and DM20.

The weather did as forecast, so whilst it was a cold start, it soon cleared into a stunning blue-sky day. Our track started just below our hut as a rough, 4WD vehicle track, crossing the

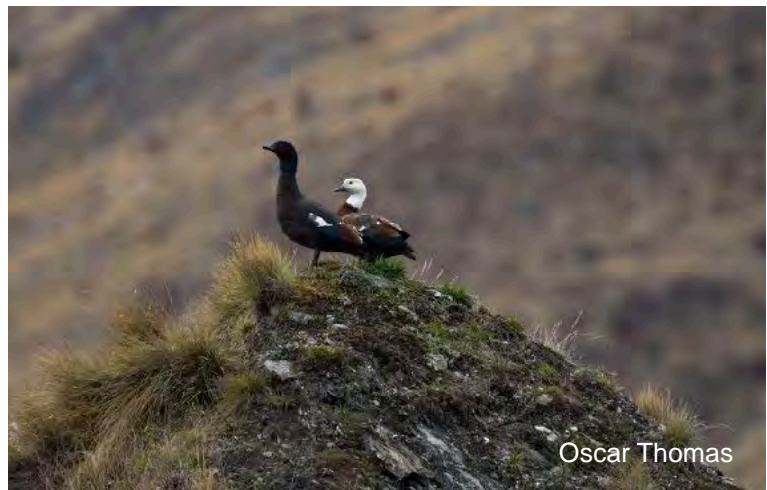


stream once or twice as it wound its way up through the beech forest. There wasn't a whole heap of birds but Grey Warbler, Bellbird, Fantail, Tomtit, Silvereye and Chaffinch were among those we recorded. Despite searching and straining our ears on both the outward and return journeys, we failed to even get a sniff of the Riflemen that had been recorded previously.



The track rapidly deteriorated from something that could have been easily traversed by quad bike, first to animal track, then to bits of animal track with lots of stream crossings, on to “no track just head upstream as best you can”, and finally to a steep slope just before we joined Te Araroa that even a goat would have thought twice about! Actually, judging by the way those creatures (of which, sadly, we saw several) crossed the landscape, they probably wouldn't have struggled, but it was nice to think that they might!

As we left the beech forest behind, the already sparse birdlife reduced further and the already impressive scenery became grander. The occasional NZ Falcon flew overhead and pairs of Paradise Shelduck occupied the summits of rock pillars in what looked like a game of “King of the Castle”. Were they really planning on nesting in such places?



Oscar Thomas

Once on Te Araroa, progress became more straightforward and we had enough time to get about 1.5km into the tussock of DM20, as well as a larger chunk in DM19. Harrier, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer, Tomtit, Pipit, Redpoll, Grey Warbler and a distantly heard Falcon were all recorded in the high country, and we also wondered if we'd heard a Chukar, though if we did, it was in no mood to respond to our playing of calls.



Retracing our steps home didn't add to our species list but did provide the day's highlight when we were able to watch a pair of Falcon mating from about 40 metres away. Special indeed. We had recorded just 19 species all day, but it had been a fantastic experience to spend time here.

After a well-coordinated dinner of far too much good food produced by all concerned, we tried again for Morepork. This time our efforts were rewarded with at least 2 birds calling from the trees.

On Sunday, the teams were reorganised with Richard, Oscar and Ela following a track on the Kennedy Face (DL20) while Dawn, Wendy and myself walked a longer circuit up the north branch of the valley (mostly

DL19). Another day of great weather, a slightly more extensive bird list (due mainly to more varied and generally lower terrain) and many more checklists entered into the atlas project.

Walking through a place such as this (or even just a corner of it as we did) is perhaps the best way to appreciate its vastness. Amazing to think anyone could actually own all this land, but great to see the money, time and expertise that is going in to attempting to restore it to something akin to its former state.

A big thank you to Motatapu Station for their help and support, to Dawn and Richard for their organisation and to everyone involved for providing such agreeable company. I felt very privileged to be there for the weekend and to contribute another small piece to the giant puzzle that is the NZ bird atlas.

**Nigel Milius**



Kererū hatch and raise one chick at a time .  
Image credit: Pseudopanax (Wikimedia Commons)

<https://newzealandecology.org/nzje/3441.pdf>

Factors limiting kererū  
(*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) populations  
across New Zealand (2021)



## Mopanui robin update

We had a late start to monitoring this season because of the increased Covid alert level in August. However, since mid-September a large crew of us have been visiting the Mopanui study site regularly. We have

identified more robin territories than ever – at least 24, including 12 pairs.



So far, we have found 8 nests, of which 2 have fledged, 2 failed because of predation, 1 has an unknown outcome, and 3 are still active. The Halo Project has again loaned us a couple of trail cameras, and we have one of these up on a nest at present.

The first fledglings were seen 2 October, which means the nest must have been initiated ~26 August. On our last visit, Franny rope climbed up to a nest with Graeme's help, to retrieve two 13-day old nestlings for banding. One by one, the nestlings were taken from the nest, placed in a handbag and lowered to the ground to be banded before being replaced in the nest.



Franny climbing up to the nest

Maureen Howard

The female robin stayed on the nest brooding the remaining nestling the entire time. Rain last weekend prevented us from returning to check whether the chicks had fledged, but we are looking forward to confirming this next time.



Banded 13-day old nestling Graeme Loh

It has been an enjoyable season so far, and great to see so many people involved in the project. Thank you to everyone for coming along, and to Nick for growing our mealworms. If you keep meaning to give it a go, it's not too late to join us – we will be continuing our monitoring trips until mid-December.

**George Pickerell**

### **Live Webcam of Falcon nest**

Graeme Parker and Kalinka Rexter-Huber have been studying Kārearea/NZ falcons in the Otago area for some years now. Graeme has just emailed me say that as part of their work they put trail cameras on all of their Kārearea study nests to determine the outcome of the breeding attempt. The landowner where one particular nest is situated offered to install a live stream webcam on the nest.

This is to let local Birds NZ members about the live stream webcam at this link:

<http://www.falconcam.nz/>

The birds have four chicks so there will be a lot of feeding activity. The chicks will also start moving around a lot soon so the window of opportunity is just another week or so. After the chicks move away from the scrape we hope to put the cam on another active Kārearea scrape.

Graeme is keen for you all to have the opportunity to watch this.

**Mary**

## An ornithological snippet

I was walking along the Foveaux walkway at Bluff, when I heard a penguin. I stopped and didn't hear it again, but heard what I thought was a chick. Then I walked back a few paces, took three steps off the track and saw a Tawaki!! And it had a very hungry chick with it. I got out my zoom lens and took a minute and a half of footage.



I sent it to the Bluff Hill Motupohue environmental group who knew that Tawaki visited there, but didn't know they had chicks! So they used my video to help with their comms about keeping dogs on a lead. Here's the video footage: <https://fb.watch/96BMiouRT5/> and a map showing the location.



I also notified The Tawaki Project who didn't know they were nesting there either.

It's testament to what they're doing at Bluff Hill though. There was so much native bush and hardly any gorse at all. There were so many tui and bellbird. I've never seen such a high density of traps either. But look at the reward!

**Beth Wishart**

### From the Trust FaceBook page, 11 November

A frustrating day on Motupohue today. Most of our traps along the Foveaux Walkway were vandalised - some destroyed and almost none left operational. And this is just as penguins, titi and other taonga species need that protection. Our team is out repairing the damage.

We will be video monitoring on the walkway and we will not hesitate to hand evidence to the police for action.

We need your support please. If you're walking on the hill and you see someone interfering with traps, please film them (discretely - we don't want vandalism to turn into violence) and bring the video to us. All of our volunteers and employees will be wearing either the green vests or hi-viz uniforms.

We're baffled about the motivation. If there's a perception that traps are cruel, please check out YouTube videos of those predators eating penguin or titi chicks alive. Now that's cruel! That's the cruelty our traps are preventing.





## Report from Atlassing, Labour Weekend 2021

13 Otago birders headed out to Alexandra on Labour Weekend to carry out almost 3 days of atlassing. It was a stunning weekend with warm temperatures over the whole weekend.

On Friday night, we all met at the Alexandra Holiday Park where most of the birders were staying to hash out the details for Saturday's adventures. A shining cuckoo was heard just outside the cabins by Oscar which was a lovely start to what was to be a successful weekend. Some eager birders (who could stay up past 10pm!), went out on a Little Owl hunt just outside of Alexandra and were successful.



With us all being eager birders, we started our adventures at 8am on Saturday morning. Locations for the day included Old Woman Range, Pool Burn, Manor Burn, and Koputai Conservation Park.

I headed out with Mary and Ela to attempt to get up to the top of Symes Road, an ascent of over 1000m. After driving my little 2WD car up a rather precarious road, we managed to get up to 950m! By the car, we had 4 Australasian pipits

keeping a watchful eye over us. We thought that two of them had a nest as they kept on coming back to the same outcrops, but there was no caching behaviour occurring. Other birds counted here were paradise shelducks, NZ falcon, Australian magpie, skylarks, Lesser redpolls and a yellowhammer.

Mary, Ela and I then headed out to Fraser's Dam. When we arrived at the Dam, it was so quiet we could hear fish taking breathers at the lake's surface. As we were having our lunch, we saw 2 Australasian Harriers flying near the top of the hills. Other species observed here were Canada Geese, Paradise Shelducks, Black Shags, Grey Warbler, Dunnocks and Song Thrushes. On the way back from the Dam near some farm buildings, we saw 200 European Starlings feeding in a paddock. Always a sight!



Returning to the Holiday Park, we stopped at McPherson Pond, a farm irrigation pond off Earnsclough Road. It was a nice change, and the first time I saw black-billed gulls in Central

Otago. Species of note here were NZ Scaup, Australian Shoveler, White-faced Heron, Little Pied Shag and South Island Oystercatchers. So a very busy pond indeed!

Mary, Ela and I were the first ones back and so took the time to relax, shower and explore a little bit of the Manuherikia River. As the rest of the birders slowly dribbled back to the Holiday Park, we heard all about their amazing stories and the birds they saw. Oscar was lucky and quick enough to see a Cirl Bunting!

Once everyone was back and had settled, we ordered Chinese takeaways and geared up for another little owl adventure! This one I went on as it was an 8pm kick-off, so plenty of time before I needed to get my beauty sleep. 2 cars headed in convoy to the back of Alexandra and we sat outside a farm house, trying to not to look too suspicious of course! The little owl's call was played with 2 real little owls calling back to us! Not long after, a little owl flew right over us on the road and settled near a water wheel. What a sight, and my first little owl!



No sleep for us birders, with most of us heading off at 8am on Sunday morning to start another day's adventure. I went with Richard, George and Ivan this time and we headed out to explore the Manuherikia Valley. Others went to the Old Woman's Range and Little Valley.

It was a busy day for my team, with us exploring all possible water sources in the Valley to

accurately describe the bird species inhabiting the area. Our team also encountered a local farmer who was curious as to why 4 people were looking through telescopes and binoculars onto his pond. We also happened to be positioned just above the farmhouse. Surveillance of us intruders started off with a wee bit of conversation and curious looks, then a car slowly drove past us, and ended with the farmer coming up to take a look. Apparently, the locals in the past had issues with people taking pictures and modifying them as a way to protest against farming practices. Once the farmer heard that we were looking at the birds in his pond, he gave us permission to enter his land and even let us head out to some more ponds at the foothills of the Range. Whew!



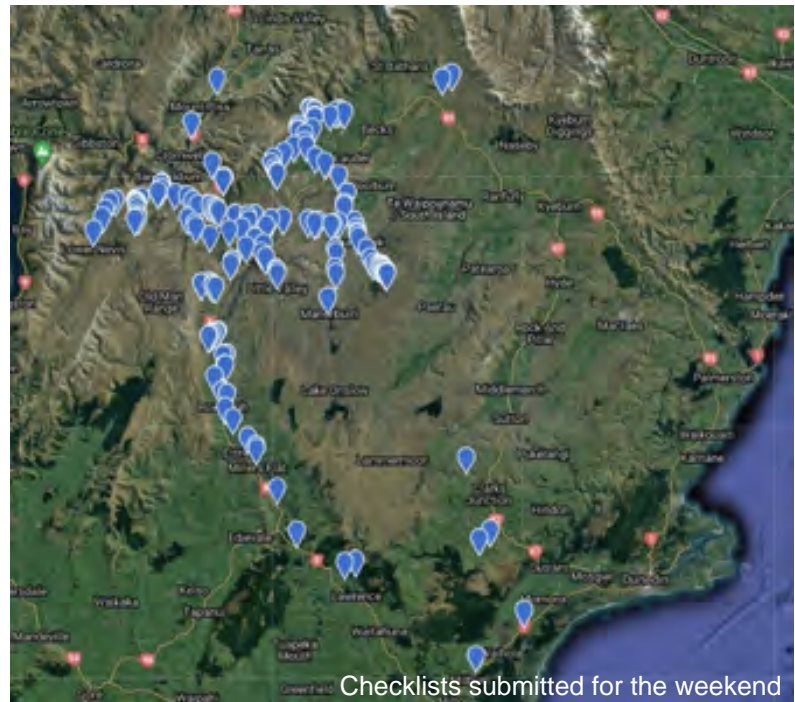
The farmer's pond was one of the busiest counted on our trip, with species including 47 spur-winged plover, 58 SIPO, 26 South black-backed gull, 5 black-billed gull, 6 pied stilt, 14 Australasian shoveler and 1 feral pigeon sighted.



After we had swept the Valley, we headed up Thomson Gorge Road past a peculiar settlement called Drybread for a change of scenery. Like most roads around Alexandra, we were warned that the majority of the Road was 4WD only track and that self-recovery was required. So, we decided to hop out and walk some of the way. Species observed from our walk included Grey Warbler, Black Shag, Welcome Swallows, Silvereye and Australasian Harrier.

It was a late arrival to the Holiday Park after our successful outing and everyone was ready for bed rather quickly. No little owl spotting that night!

In summary, it was a great weekend and I really enjoyed getting to know everyone better. As a blossoming birder, I learnt heaps in a very short time. Thank you to Richard for organising, and to everyone else for your company and infectious enthusiasm.



Here's to the next atlassing weekend!

**Emma Salmon**



## Black-billed gull chicks (K-bills ) marked at Makarora

10 November 2021



Rachel Hufton, Aspiring Biodiversity Trust, and Sarah Forder of DOC have been doing good work in the Upper Clutha valleys. For the first time in many years the Hunter River birds have been surveyed. And this season black-billed gulls have set up colonies on the Makarora riverbed. Rachel asked for assistance with banding the chicks so the origin of birds establishing colonies in future years might be identified. I am particularly curious to learn where the birds I have seen around Haast township have come from.

Before embarking on this I consulted Rachel McClellan who worked with K-bills in Southland. I am familiar with red-bill gull colonies. They are viciously intolerant of any neighbours and unattended chicks. Rachel's advice was re-assuring. They turned out to be nowhere near as cranky as red-billed gulls.

Sue and I met with Rachel Hufton, Sarah Forder and Antony Coote on Tuesday 9th morning and waded across the river. We set up a picnic table as the processing base 70 metres away and a T shaped fence to corral the chicks. This combined with portable lengths of mesh proved efficient at marshalling chicks.



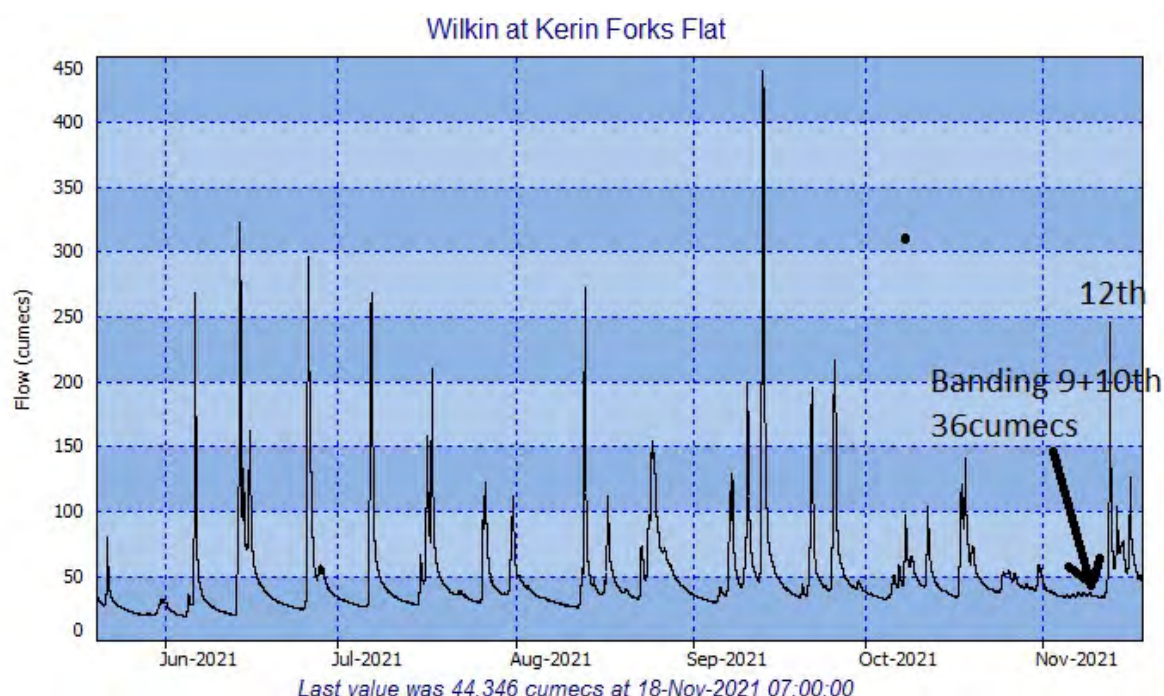
We did several roundups and the food items regurgitated were interesting. At first I ignored them as just messy but then there was an alarming find, the remains of a small gull chick! We did not want to believe it initially but the large knee was diagnostic. In the warmth of the midday, bright green manuka beetle were prominent, explaining the adults we could see hawking for prey ten to fifteen metres above paddocks. Early the next morning the diet was worms, followed by the larvae of carrion beetles.

I was there to train and support. The size 'E' stainless steel bands are quite stout and bit springy so need some care to close them well. Ankles were measured and those less than 7mm diameter were not banded. No banding casualties were found when we did a check of the colony at the close of banding.



173 chicks were banded in this colony opposite School Road. The mark-resight at the end gave us an estimate of 50% of the creche age chicks being banded.

There were plenty of birds still on eggs, so, low river levels permitting, there will be another opportunity to band the next age group of chicks soon.



This year there are colonies of K-bills on the Makarora, none last year.

Looking at the river flow gauges nearby you can see why nesting on this river, so close to the Alps is hazardous. We did the banding at the end of a twenty day flood free period and I was very pleased to hear that rains did not flood the colonies two days later. Here's hoping. There was one chick with primaries forming up, well ahead of the other's development. Probably five days away from flying. The others probably two to three weeks away from the freedom of flight.

It was a great experience being on the riverbed with black-fronted terns, wrybill, banded dotterel, and SIPO all breeding. We used to regard this river as unimportant but now that many of the prime habitats, such as the Ahuriri River, have become choked with weeds the value of this 'clean' river has risen. We need to credit the good farming practices that jump on any weeds that try to colonise the river. Their long-term vigilance is important for river bird conservation.



Rachel and Sarah will be keen to get any sightings of banded K-bill gulls in the coming months and years. Remember they migrate to the coast so we may see some in winter depending on whether they follow the modern course of the Clutha River or its fossil course through Southland .

There are two ways to report your sightings of a black-billed gull with a metal band on the right leg online:

- Either by the FALCON database's Public Sightings Form  
link: <https://app.birdbanding.doc.govt.nz/sightings>
- Or by emailing details to [falcon@doc.govt.nz](mailto:falcon@doc.govt.nz)<<mailto:falcon@doc.govt.nz>>.

Put the band details in the comments section. Of course, enter place, time, date, and note other birds around.

If you have a fancy camera, you may be able to read the last three (of 5) numbers of the E band which will tell us exactly which bird it is. Some may go on to have a notable life!

Rachel and Sarah and I can then log into Falcon and see what you have found.

**Graeme Loh**

Hi Graeme

Why are they called K-bills?

Sue

Oh dear I am too close to the subject.

K is the letter annotation used for black in colour band combinations.

I use K-bills as a note shorthand that means fewer misunderstanding with notes about sbbgs or poorly handwritten R bill gulls.

Learnt it form the other old hands.

G



## Request for novel locations of red-billed gulls breeding at Otago

Otago is bucking the trend of national decrease in red-billed gulls. The New Zealand population has decreased 30% in 50 years (Frost & Taylor 2018: [http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/system/files/Frost%26Taylor\\_2018.pdf](http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/system/files/Frost%26Taylor_2018.pdf)). In contrast, numbers at Otago have at least tripled through 20 years (Perriman & Lallas 2012: <http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/system/files/Perriman%20%26%20Lallas%202012.pdf>). We are now in the second year of a participatory science project run by the Royal Albatross Centre. This project encompasses Otago and has two goals; first, increase public awareness with the aim of mitigating perceived conflicts with gulls; and second, increase public involvement through citizen science and school projects.

We accounted for about 6,000 red-billed gull nests at Otago in the 2020 season, a total representing a 25% increase through the last decade. Although most large breeding colonies (e.g. Pukekura / Taiaroa Head) have persisted long term, some red-billed gulls change their nesting location from year to year. This complicates understanding trends in population size, and what constitutes a good nesting location.

As the 2021 breeding season has begun, we are again gathering information about nesting locations to improve our understanding of the number and size of nesting colonies in Otago. This information will help generate a more accurate estimate population size and increase our understanding of why they nest where they do. If you have seen gulls nesting this season, please share your observations (photos are very useful). The ideal timing is late November to early January. Go to <http://www.inaturalist.org> and search for *Red-billed Gull Nests in Otago*, and upload your sighting information. Alternately email your observations to [education@albatross.org.nz](mailto:education@albatross.org.nz).

The accompanying map shows Otago locations and we look forward to being embarrassed by the manifestation of other locations we don't know about. Of particular interest is any nesting on buildings anywhere except Oamaru.



Our estimates for number of red-billed gull nests at Otago in 2020. Notable absences this year were no nests along Waitaki River (North of Oamaru), at Shag Point (south of Katiki Point) and at Karitane and Doctors Point (south of Waikouaiti)

**Sally Carson & Chris Lallas**

# Share your observations on our



## Red-billed gulls / Tarapunga

*Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae scopulinus*

### Where are they nesting?

Numbers and locations of Tarapunga nesting colonies are changing. You can help collect data to improve understanding of population trends and why they nest where they do.



The nest is a simple bowl of seaweed, twigs and grass (30 cm across). In Otago, courtship and nest building begin late September / early October. The first eggs are laid in early to mid October and are incubated for 3-4 weeks. The chicks fledge at 4 weeks of age, throughout December and January.

add photos  
of your  
sightings!

- ▶ Go to [www.iNaturalist.org](http://www.iNaturalist.org) search for 'Red-billed Gull Nests' in Otago and upload sighting OR Email your observation to [education@albatross.org.nz](mailto:education@albatross.org.nz)



## From Doubtful Sound to Preservation Inlet

At the end of September, to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary (give or take a few weeks) of us all meeting up for the first time, Suzanne, Wendy, Nigel and I spent a week on the Milford Wanderer, on a Discovery Expedition from Doubtful Sound to Preservation Inlet. For most people this would be a week of relaxation, good food and company, watching the world drift



by at a leisurely pace. But with a party of birders aboard, in a sparsely atlased part of the country, something had to give. And so every daylight hour, and several nocturnal ones as well, there was usually at least one of us out on deck, scanning with eyes and ears, in an effort to fill as many gaps as possible, while keeping an eye on Atlas square boundaries to maximise coverage.

After boarding the vessel at Deep Cove, we set off around lunchtime (fortunately most meals were served while we were stationary, so we didn't have to choose between food and birding!) and headed straight down Doubtful Sound and out into the Tasman for one of two open water sections of the cruise. The winds of the previous day or two had eased, but there was still a bit of a swell, and more importantly good numbers of birds: 4 albatross species, plus giant petrels, Sooty Shearwaters, Cape Petrels and a close view of a Grey-faced Petrel, finishing off with a Gannet at the entrance to Breaksea Sound.

We spent the next two days exploring the sheltered waters between Breaksea and Dusky Sounds, including visits to Anchor Island, home of Kakapo (though none seen), and Pigeon Island, home of Richard Henry (also not seen). Evenings were spent in various sheltered coves, and nocturnal counts were undertaken at either end of the day; Morepork was recorded at 3 of the 5 locations, but the most common night-time species were probably Kaka and Variable Oystercatcher.



Offshore from Anchor Island, looking up Dusky Sound

On our second pelagic session we had mostly acquired our sea-legs, and were thus able to fully appreciate a pod of Humpback Whales breaching at various distances. There were also good numbers of birds again, but of a different composition to Sunday, with at least one Broad-billed Prion among the large numbers of Fairy Prions, several Common Diving Petrels, and lots more Sooty Shearwaters among the albatross.





Near the mouth of Preservation Inlet

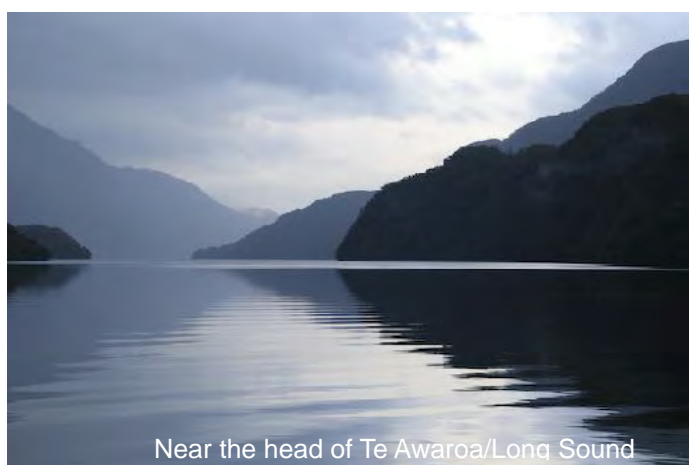
Our final area of discovery was Preservation Inlet, which has a fascinating history, even to those of us whose main interest lies elsewhere.

We visited one of two sandy beaches in Fiordland, (so we were told), took a walk out to Puysegur Point (where the weather station was being repaired, having recently been struck by lightning) and visited the predator-free Coal Island.



Puysegur Point

The last night was spent at the head of Long Sound, where the more competent of us went kayaking, while the less competent paddled round in a small circle, and the sensible one stayed on board the Wanderer and took photos of the rest of us!



Near the head of Te Awaroa/Long Sound

It was interesting to see Black-backed Gulls in ones and twos, dotted along the coast, rather than in the large numbers associating with farmland and landfill sites; and a complete absence of sparrows, starlings, thrushes and harriers.



During the cruise we compiled checklists for 29 atlas squares, many of which had little or no previous spring coverage, and recorded 48 species, about half of which were seabirds. Land birds were (perhaps surprisingly) rather sparse, and though we found most species we would have expected, they tended to be well spread out.

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

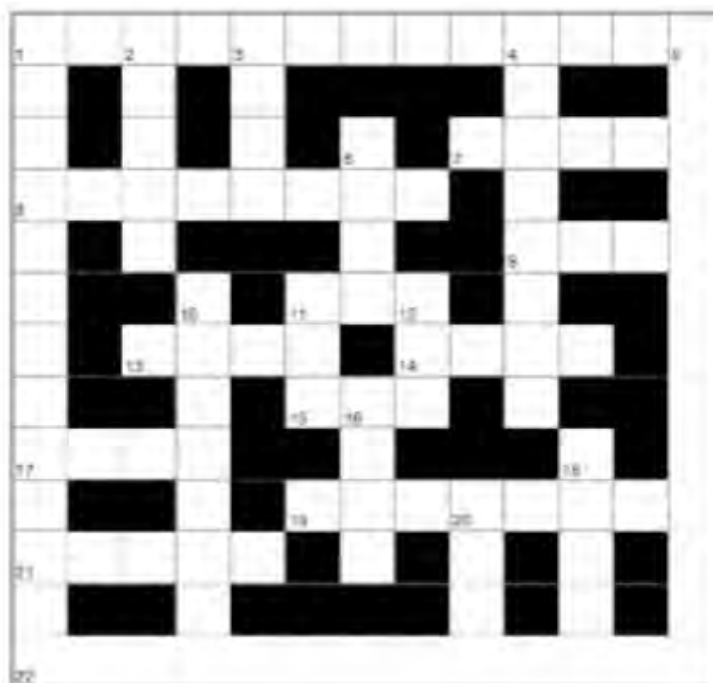
## Christmas Crossword (from an old OSNZ Northland Newsletter)

### Clues across

1. Common white New Zealand bird (3-6, 4)
7. See 5 down.
8. Former American Long-tailed Duck
9. Grey, Brown & Campbell Island ones occur in New Zealand
- 11 Genus of endangered Hawaiian birds
- 13 See 18 down
- 14 Extinct New Zealand bird
- 15 Lacking moisture
- 17 Metal decay or part of a tanager that isn't yellow?
- 19 Colourful European woodland bird
- 21 2 under par for the raptor
- 22 Decorative species of antbird? (6, 7)

### Clues down

- 1 Argentina's national bird (6, 7)
- 2 Well-dressed person?
- 3 Trouble-ridden country but home to the babbler
- 4 British garden bird (5, 3)
- 5 Baby boomer? (6,7) and 7 across: prefix for an even smaller one?
- 6 Extinct Hawaiian bird
- 10 Australian nuthatch?
- 11 Aged
- 12 Timid species of albatross?
- 16 Huge South American bird
- 18 (and 13 across) North Atlantic auk
- 20 One of many on the breast of a thrush





## How to get birdies on a golf course

Nine months ago, a man called Paul was on a golf course. “Hmm”, he thought, as he picked out a new club to replace the one he’d somehow bent on a particularly hard piece of air. “Looks like there are a fair number of trees around here. That probably means possums”.

Most people would have shrugged the thought off, but Paul had a secret identity – he ran the CREST conservation group that covers the length of the Manukau Harbour from Karaka to Clarks Beach. And this was the Clarks Beach Golf Course.

“Wouldn’t it be nice”, mused Paul as he sliced another divot off the green, sending it spinning miles out into the open sea, “If we could get some good predator control going here. I mean, it’s really close to the beach, which would be good for the dotterels, and tūis would probably like these trees, and – “

At this point he rocketed his last ball past a somewhat confused magpie into the middle distance, and was forced to retreat to the clubhouse.



But the idea of a pest-free golf course stayed with him on the walk, and whilst drowning his sorrows in a cool beer, he ended up chatting about it to a lifetime member of the golf club called Lew White.

“Sure”, said Lew. “We lease the golf course land from Auckland Council, and they’re pretty keen on this pest control stuff too. I reckon they wouldn’t mind if we set something up between us. Let’s try a few traps”.

So in April, the CREST provided Lew with 15 “Flipping Timmy” possum traps, which went up on trees all over the golf course. Lew and a keen young man called Reon checked them every morning and evening, and the results were incredible – between eight and twelve possums every night. Over the first ten days they got 82 possums! None of the golfers seemed to mind the trapping, nor did the dog-walkers who used the course. One lady did say she’d seen a dead possum hanging out of a trap, but she wasn’t upset by it. Her dog’s opinion about the dead possum remains unknown, but is presumed to be favourable.

“It’s going really well”, said Paul to Lew, “but Reon’s noticing a lot of rat poo around when he’s clearing the possum traps. Could we do something about them as well?”

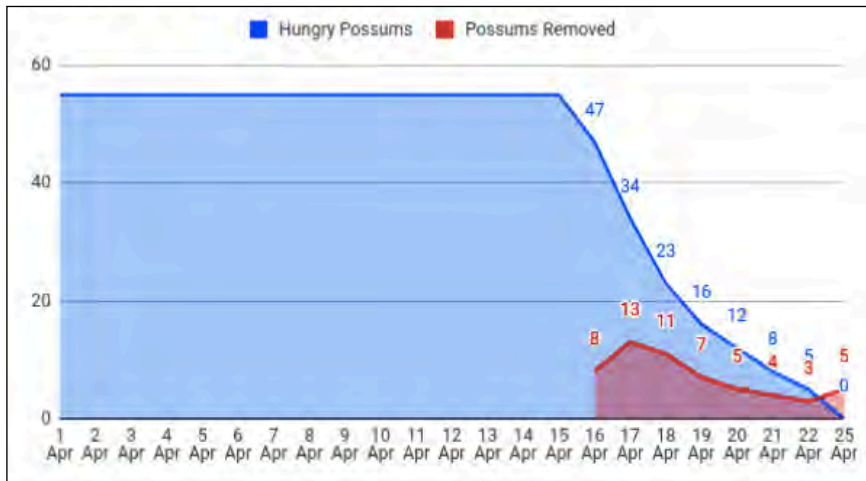
“Can’t put rat traps down”, said Lew. “All the golfers’d be catching their fingers in them trying to get the golf balls out”.

“Oh no,” said Paul. “We could use bait stations. Much safer”.



Lew regarded him suspiciously, but then the light of inspiration flickered in his eyes. “We’ll give it a go”, he said. “But only if you promise to use foot-long tees on every round you play here from now on. Deal?”

“Deal”, said Paul solemnly, and they shook on it.



Possums in Trees at Clarks Beach Golf Club - April

So twenty brand new Pied Piper rat bait stations went out, and signs went up, and Reon checked and filled the bait stations. The initial bait take-up was huge but after a while it settled down so Reon only needed to fill them each school holiday. A sign that the rat population was thoroughly suppressed.

Meanwhile the possum catch in the traps had dropped to only about six per week, so Paul organised a few Philproof bait stations to mop up any stray possums and keep the population down. A few Doc200 traps in boxes went in to cover other pests like stoats (and they also caught a few rats).



Every pest control device was logged on [TrapNZ](#), so progress could be tracked. After a month of baiting, Reon put out some wax tags to see how many pests were left. He found a few chew marks in places well away from where the traps and bait were. Places that would soon be covered! Reon set off at speed, with a gleam in his eye.

And that is the story of how Clarks Beach Golf Course is not only the top-voted golf course in New Zealand, but may also now be the most pest-free golf course in New Zealand.

And the best thing about this? The recovery of the birds.



Before Lew and Reon started their work there were no tui or kingfishers on the course, or indeed any birds except magpies and sparrows. Now, wherever you are on the course you can see or hear a tui or a kingfisher. In some places you can spot ten or more tui at once. There are berries hanging on trees which would once have been stripped bare by the pests.



So if you think your local golf course needs more birdies, then have a chat with them about following the example of Clarks Beach. If they

say it's too hard, get them to call Lew to get the lowdown on the benefits. He's gotten pretty keen about pest control now he's seeing the results. Meanwhile, Reon has learned heaps about trapping and baiting, and he's also become a pretty good photographer. In fact, all of the photos in this article were taken by him out on the golf course.

And Paul? They say that sometimes, on a cool and misty morning, if you listen very hard, far away you can hear the cry of a man shouting: "Bugger! I've lost another ball".

**Catherine Bircher Sept 20, 2021**



## Programme for 2021

**Monthly Indoor Meetings** will be held on the last Wed of the month at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

Sun 14 November **Wader count.** Volunteers needed. High tide (2.01m) at 1.18pm. Back up day Sun 12 December in case of bad weather. Contact Maree Johnstone [mareej@kinect.co.nz](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz) to be assigned to a team.

Wed 24 November **At Maori Hill Community Centre, 607 Highgate**  
**Bird Quiz night and festive end-of-year supper.**

Sat 4th December Field trip to the Middlemarch area on. Meet outside Bunnings at 8.30, or Outram 4 Square at 9am. Please register your interest with me.  
Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

23

**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](mailto:birds.otago@birds.nz.org.nz)

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

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **19 January**



Mary Lawson Alexander @ShatteredImages.