



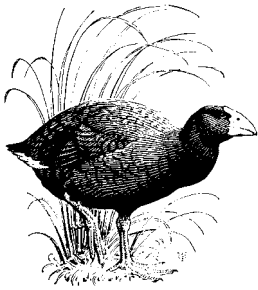
No. 1 March 2014

Birds New Zealand

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Birds New Zealand



NO. 1 MARCH 2014



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PUBLISHERS

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We welcome advertising enquiries. Free classified ads are available to members at the editor's discretion.

Articles for inclusion in *Birds New Zealand* are welcome in any form, though electronic is preferred. Material should be related to birds, birdwatchers, or ornithologists in the New Zealand and Pacific region, and can include news on birds, members, activities and bird study, literature/product reviews, letters to the editor, birdwatching sites, and identification. Illustrations are especially welcome, though they must be sharp. Copy deadlines are 10th February, May and August, and 1st November. The views expressed by the contributors to this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc.

QUOTE

Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere.
Ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōna te ao.

The bird that feasts on the Miro berry, theirs is the forest.
The bird that feasts on knowledge, theirs is the World.

Maori proverb

COVER PHOTOS

Front and Back Covers: White Herons at their sole breeding colony in the Waitangiroti Nature Reserve near Whataroa by Rebecca Bowater FPSNZ AFIAP



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President's Report



In this my first report for the year I hope that everyone is making interesting and productive bird observations. I know that I have heard of some interesting observations of birds in strange places and there have been some interesting waders on my local roost site. I also hope that everyone is submitting their observations into eBird to help build the database for the future, while at the same time providing monitoring information on populations and distribution.

Name Change:

Council has now largely completed its investigation into the ramifications of the decision at the last Annual General Meeting to introduce a common name for the organisation. Ian Armitage has produced a very comprehensive strategy for the implementation and Council is proceeding along the path that has been determined and agreed.

It was considered in this process that an important first step for the Society's medium term strategy, aimed at encouraging a better understanding of what the Society aims to achieve and its objectives was:

1. The adoption of the brand name 'Birds New Zealand' and
2. A change in the name of the magazine *Southern Bird* to *Birds New Zealand*.

This formed the basis of the motions that were passed at the 2013 Annual General Meeting.

Council decided that all aspects of branding across the Society should be reviewed to achieve effective coordination and consistency in not only the use of this name but also in relation to our relationship with various agencies and organisations with whom the Society interacts and cooperates.

It is intended that the new name for *Southern Bird* will be introduced with the publication of this current edition. The new letterhead is already being used and the details relating to the use of the name by regions will be circulated shortly.

Council decided early in this process that the *Notornis* symbol would be retained as part of the logo, to maintain consistency with the past.

It was also decided that the journal *Notornis* would remain unchanged and will still be issued under the Society's official name of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. This is consistent with the Society's scientific mandate and the refereed journal is the means of disseminating the scientific findings relating to bird life.

Australasian Ornithological Conference:

This was a very successful event organised by Mel Galbraith and his team from the Auckland Region. Council is grateful to Mel and his team for taking on this task under the name of the Society. There is a standing organising committee for these events comprised of representatives from BirdLife Australia and the Society and technically the conference is under their control, but because it was such a success, we will claim the credit.

There were approximately 180 registrants and I was pleased to see the number of attendees from New Zealand.

I was also pleased to see the calibre of the student presentations. I had a small role to play in the judging of the

awards and the presentations were at a consistently high standard. I believe that is a reflection of the standard of the tutors at the universities and also the calibre of the students. The long term future of bird related research appears to be in good hands.

Bruce McKinley was one of the chief judges and I thank him for fulfilling that role on behalf of the Society.

At this stage the venue of the next AOC in 2015 has not been confirmed, but it is likely to be in Adelaide and I would urge members to make an effort to attend as it will certainly broaden your outlook on ornithological studies.

New Field Guide:

The revision of the field guide is well advanced with Hugh Robertson having written about 75% of the text. A contract has now been entered into with Derek Onley to prepare the new plates and these should be completed by the middle of this year. Publication is expected towards the end of 2014.

At this stage it is intended to produce this in a hard copy format, along with the Hand Guide, but consideration will be given in future to making the information available in an electronic format.

Annual General Meeting Weekend 2014:

This event will be held in Palmerston North from the 31st of May to the 3rd June 2014. The registration forms are now available on the website, with early bird registrations available until the end of March. If you do not have access to a computer contact your RR.

I would urge as many members as possible to attend this event to not only learn of bird related research in New Zealand at the scientific days but to renew or establish contact with members from throughout the country. It also provides an opportunity to compare activities from region to region and hence enhance your enjoyment of your own bird watching.

Membership Database:

As you will be aware the Society has in the past two years developed an online membership database. This was developed for several reasons. The first being to take away all the work involved in maintaining a manual database and secondly to give members the ability to update their own details and thirdly to make it easier to communicate with members.

I would remind all officers of the Society that this membership database is only for Society activities and that the Council wishes to respect the privacy statement that we provided to members at the time of introduction that it would not be used for other purposes. I understand there has been a recent issue where the database was used to provide unsolicited material to members. That is clearly not within the mandate that the database is maintained and that practice should not continue into the future.

I would also remind members that if they change either email or postal addresses to make sure that the database is updated. Documents that are returned because of address changes only create additional work for our volunteers and can be easily avoided.

Mark Nee:

Early in December Mark Nee passed away. Older members would remember Mark as a long serving treasurer of the Society.

Mark was an old-fashioned accountant who did not believe in preparing budgets, which he considered to be a waste of time. However he always had a very good understanding of where the Society's finances stood at any particular point in time and was able to keep Council informed.

A fuller obituary for Mark will be provided in a future edition of *Birds New Zealand* but his passing leaves a further gap in the old time members of the Society.

Brian Gill:

I recently attended along with many other members of the Society the retirement of Brian Gill as Land Vertebrates Curator at the Auckland Museum after 32 years. While this was strictly not Society business Brian has been very active in Society affairs during his term as curator and indeed holds a Robert Falla Award from the Society, largely for his work on two checklists.

However, what is noteworthy from a Society members' perspective was his easy accessibility while he was the curator. If any member had a query regarding bird identification or found a dead bird that they could not identify, Brian was only too willing to drop his activities and look at the specimen. Of course he also obtained many of his museum specimens by that method, but for the member concerned it was always a learning experience and it must have been disruptive to Brian's normal work day.

We hope that now that he has more time on his hands that he will be able to participate more in Society affairs in the coming years.

Annual General Meeting Weekend 2015:

The AGM weekend in 2015 is also the 75th annual meeting of the Society. The Marlborough Region has offered to host this activity and make it worthy of the significant event of a 75th Anniversary.

While planning is only in its very early stages it is intended that much of the weekend will focus on the people that have been associated with the Society over 75 years and what the Society has achieved over that period. The preliminary theme that has been chosen is "**The People and the Birds**".

This sounds like a really interesting event because to my way of thinking the people are our greatest asset and they deserve to be acknowledged.

To make this event a success however it will require people to provide their memories so if people could note any activities or people that they believe should be considered and forward those suggestions to Mike Bell at Marlborough. To make the event a success we will also need people to make the presentations so if you are asked I hope that you can respond positively.

Conclusion:

I look forward to meeting many of the members during the Annual General Meeting weekend in June but in the meantime enjoy your birding.

DAVID LAWRIE, *President*

New brand name



Birds New Zealand

At its recent annual conference in Dunedin the Society unanimously adopted the brand name of '*Birds New Zealand*' in the hope that this will improve the awareness, understanding and relevancy of the society to the general public. While a similar move has been proposed before, this brand name change only relates to our more popular activities and particularly those where we are interacting with the public. Importantly, *Birds New Zealand* will be the new name for our journal *Southern Bird* from 2014. The society's website, brochures, notices and posters will gradually be changed also to reflect our new branding. *Notornis* will continue to be the scientific journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. Council sees this as the first step in reviewing the society's strategic plan, and members will be advised of further initiatives as they develop.

Joining *Birds New Zealand*

If you are reading this but are not a member of *Birds New Zealand* you would be very welcome to join us. Our membership consists of the whole spectrum of people interested in New Zealand/South Pacific birds from beginners with just an interest through keen birdwatchers and amateur ornithologists to professional ornithologists, so you should find others of a similar level to you, or find resources that are of interest to you.

For our very reasonable subscription fee of \$70 (students pay just \$35.00 and overseas/corporate rates etc are also available) you will receive a quarterly issue of this magazine *Birds New Zealand*, which is the Society's main mouthpiece to members, has articles of bird/ornithological interest and both national and local news; a quarterly issue of *Notornis*, the Society's scientific journal; and from time to time either free or discounted major Society publications.

In addition to reading material and, with time, a useful collection of reference books, members have access to meetings, both indoor and in the field, on a national and regional basis providing opportunities to gain knowledge on birds/ornithology and learning practical skills whilst networking with knowledgeable people. Our extensive library of books and journals is open for members to borrow and view items. Members are also encouraged to provide data to the Society's schemes, and supply sightings to the eBird online reporting tool. These data provide information on which research may be conducted, often with conclusions relevant to decision-making processes on the conservation of birds.

For further details and/or a membership form you should take one of three actions:

- Visit the Society's website www.osnz.org.nz
- Contact the Society's membership secretary.
- Contact your nearest regional representative.



An Old Robin

According to Heather and Robertson's Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand, the oldest known Robin (16+ years) was a South Islander that lived on an island in the Marlborough Sounds. However, that record has been overtaken by Gavin, a North Islander, in Pureora Forest. Robins were banded in the Tahae block at Pureora during 1995-98 by Department of Conservation staff for a study into the impacts of aerial 1080 operations on the species. As a consequence 75 robins (46 males and 29 females) that established on territories in the study area were individually colour-banded. Annual censuses of these robins have been carried out each spring to determine annual survival and longevity. On 8th January 2014, Gavin was found alive and well in his territory where he has always resided, and as usual he was keen for some mealworms to eat and cache. He was banded as a juvenile in March 1997. I reckon he would have been a nestling in December 1996, making him about 17 years old now. That seems an amazing age for a small bird, especially in a mainland New Zealand forest where pest control has been sporadic. He is the last survivor of the Robins banded in 1995-98, the last banded female having disappeared during 2009-10. My thanks to Tertia Thurley of DOC for checking on Gavin in January.

RALPH POWLESLAND

Membership Renewals

Subscriptions were due on 1st January. Those members with email should have received a membership renewal form via that medium. Those members who do not have email (or those where the Membership Secretary has not been informed of an email address) should have received a renewal form as an insert with the September issue of *Southern Bird*. Please endeavour to pay close to the due date - the Society depends greatly on your subscription to continue the furtherance of its objectives in encouraging and supporting the study and enjoyment of birds in the New Zealand region.

If you have misplaced your renewal form, a blank version is now available online at www.osnz.org.nz/join.htm, or otherwise please contact the Membership Secretary at PO Box 35150, Naenae, Lower Hutt 5041.



Birding in Manawatu

As you head to or from conference this year, or if you find yourself with time to spare on either side of the conference, there are a couple of local spots you may wish to consider exploring. The first and most easily accessible is the walkway along the Manawatu River. A number of birds make the river home and the Esplanade Gardens are home to a number of native birds, with the occasional Falcon sometimes being seen pestering the birds in the aviaries there. Along the stone banks of the river Black-fronted Dotterels can regularly be seen.

Twenty minutes from Palmerston North is the popular Sledge Track. This walkway is home to a number of forest birds, and Tomtits can be usually sighted there. A drive north through the picturesque Pohangina Valley leads you to Totara Reserve which is a fantastic reserve of native bush and home to a number of native birds. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are regularly seen in the valley as well as Eastern Rosella. Further afield the two-hour walk to Rangī Hut provides reliable access to Tomtits, Rifleman and Whiteheads. Falcons are often seen in the area as well. A shorter 40-minute walk to Heritage Lodge can often yield similar species.

The most obvious spot to visit is the Manawatu Estuary, and while June is not the peak time for waders, Royal Spoonbill and Wrybill can usually be found at that time of year as well as a range of shag and tern species. The nearby ponds along Palmer Road at Foxton Beach are home to typical waterfowl and New Zealand Dabchick.

Lake Horowhenua can play host to surprise visitors and recently a Little Egret has regularly been sighted there. It is a place worthy of a visit, and in June Cattle Egrets can sometimes be seen around nearby paddocks. Further south the Ohau Estuary (Kuku Beach Road) is a fantastic little estuary all year round and a range of waders and other birds can often be seen there, including Royal Spoonbill, Black-fronted Dotterel, Bar-tailed Godwit and so on.

Obviously as part of the conference we will be travelling further afield to Pukaha/Mt Bruce (Wairarapa) and Bushy Park (Wanganui). A worthwhile detour if heading from Palmerston North to Wanganui is down Whangaehu Beach Road. Often at this time of year Cattle Egrets can be found amongst the herds of cattle down this road. Also, we will be keeping in touch with the Upokongaro Café owners who have had Nankeen Night Heron roosting in their trees during the winter months, the birds coming out at dusk. We will be sure to let conference goers know of any sightings running up to the conference.

CRAIG STEED

Nominations to Council

The position of Secretary and two Council vacancies were advertised in the December issue of *Southern Bird*, as the terms of Peter Gaze, David Melville and the one year co-option of Stef Grosser expire. In addition there was an un-filled vacancy on Council. Nominations have since been received for Delia Small (Secretary), Stef Grosser, Keith Woodley, Mel Galbraith and Benedikt Holtmann (Council). An election for three Councillors will be held at the annual meeting.

Birds New Zealand Endorses the Use of 1080 for Pest Control for Protecting Native Birds

Birds New Zealand President, David Lawrie, said on 31st January, that his society strongly endorses the decision of the Government announced earlier that week by the Hon. Dr. Nick Smith, Minister of Conservation, for the aerial use of 1080 pesticide in a 'Battle for Our Birds' for the control of animal pests to achieve better protection of our at risk native birds.

Mr. Lawrie said, "Members of *Birds New Zealand* are increasingly concerned at the steady loss of native birds in all natural habitats, especially iconic, rare and endangered species that include kiwi, parakeets, Kea, Kaka, Yellowhead, Blue Duck and kokako. The 'Battle for Our Birds' programme launched by the Minister to save native species is a welcome response to the expected increase in pest animal numbers that will eventually prey on forest birds following exceptionally heavy seeding in beech forests that is predicted to occur this year". "Birds living in all natural habitats need protection from rats, stoats and other pests", said Mr. Lawrie, "and the problem is expected to be especially urgent in coming months in beech forests where very heavy seeding is expected and will lead to greatly increased populations of pest animals that will prey on birds".

"*Birds New Zealand* accepts the conclusions of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment that careful use of 1080 is safe and that its regulated use is the only tool presently available for cost-effective control of pest animals for the protection of birds over large areas of forests. It complements the use of trapping that is widely applied now but the sheer scale of the pest control problem in beech forests in coming months, especially in the South Island, following predicted mass seeding means that carefully targeted aerial spreading of 1080 is the only practical and realistic approach that can be adopted", stated Mr. Lawrie.

He said that several studies have been made on the impacts on native birds since the mid 1990s which have demonstrated that aerial 1080 poisoning of possums and other pests has not markedly affected native bird populations and in all cases is beneficial in the longer term.

Studies of North Island robin and North Island tomtit in Pureora Forest

Park in 1997/98 concluded that the breeding success of both species improved dramatically after pests were poisoned by aerially distributed 1080 baits. The use of 1080 baits has also been demonstrated in studies published in 2003 to have markedly improved the survival and nesting success of New Zealand Pigeon and Kaka in Whirinaki Forest Park, near Rotorua.

In a study made on the critically endangered Kakapo, a nocturnal herbivorous parrot, Mr. Lawrie said, "The breeding of the Kakapo is associated with periodic heavy seeding of several forest trees and other plants, their major plant foods. Protection of Kakapo chicks from predation from stoats, rats and possums is therefore critically important when heavy seeding occurs and the careful use of the 1080 pesticide can help achieve this".

Mr. Lawrie also explained, "That a major concern of ecologists is that 1080 poison itself, however carefully applied, might be killing some of the native bird and other animal species that it is intended to protect. While there was some evidence of this in the past, the design and application of 1080 has changed immensely in recent years". Mr. Lawrie added, "An issue that has been studied in South Island Robins by the Zoology Department in the University

of Otago was the effect of an aerial 1080 operation to control possums, which are now preceded by non-toxic pre-feeding bait. The results were clear in that adult Robins nesting in the study area of the 1080 operation survived. This University of Otago research is continuing to look for other positive effects of 1080 operations on biodiversity".

Mr. Lawrie added that, "A conclusion of a study involving the Kea, a parrot living only in a few South Island mountains shows that where an aerial application of 1080 was well-timed the secondary poisoning of stoats was sufficient to increase Kea productivity four-fold over the next two breeding seasons as well as leading to improved survival of birds in all age classes. Populations have been modelled to show that the alternative of no pest control at all would see the likely demise of the Kea and that would be very sad loss indeed for such a distinctive and intelligent endemic species".

"A study published in 2012 of 1080 poisoning of possums where the Fernbird occurs suggests that impacts of aerial 1080 operations on Fernbird numbers are small and the observed impact is outweighed by improved breeding and survival resulting from the reduction of mammalian predators", Mr. Lawrie stated.

New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members: Nicki and Eliot Attridge (Marlborough), John Ballinger (Northland), Mike Dickison (Wanganui), Emma Dunning (Wellington), Kerri-Anne Edge (Southland) Joshua Emmitt (Auckland), Marian Griffiths (Wairarapa), Benedikt Holtmann (Otago), Jeanette Jenkins (Southland), Janet Ledingham Otago), Christopher Leonard (Gisborne/Wairoa), Heather and Robin List (Wairarapa), Nicky McArthur (Marlborough), Colin, Joanna and Shore McVeagh (Wairarapa), Kaitlin Morrison (Northland), Peg Norris (Canterbury), Graham Pearson (Wanganui), Susan Steedman (Northland), Hugh Stewart (Wanganui), Wendy Sullivan (Marlborough), Aude Thierry (Canterbury), Charlotte Thomas (Auckland), Carol Whiddett (Nelson).

We also thank the following members for their generous donations to the Society: William Abbott, Nicholas Allen, Dorothy Allott, Neil J. Andrews, Mike Arnold, Francie Beggs, William A. Cook, Jack Davidson, Enviro Research Ltd, R. Ewan Fordyce, Diane Fraser, Murray Gavin, Jillian Hanna, Neil Hayes QSM, CEnv., FRSA, Graham I. Hunt, Ted Kirk, Carol Kleim, Noel Knight, Geoff de Lisle, Bruce McKinlay, Anthony Marsh, Colin Miskelly, Philip Munns, Dan O'Halloran, Viola and Philip Palmer, Lorna Russell, Joy Sagar, Heather Smithers, D.M. Stracy, John Troost, Gillian Vaughan, Carol Whiddett.

Battle for Our Birds



In a speech to the Rotary Club of Nelson on 29th January 2014 the Hon Nick Smith, Minister of Conservation, explained the thinking behind and the programme that will be used to protect New Zealand's special birds from a forecast explosion in pest numbers following a beech mast event expected this year.

Dr Smith stated that New Zealand gains a premium for its primary produce due to its good environmental credentials, and out of 193 countries in the United Nations ranks seventh for the proportion of its land protected in reserves. However, it ranks 193rd for the proportion of its animals at risk of extinction. There is a high rate of endemism of its animal species. The decline of our birds is documented in the latest Bird Atlas, comparing distribution in the 1970's with those in the 2000's.

The cause of decline and extinction risk comes from predators. Pest enemy number one is the rat, number two the stoat and number three the possum. Dr Smith said "Landcare ecologists estimate that rats, stoats and possums kill 25 million native birds a year. That is an incredible number which puts into perspective the true scale of the threat these pests pose to our environment. Take the Rena ship grounding and sinking in 2011, noted as New Zealand's worst environment disaster. About 2,000 birds were found dead. So the damage caused by rats, stoats and possums is like having a Rena disaster every single hour."

Dr Smith explained that beech trees seed irregularly, with large and widespread masts only once every 10-15 years. The last large mast occurred in 2000 and it is predicted a very large mast will occur this summer. It is believed this was triggered by a year-to-year variation in temperature greater than one degree Celsius. Dr Smith said "About a million tonnes of beech seed will drop this autumn triggering a plague of mice and rats of biblical proportions. Rat numbers are expected to grow from less than one to more than 10 a hectare." This will be followed by an explosion in stoat population as this animal preys on the rats. This turns nasty for the birds in the following spring when the beech seeds germinate and dries up as a food source, leading first starving rats, then starving stoats to turn to alternative food supplies including native birds. Thus about every 15 years or so the bird population takes an awful hit. In following years the birds just



maintain their numbers before taking another hit after the next beech mast.

Asking "What can we do to protect these birds from this plague of predators?" Dr Smith pointed out that during a local beech mast in the Dart Valley aerial 1080 was used to control pests in some areas but not others. Only 10% of Yellowheads survived in areas with no pest control, but 80% survived in areas where 1080 was used to control rat and stoat populations. The use of 1080 has been claimed to harm wildlife such as kiwi and Kea, but from radio tracking none of the former have been found to have died, and the latter 12% have died, but subsequently breeding success has increased. Less palatable baits are now being used and a Kea repellent is being developed.

There is also no evidence for poisoning of waterways and the environment, and unfortunately trapping is three times as expensive as aerial 1080. In addition the latter figure is only for possums. ERMA, now called the Environment Protection Authority, reassessed aerially applied 1080 in 2007. Following this it tightened conditions of use, monitoring and reporting. Dr Smith said "The game-changer in the debate has been from the statutorily independent Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. Dr Jan Wright started off as a bit of a sceptic but the 2011 report and 2013 update strongly call for the increased use of 1080".

Dr Smith said "The Battle for Our Birds programme is all about improved survival

of 12 key species through improved pest control": Great Spotted, North Island Brown and Tokoeka Kiwi, Kaka, Kea, Blue Duck, Yellowhead, Orange-fronted Parakeet and Rock Wren, plus Long- and Short-tailed Bats and giant snails. The programme will also save millions of other birds like Fantail, Robin, Tui, Rifleman and Tomtit, plus other fauna and flora.

Dr Smith explained that there will be "about 500,000 hectares of additional pest control this calendar year to respond to that beech mast. In addition to this, DOC will extend 1080 use by 50,000 hectares a year during the next five years." "This more than doubles control operations for rats, stoats and possums on our public conservation land from five per cent last year to 12 per cent."

"The bulk of the new forests being protected are in the South Island—the Catlins and the Dart in Otago; the Waitutu and Hollyford in Fiordland; the Hawdon, Poulter and Hurunui in Canterbury; the Landsborough, Makarora and Mokihinui Forests on the West Coast; the Heaphy, Wangapeka and Cobb forest areas in the Kahurangi National Park as well as the Abel Tasman and Pelorus [in Nelson]. The five areas in the North Island to receive protection this year are the Pouiaoa forest in Taranaki, parts of the Whanganui and Tongariro National Parks and the Pirongia and Awaroa forests in the Waikato."

Dr Smith announced that "this 'Battle for Our Birds' is going to cost about \$21 million over the next five years, out of DOC's annual \$335 million budget." "There is strong support from well-respected New Zealand institutions for the science behind 1080. As well as the PCE and the EPA is the New Zealand Conservation Authority, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, Federated Farmers, the Federated Mountain Clubs, Landcare Research and Lincoln University."

Dr Smith concluded that "New Zealand's number one conservation challenge is ensuring the survival of our native species", that "the problem is particularly urgent this year with a widespread beech mast, and the inevitable plague of rats and stoats. We need to up our pest control to give our birds a fair go." He stated that "this 'Battle for Our Birds' programme is the largest-ever species protection initiative. It is about winning in our forests but also winning over New Zealanders' hearts and minds. We need to back our kiwi, our Kaka and our Kea over rats, stoats and possums." He said "It is a war I am determined we will win."

Australasian Ornithological Conference

Auckland 4th-7th December 2013

In December 2013, 180 delegates gathered in Auckland for the 7th Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC), the second time that the event has been held in New Zealand. In addition to delegates from New Zealand and Australia, we were joined by a number of enthusiasts from further afield, including UK, Ireland, USA, Indonesia, Qatar and South Korea. The conference was held at Unitec Institute of Technology, hosted by the Department of Natural Sciences.

The programme consisted of three keynote speakers, 88 oral presentations, eight posters, and four field trips—and several social events, of course! Topics covered a spectrum of ornithological interests, with seven symposia focussing on topical research areas and issues.

The logo for the conference featured the New Zealand Storm Petrel. We considered that the rediscovery of this species represented a recent exciting and significant event for the region, and was an appropriate focus for AOC in Auckland. One of the keynote speakers, Dr Matt Rayner (University of Auckland) presented the story of the rediscovery. Other keynote speakers were Prof. Hamish Spencer (Director, Alan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution; University of Otago) who presented recent research findings on the classification of the world's cormorants, and Dr John Ewen (Institute of Zoology, Zoological Institute of London) who outlined the challenges faced with the conservation management of small bird populations.

Field trips catered for a range of ornithological interests, covering pelagic

species in the outer Hauraki Gulf, terrestrial species on Tiritiri Matangi Island, waders at Miranda and Mangere, and scientific collections at the Auckland Museum. Comments confirmed that the birding on the field trips was successful, with many international visitors recording a number of 'lifers', including the New Zealand Storm Petrel on the

pelagic! Auckland weather came up trumps; rain on the presentation days, and fine for the field trip day!

I thank my fellow organising team and student helpers for ensuring that the conference ran smoothly, and solving the inevitable hiccups without (hopefully!) them even being noticed by delegates. I gratefully acknowledge the Research Office and the Department of Natural Sciences at Unitec for the support and sponsorship of the conference, and extend thanks to the exhibitors who also supported the event.

MEL GALBRAITH
AOC 2013 Convenor



▣ Feeding time,
by Chris Thompson

▣ Delegates viewing birds
visiting a water trough
on Tiritiri Matangi
by Mel Galbraith

Australasian Ornithological Conference 2013 Travel Scholarships

This is a brief summary report on the experiences gained after attending the Australasian Ornithological Conference in Auckland. It is important to note that I also attended the 'East Asian-Australasian Flyway is collapsing' workshop held in Miranda three days before the conference.

During the conference and workshop, I received updated information about some of the latest wader and waterbird research along the flyway. Relatively little work is done in Asia, and this is an important knowledge gap to fill. Meanwhile, I met and talked to many experts in my field, giving me a lot of inspiration about what I may do in the future.

I gave an oral presentation during the conference and it was a valuable lesson. I tried to cover too many topics within the talk and forgot to state some important points that I would have liked the audience to know. The series of talks in the flyway symposium indicated that urgent action is needed to conserve shorebird habitats along the flyway, but the procedures needed to achieve that goal remain uncertain. We know too little about the socio-economic values of coastal wetlands in East Asia. Researchers in general do not seem to be comfortable or sufficiently skilled to negotiate with decision-makers. There is still a lot to be done in the meantime, and researchers simply have to try every possibility to safeguard the future of shorebirds.

This conference also provided me a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new friends. I am going to have a competition with two new friends, who are also in their final stage of PhD, to see who can complete their thesis first. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation again to the OSNZ for providing me this wonderful opportunity. The experiences I gained and the connection I built after establishing contacts with experts in my field will be very important for my research and conservation career in China.

JIMMY CHOI



▣ Delegates viewing samples of the
bird collection at Auckland Museum
by Chris Thompson



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY LUIS ORTIZ-CATEDRAL

Conservation

IN THE ENCHANTED ISLANDS

■ A Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) attempts to land on a rocky cliff along the coast of Floreana Island.

in the Galapagos Islands. The unspoken formula all participants in these bird surveys think of is “less rats = more native birds” but this equation applies only to introduced rats. The Galapagos Islands are home to two extant endemic rat species. The Galapagos Islands are in no way immune to the effects of waves of human colonisations. Besides Norway and Ship Rats, humans brought with them cats, dogs, donkeys, goats, pigs... the list goes on. Perhaps this information is enough for the average New Zealander (particularly bird enthusiasts) to imagine the devastating effects of these alien invaders on the fauna of a remote archipelago. History repeats itself.

“History repeats itself, but the special call of an art which has passed away is never reproduced. It is as utterly gone out of the world as the song of a destroyed wild bird”. The quote is from Joseph Conrad’s *The Mirror of the Sea*. Although Conrad’s writing deals more with his experiences as an author, as a human out at sea, this quote comes to my mind on a regular basis when I think about biodiversity loss, about missed opportunities. The heavy, bleak metaphor Conrad’s uses needs little explanation: “... out of the world as the song of a destroyed wild bird”. “Dead as a dodo”, metaphors and idioms with a sense of the irreversible. The loss of biodiversity on islands caused by humans fills the pages of hundreds of books. One of the first ones I read was David Quammen *The Song of the Dodo* (The Dodo, a destroyed wild bird). The Dodo is now as dead as a Dodo. This book is a must read for anyone interested in islands, in birds, and in the effects of humans on fragile insular ecosystems such as the Galapagos Islands.

But reading is not always necessary to understand and relate to biodiversity loss, or to help slow down its pace. A fishing hook in the neck of an albatross is an unwritten, silent, yet powerful lesson of the extent of our actions on the planet. “It is very sad,” Lorgio Vaca (aka Lolo) tells me as he passes me the wounded albatross. Lolo is an Ecuadorian ranger who has worked for the Galapagos National Park for over many, many years. His skills at handling albatrosses are remarkable and so are his skills behind the wheel. Lolo also works as a taxi driver from time to time. “To make ends meet,” he tells me. Lolo has no academic training as a biologist; yet, he understands the need for studying animal populations at heart.

Fresh linen. That is what the plumage of the Waved Albatross smells like. I am on Española, one of the 20 or so main islands and islets that make up the Galapagos Islands: *Las Islas Galapagos*, *Las Islas Encantadas*, The Enchanted Islands. I am part of a crew of ten assisting rangers from the Galapagos National Park and scientists from the Charles Darwin Foundation. The goal is simple: capture, measure, tag and release adult Waved Albatross at their only nesting site; the oldest and southernmost of the islands in the Galapagos Archipelago, an eroded flattish island some 60 km². I am holding a heavy male albatross. One of the fifty or so adults handled so far. This male has a fishing hook stuck in its neck. My colleague and friend Carolina García (a skilled and enthusiastic Spanish vet) is inspecting the wound to remove the hook. “He will be fine,” she assures me. The entire team sighs with relief. Gustavo Jimenez-Uzcátegui, an Ecuadorian scientist leading the expedition has just released one individual and gets ready to handle another. “Do you want to process the next one?” he asks me. I am a newcomer to these islands; yet, I am trusted already to handle a precious, endemic bird; nothing short of a privilege. The salty breeze wafts the bird’s smell through the hot air of June. Fresh linen. Weird and wonderful. Just like the islands themselves.

I joined the taskforce of the Charles Darwin Foundation eight months prior. My main goal for the first 12 months, as a junior scientist, was to advance the knowledge of the critically endangered Floreana Mockingbird, which is now restricted to two islets off the coast of Floreana Island: Champion and Gardner. My study at the time encompassed aspects of the diet of the species as well as its breeding biology, but most importantly coming up with an estimate of numbers: an updated population size. An accurate population size is the cornerstone for the management of any species. Numbers matter. To conserve we must count. Numbers can seal the fate of an entire species. So here I am, in this remote spot in the Pacific Ocean, counting birds on various islands. Besides Floreana Mockingbirds and Waved

“ I PACKED A RETURN TICKET FOR DECEMBER THIS YEAR. I SIMPLY COULD NOT GET USED TO THE IDEA OF NOT RETURNING TO GALAPAGOS. THESE ISLANDS HAVE CASTED A SPELL ON ME. ”

Albatrosses, I participated on counts of finches, shearwaters, tropicbirds, boobies, Galapagos Doves, Galapagos Hawks, Short-eared Owls, Lava Gulls, Swallow-tailed Gulls, Greater Flamingos, Galapagos Penguins... The overall aim of these counts was to generate a baseline against which to measure the effectiveness of management actions, in particular, the large-scale control of rats that is underway

He pays attention to details. He is as happy to teach what he knows as he is to learn from visiting scientists. His gentle, stocky figure meanders among the albatross territories, slowly, all smiles, muttering words occasionally as he captures the next bird. He talks to the albatrosses. Lolo is 60 years old; his smile as innocent and easy as a child's. This is a common thing in Galapagos: the friendliness, the deep understanding of the island's animals and their ways, harnessed on the skin of many Galapagueños. The ultimate custodians of a magical biodiversity found nowhere else on earth. A biodiversity Galapagueños are happy to share with the world.

"Have you read many books?" my field assistant Francisco Naula asked me a few months before the trip to Española, as I was measuring a Floreana Mockingbird. "A few," I answered. "I brought some with me," I say as I release the bird, "why?" Francisco seems puzzled. "Because books keep me company," I answer smiling. Francisco is a young resident of Floreana Island. He is currently studying Environmental Management online. During his epic voyage, Charles Darwin, had with him books he treasured. Among these, a copy of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As a biologist visiting the Galapagos Islands, I decided to bring a copy of the same book: a self-imposed rite of passage. In his accounts, Darwin describes vividly the arid coastlines of the islands he visited, as well as the forested areas found inland, the lush volcano tops; nothing short of a paradise on earth. But, there is always trouble in paradise. By the time Darwin set foot on the Galapagos Islands, the human-driven extinction of species on the islands had begun many years before: the loss of paradise underway.

History repeats itself. Human societies expand, colonise, and in their wake many animals, many wild birds are destroyed. But history can repeat itself in a more positive light. What has historically worked in one archipelago, can work on another. The devastating effects of

■ A Floreana Mockingbird (*Mimus trifasciatus*) feeds on *Opuntia* nectar.



■ A Galapagos Mockingbird (*Mimus parvulus*) perches on the back of a Galapagos Land Iguana near the summit of Fernandina Island (*Conolophus subcristatus*).

humans and introduced species in New Zealand have promoted the development of sophisticated control and eradication techniques for various species of mammals, and the translocation of endemic bird and reptile species to island and mainland sanctuaries. This recipe to "turn the tide", to make things right, to make the world a better place is one of New Zealand's finest unsung exports. Such blueprint for restoration is being followed in many places around the world, including the Galapagos Islands. What works in New Zealand is working in Galapagos: history repeating itself.

And that is what took me to the Galapagos Islands, a job offer, an opportunity to implement a known and tried kiwi blueprint for avian translocations for the critically endangered Floreana Mockingbird. The species is known also as "Darwin's muse" because specimens collected on Floreana Island helped Charles Darwin shape his ideas about evolution and common ancestry between organisms. Originally found on Floreana Island (some 18,000 ha in size) and its outlying islets, the mockingbird is now restricted to two rocky islets, which combined, add up to some 100 hectares of scrubby vegetation. My goal is to produce, within 12 months, a diagnosis of the likelihood of establishing mockingbirds back on Floreana Island. A translocation of the species is needed; no doubt about it. The timing seems to be the moving target. Determining the timing for a translocation requires many pieces of information, but first and foremost, numbers. At the beginning of my contract, the most optimistic estimate was 500 Floreana Mockingbirds on Champion and Gardner Islets. This estimate was generated over the years by staff from the Charles Darwin Foundation, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Zurich University and the Galapagos National Park. However, the remoteness of the islets where the species is found (which limits the number of visits to the islets), and the high variability in rainfall

between years (which is known to affect survival of birds), have prevented a better understanding of the crucial timing for a potential capture and transfer of birds. Accessing Champion is straightforward. The island is somewhat flat, close to a departure pier on Floreana Island and it has multiple landing points. The islet is also tiny, only 9.6 hectares in size. It can be walked comfortably. Within minutes of landing, during my first visit to this islet, I learned my first lesson about Floreana Mockingbird biology: these birds are fearless. Having evolved in an environment without mammalian predators, they approach humans inquisitively. Sometimes, they land on people's heads. Much of their behaviour takes place at ground level. Foraging, mutual preening, even disputes between neighbours are settled on the ground. It's a no-brainer. Their tameness is the key to understand their current distribution and rarity. They disappeared from Floreana Island, some 1,800 times larger than Champion, most likely due to the drastic changes humans brought to the island. Champion might be small in size, but it is a stronghold for the Floreana Mockingbirds. A fire, a sudden rat or cat invasion could wipe out the mockingbirds from Champion very quickly. Visits are kept short. Quarantine is stringent. Sixty-three mockingbirds live here. I know every single one of them by name.

Accessing Gardner is a totally different beast. The islet a rugged dead volcano, some 16 kilometres from the nearest pier, and there is only one landing point; a slippery lava block less than one metre². "It is the second toughest landing in Galapagos," I have heard seasoned park rangers claim. "More people have been to the summit of Mount Everest than to Gardner," Tui de Roy once told me. As the silhouette of Gardner appears in the distance, my heart beats faster. There is a dark cloud above the islet. A cloud, but not quite. As we approach it becomes clear that it is a swarm: hundreds of frigate birds. My first landing on Gardner was

easy, almost too easy. So was the second one. After four easy landings one month apart from each other, I experienced the first difficult landing, which was also coincidentally, the most difficult in thirty months. Four metres of swell at sea can be very scary, and dangerous. A leap of faith. All the gear is dry. Tony Nahrung (an Australian volunteer) and I are safe and waving goodbye to the skipper who brought us here and whose manoeuvres made it possible to land in spite of the rough seas. The skipper will be back in seven days. Tony and I are very quiet; our hearts still racing. After a similar landing some eight months later, my helper at the time, Alex Litchblau tells me: "That was stupid." "No," I answer, "that was necessary".

Tough landings are necessary to understand why the mockingbirds on Gardner Island, the largest remaining population, are still plentiful: humans don't come here often. Many parts of the islet are a sort of crumbly, dusty honeycomb. Hundreds of Marine Iguanas, burrowing in the soft soil, have carved intricate labyrinths on the steep slopes. The tallest trees (which can be counted by hand) rarely exceed five metres. We stick to a non-excavated path to reach the campsite. Most of the vegetation consists of low, thorny plants. The birdlife is incredible, literally; hundreds of sea birds. Three species of booby nest here, two species of frigatebird, tropicbirds, gulls, finches, herons. Mockingbirds are everywhere. Perhaps this is what the lowlands of Floreana Island looked like before the arrival of humans: a paradise of thorns and birdlife. But there is more to Gardner than just birds. The heavy Galapagos Sea Lions, and occasionally Fur Seals, bask lazily in the exposed lava

outcrops, indifferent to us. On quiet days we can hear pods of dolphins, or a passing whale near the shore. Reptiles are also present: Marine Iguanas, Floreana Racers (a type of snake), and at least one species of gecko. Another curious inhabitants are centipedes, some of them measuring up to 27 centimetres. Yes, I measured one. That is, after I shook it off from under my shirt. It took some shakes and a peculiar dance. Alex laughed so hard he almost cried. Perhaps the centipede dance was not my most graceful moment. Possibly the centipede was as scared as me. Seeking shelter under our tarpaulin, the centipede stood still long enough so I could carefully measure it: 27 centimetres. I am told they prey on geckos. Incidentally, centipedes are one of the favourite food items of the Floreana Mockingbirds. Perhaps attracted by my centipede-removal antics, the resident family group of mockingbirds approaches us, and the hunting begins. Mockingbirds 1: Centipede 0. Using plastic centipedes we lure mockingbirds into traps. They can't resist the temptation of a tasty treat. This is perhaps the easiest bird to trap in the world; a shiny paper wrap, or a pocketknife do the trick as well. Mockingbirds inspect everything. Sometimes they peck at the laces of our boots, our sunglasses. Anything new in their territories attracts their attention. I imagine that such inquisitiveness is an advantage in these arid landscapes where food can be very scarce. I have seen mockingbirds flatten their body next to a rock, looking into the tiniest crevice in search of spiders or insects. If a grasshopper suddenly leaps from the vegetation, mockingbirds will jump, flap, fly and pirouette vigorously, often catching the unfortunate insect on the wing.

Catching mockingbirds is easy. Since



▲ A male Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii excisa*) displays to his mate on Gardner Islet.

2006, various scientists have captured hundreds of them. The meticulous measuring and banding of all these over the years has allowed for a picture of the demography of the Champion and Gardner populations to emerge. Floreana Mockingbirds breed co-operatively. By keeping a record of their unique bands we have learned that the groups can be as small as four individuals and as large as six. The groups consist of relatives (offspring from previous seasons) and newcomers. The survival of adults is high, exceeding 60% from year to year. Their nests are rarely above half a metre from the ground. Males and females construct two to four nests before choosing one to lay their eggs in. The structure is made of twigs and often lined with lichens, feathers and snakeskin. The clutch, which until recently had not been described, consists of three to four oval blue eggs speckled with brown.

"When are you going to bring cucuves to Floreana?" Floreanita Wittmer asked me often. Cucuve is the general name given to mockingbirds in Ecuador. Floreanita is 72 years old. She is the daughter of the first German family that settled on Floreana Island in 1932. Many colonists attempted to settle on the island early in the 20th century. Most failed. "The Wittmers" arrived to stay. Floreanita is named after the island where she was born. She wakes up at 5:00 am every day. Her knowledge of the island and its flora and fauna is remarkable: a kind of knowledge that can only come from carving an existence in such a remote location. She has not seen a Floreana Mockingbird in her lifetime. I showed her photographs often. She has moved from doubting their existence, to enquiring about the behaviours of the species, its numbers, and its colours...and about the timing of a translocation for the species. Significant steps have been made towards a translocation of the Floreana Mockingbird: we understand better than ever the basic demographic trends of the Champion and Gardner populations. We also have preliminary information about the composition of breeding groups

■ A Cactus Finch (*Geospiza scandens*), perches in an *Opuntia* cactus in Santa Cruz Island.





▲ Typical vegetation at 'Los Tuneles', Isabela Island.

and their reproductive success. And we know, from their behaviour, that they would not stand a chance against introduced cats and rats. The essential groundwork to restore Floreana Island following the known and tried New Zealand model has begun. I am confident that in coming years, it will be possible to answer Floreana's question with a realistic timeframe.

After two and a half years working in the Galapagos, I have become a familiar face among the locals. I have even earned a nickname "El cucuvero cabeza pelada" which roughly translates as "the bold mockingbird-man". 30 months in the Galapagos Islands; 53 bird species sighted; 14 islands and islets visited; hundreds of individual birds counted and measured. My work is only a small contribution to the ongoing efforts of staff from the Galapagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Foundation. Local and international rangers, scientists and visitors are helping stop biodiversity loss using models developed overseas, but also through techniques developed locally. However, the work on these islands is not free of many and

complex challenges. In spite of these, there is hope to restore islands. The commitment of the people working at the Charles Darwin Foundation and the Galapagos National Park is inspirational. If you are fortunate to visit the Galapagos Islands I invite you to reach deep into your pockets and donate to these organisations. Donate, and donate generously. The work these institutions do is noble and much needed. And if you cannot visit, you can still help preserve this paradise on earth through donations online. The Galapagos Islands are a global treasure. They belong to everybody, and everybody can help preserve them.

When I arrived in the Galapagos Islands in September 2010 I had with me a copy of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I packed this book when I left these islands 30 months after. I also packed a return ticket for December this year. I simply could not get used to the idea of not returning to Galapagos. These islands have casted a spell on me. When I return to this equatorial outpost I will bring with me a copy of another of John Milton's books, *Paradise Regained*.

LUIS ORTIZ-CATEDRAL

▼ Columnar cacti on Champion islet. Floreana Island in the background.



NZ Bird Conference and OSNZ AGM 2014

Call for registrations and abstracts

Palmerston North is looking forward to hosting the second New Zealand Bird Conference and Society AGM over Queen's Birthday Weekend, Saturday 31st May to Monday 2nd June 2014. Home to Massey University, Palmerston North is an exciting hub of avian research and we look forward having a number of local speakers sharing some of the latest research knowledge with you. Alongside this we look forward to bringing together researchers and bird enthusiasts across the country to share their knowledge and findings to make for a dynamic and informative event.

The venue for the conference will be the centrally-located Kingsgate Hotel. There will be discounted accommodation available onsite or visitors may choose from a range of alternative accommodation close to the conference facility, which is just a couple of minutes' walk from The Square.

The conference again aims to continue the fine work of previous conferences in making this the premier New Zealand event for the communication of new research findings on New Zealand birds while providing opportunity for discussion, networking and workshops for bird researchers and birders in New Zealand.

The format of the conference will be similar to the most recent conferences, with the first two days largely being devoted to scientific presentations. A variety of workshops are planned for the Sunday morning. Abstracts for oral presentations are being called for now and Society members are encouraged to submit abstracts.

There will be lots of opportunities for socialising over the weekend with an informal dinner on Saturday night and the conference dinner on Sunday evening at the Kingsgate Hotel. In addition, on Monday a variety of exciting field trips will be available:

1. Bushy Park, Wanganui: Only an hour away, Bushy Park is home to Robin, Saddleback, and recently-released Stitchbird as well as other forest birds.



2. Pukaha Mount Bruce Wildlife Centre: A behind the scenes tour where you will get the chance to see the white North Island Brown Kiwi, Kokako and other species up close.
3. Manawatu Estuary and surrounds: well known for its waders the Manawatu Estuary is a popular local spot, but close by is an area well known for Fernbird. This trip will enable visits to both areas and will have the option of an early return for those with late afternoon flights.

This conference will again use online registration as the main method of registration. The registration form and further information about the programme, field trips, workshops and accommodation options will be available on the Society's website www.osnz.org.nz.

For those without internet access, a printed registration form and information pack can be obtained by contacting your Regional Representative or by writing to Craig Steed, 9 Petersens Road, RD1, Palmerston North, 4471.

Early registration is encouraged. Register before 31st March to take advantage of an early registration discount. Society members are advised to make early airline bookings to Palmerston North to take advantage of cheaper fares.

We look forward to hosting you in Palmerston North over Queen's Birthday weekend in 2014.

Key dates:

- Deadline for Early Registration: 31st March 2014
- Deadline for Abstract Submission: 31st March 2014



The McPherson Natural History Sound Archive and New Zealand Birds Online

In October 2011 Dr Colin Miskelly, Curator of Vertebrates at Te Papa, came to see me to begin negotiations for the acquisition of audio recordings held in my archive for use on the New Zealand Birds Online digital encyclopaedia. After sorting out the necessary paperwork all the fun began. Up till now I had never uploaded an audio file to another site although I had downloaded many files from other sites over the years. The transfers were a bit of a learning curve, as with the first session of uploads I discovered the metadata was not transferring with the related audio clip. This meant that all the audio and related field notes from the first sessions had to be re-entered and edited a second time. This editing was done using Audacity with the LAME add-on which allowed the various file types I hold to be converted to whatever I wanted to use, mostly mp3 in this case. Te Papa's switching to a new server with greater capacity improved upload speed part way working through the list of recordings to be uploaded.



Because my collection is run as an archive that accepts recordings from a wide range of sources care was taken to acknowledge the original recordists, many of whom are now deceased but whose field work is now proving its value in so many applications probably never envisioned at the time. A spin-off from this work has been some expressions of interest from a couple of publishers wanting to use these audio clips or similar ones on various apps, usually as part of a book or other publication. Radio New Zealand National have also shown interest and are negotiating for permission to use some of these recordings on both the National Program and Concert FM to supplement recordings currently in use. Radio New Zealand became interested when the site went live at Queen's Birthday at the OSNZ annual general meeting 2013.

Just as a matter of interest some of the feedback has come from researchers and others from as far away as Iceland and the Aleutian group. Some of the file types that I have encountered over the years have been wav (preferred), mp3, mp4, various video files, Ogg Vorbis and various derivations of these. Variable bit rate files come in on occasions also.

LES MCPHERSON

New Tweets from Morning Report

If you have been listening closely to our famous bird calls during Morning Report, you may have noticed a change. We have replaced the previous birdcalls with new ones – it will be a much larger and more diverse selection of calls rotating on a roster of land, sea and shore birds.

John Howson asked me to review and replace the bird calls April/May 2013, gathering of audio, editing and recordings of tags since December and it will be ongoing this year.

We hope to have more than 120 birds by the middle of the year. Last year Our Changing World covered the launch of a new website dedicated to NZ birds www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz – a lot of the audio supplied by one Les McPherson (www.archivebirdsnz.com) a lovely chatty 70-year-old bachelor from Ashburton (who used to pack women's lingerie of all things!) with a "large" bird recordings obsession.

He's very well known to the lovely Sound Archives people in Christchurch. He's been supplying RNZ with .wav recordings and this is what we have been enlarging our collection with. Helena Nimmo has been also working to source beautiful images to add to OUR website as birds are VERY popular. If you want to expand your own knowledge about NZ birds I do recommend the [nzbirdsonline](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz) website – it's a fantastic reference site to identify birds or their calls.

Birdcalls play on RNZ National at 0659'30 and 0859'30 and 60 sec versions of the birdcalls can also be heard at various news times on RNZ Concert.

I had no idea of how many birds we actually have here and the surprise of hearing sounds like someone being murdered (kiwi) or a cat purring (penguin) still surprises and delights every time.

They are just so fascinating and because of this we keep our cat Monty inside at night and he wears a bell (which he HATES!!) to prevent him from decimating our local bird population in Akatarawa.

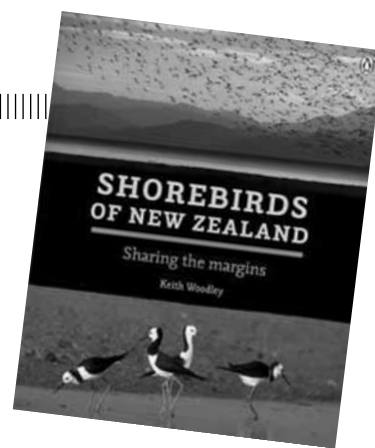
Favourite bird – too hard – still love the haunting call of the kokako if pushed to choose just one!!

Check out the updated Bird collection page on our website, curated by Helena and hugely popular: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/collections/nga-manu>

KATRINA BATTEN (Bird wrangler). Republished from Soundbytes, Radio New Zealand

Shorebirds of New Zealand, Sharing the Margins

Woodley, Keith. 2012 Penguin Group
ISBN 978-0-143-56750-9
Soft Cover \$50.00



In the 'Author's Note', Keith Woodley makes manifest his belief that although New Zealand is well known for its bird life and more specifically its unique biogeography, those people that have visited Miranda, and thus one might assume may have a current interest in birds, clearly are neither well informed about the rich and varied shorebirds that inhabit and breed in our watery margins nor their plight. As such, *Shorebirds of New Zealand* is directed, in part, at filling that information void for those who would be keenly interested in the subject matter. And to this end, Woodley has succeeded without exception. But more, the book seamlessly bridges the knowledge space between general interest in birds, and professional ornithology, ecology and conservation science.

Chapter by chapter we are drawn into the natural history of the species, the habitats, their relationships and their threats. Where necessary, the writing is charmingly descriptive, thus creating an eloquent and personal feel for the environments described. Whether we have been fortuitous enough to have witnessed these habitats first hand or whether we are completely naïve to such places, the author beautifully reveals their nature and ambience. Information gleaned from a wide variety of peer-reviewed journals, established book authors and from conservation groups and organisations is effortlessly integrated into the stories of each species and their landscapes. The reader is taken on a very factual journey, yet it is not encyclopaedic in nature. As such, it is a sympathetically structured, well crafted narrative that tells of the stunning shorebird diversity and biology, the vital connection between species and habitat, and the array of factors that endanger their existence. For at the end of it all, as the subtitle '*Sharing the Margins*' suggests, the author inevitably refers to the ominous elements of man's impact on

these landscapes and their inhabitants. Although no punches are pulled in plainly stating the negative consequences of such impacts, it is done so sensitively and objectively, including circumstances where species have benefitted (albeit unintentionally) from human developments. My only comment would be that, like many such books that have conservation and species/habitat survival at their heart, the reader is not left with a direct and clear path to pragmatically support the professionals in their work to mitigate the human-induced pressures. This book should certainly appeal to a wide variety of readers, many of which may be in a position to become involved in organisations and events that assist and champion the conservation cause.

The stories and themes are, for the most part, cleverly supported and illustrated by stunning yet often subtle photography from a number of well known sources including Ian Southey, Colin Miskelly, Katherine Steeds and Rod Morris. Yes, in places the photographs feel either too small or too dark, which may detract from the clarity and impact. Of course, this book is not centred on the photography and the superb narrative provides all the focus and imagery to get the points across.

From front to back, this book clearly demonstrates the author's desire to ensure the contents are palatable, easily recognisable and ordered, whilst assuring the reader that the information within is substantiated by credible research and knowledge. The layout and structure of the book is logical and compartmentalised, with tempting headings for each chapter that entice the reader to discover the hidden meaning for each bird species. The glossary, bibliography and indexing are all comprehensive.

This book has few New Zealand parallels to draw comparisons with since the author's writing style and the book's

content and purpose make the exercise mostly futile and unhelpful. I venture that although the writing style is similar to that found in the author's 2009 *Godwits: Long Haul Champions*, the text in this later work, covering all the shorebirds and their habitats, is somewhat more refined. The appeal here is in the variety and the context within which Woodley places the birds and their struggle to survive in human-altered landscapes. This is not an encyclopaedic work such as *The Natural World of New Zealand* by Gerard Hutching (1998), nor is it simply a good story as oft illustrated by the wonderful photographic texts of Wade Doak. Neither is it worth comparing, in any meaningful manner, to the photography-centred species by species accounts exemplified by, for example, De Roy, Jones and Fitter's 2008 outstanding volume, *Albatross*, in which precision identification of species is a fundamental aim. *Shorebirds of New Zealand* boasts depth and breadth. It is written in Woodley's own inimitable style, integrating informative facts with descriptive text. It is an exceptional and fascinating piece of work revealing yet more of New Zealand's unique natural history.

The book is priced appropriately for a soft cover volume of this quality and content. I feel comfortable recommending this book to laymen and professionals; to those with a passing interest, an all consuming passion or an academic regard for birds – and not just New Zealand species; and particularly, of course, to those with an attraction to shorebirds, New Zealand water-margin habitats and biogeography, and conservation themes. Having said that, this is also a book that can be left out on the table for all and sundry to flick through at leisure; they will surely find it attractive,

DR LORNE ROBERTS
Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader,
Unitec Institute of Technology.

FAR NORTH

The last weekend in November managed to coincide with good midday tides, the availability of a boat from the Kaitaia DOC office and enough willing volunteers to conduct a wader count at the Far North high tide roosts. Although movements of the flighty birds on Kokota Sandspit made counting difficult, we estimated 5,070 Bar-tailed Godwits, nearly 3,000 Lesser Knots and about 700 Turnstones (including the confiding birds on Kowhai Beach), the highest estimates for a few years. Species diversity was poor with only eight Pacific Golden Plovers and a single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper to add to the Arctic migrant list.

Twenty local people, not just members, sent in reports of birds over the last three months. These include three more sightings of Australian Pelicans, one of six birds together. Kaka continue to be seen occasionally in Kerikeri. Australasian Bitterns were still booming at Skudders Beach well into December and seen near Russell. An albino White-faced Heron was visible from State Highway 10 near Pakaraka.

Two further pelagic trips have left Whangaroa Harbour, one on 23rd December and one on 13th January. Both trips recorded New Zealand Storm Petrel (three on the January trip), Cook's and Pycroft's Petrels and a few Hutton's and Short-tailed Shearwaters with the regular Fluttering Shearwater feeding flock. Wandering and White-capped Albatrosses featured well in December but not in January, apart from a distant unidentified bird. As well as two more reserved dates in March and April, our boatman has agreed to take us on an evening excursion with a view to looking for signs of birds coming to breeding burrows along our east coast.

Moturoa Island reports a reduction in North island Robins but an increase in Whiteheads which will surely spread to mainland sites in the near future. On 25th January, a well-fledged Grey-faced Petrel was still in an accessible burrow there. A project to promote Little Penguins around the Bay of Islands is underway, with the help of two local schools whose pupils are constructing nest boxes for placing at suitable sites – *DETLEF DAVIES*

NORTHLAND

This has been the best year in a long time for our Waipu Fairy Tern population which raised 12 chicks to the banding and fledgling stage – with the help of many volunteers who warded off the predators.

Monthly meetings continue to attract a good attendance, with both OSNZ members and a few locals present. At the September meeting Hilton Ward, one of our members, and his wife Melva, gave a presentation showing the progress made with forming walking tracks around a wetland near Ratty's Landing, adjacent to the Hugh Crawford Reserve on the Ngunguru road. In addition to providing a list of birds seen nearby, they also captured some excellent shots of the plants and flowers encountered along the track – great encouragement for us to go and have a look!

In October, Dai Morgan, a former Northlander who is now living and working in Australia, gave us a rare insight into the work devoted to the conservation of the Glossy Black Cockatoo during a brief visit home. The following month Pete Mitchell, the ranger in

charge of the Bream Head Trust, brought us up to date on the work that they are doing there in conjunction with the Land Care Trust, DOC and Refining NZ. This involves predator trapping on the many kilometres of steep tracks through the dense bush covering Bream Head, together with revegetation planting and educational tours.

A point of interest at our meetings is the Recent Sightings list which is passed around and is completed by those present. It triggers a lot of discussion about "what to see and where" – *JANET SNELL*

SOUTH AUCKLAND

The region became a focus for twitchers after Karen Opie found an Oriental Dotterel at Port Waikato on September 29th, where it stayed for about two weeks. An incidental sighting resulting from all the attention there was a passing Sanderling on October 26th.

Apart from very heavy mortality of Short-tailed Shearwaters in October and November beach tallies on our regular beach patrols have been fairly light with a White-faced Storm Petrel on October 28th perhaps being the highlight.

November was census month with 19 people counting the Firth of Thames where highlights included a Marsh Sandpiper, a Shore Plover and a Common Tern. On the Manukau 29 people covered the harbour getting a good count with a Black-fronted Tern at Clark's Bay being a nice surprise for us in the north. In addition to the more usual birds there has been a Pectoral Sandpiper appearing on both the Manukau and the Firth and single sightings of a Great Knot and Grey Plover at Kidd's Shellbank.

Long term observations at Mangere by Ray Clough have shown notable declines in shag numbers. He has not seen a Spotted Shag for at least 10 years where there used to be 10-15, Black Shags are no longer seen in flocks of up to 400, and groups of about 300 Little Black Shags once fished where there are now about ten. Some of this may be due to local problems with birds being caught in fishing nets. On a brighter note Ray has confirmed breeding again in the small population of Black-fronted Dotterel at Mangere.

There appears to have been a good season of flowering and fruiting in the bush, with Tui reported absent from bird tables for long periods. Several members also found nests of New Zealand Pigeons and Tui, and the Weka at Kawakawa Bay seem to be doing well. Additionally two Kaka and three parakeets recently reported from the Awhitu Peninsula are likely to be a result of plenty in the bush they originated from. We are now waiting to see how bad the rats will be following the bounty... – *IAN SOUTHEY*

TARANAKI

The Taranaki coast has been home to some unusual birds over the last few months. Mid-October saw 40 Royal Spoonbills at Mokau in the north, and the next day 22 were further south at Urenui, probably some of the Mokau 40. A live Fiordland Crested Penguin was at Tapuae Beach just west of New Plymouth for a few days.

Barry Hartley has seen a few migratory waders on the South Taranaki coast including a well coloured Turnstone and a Lesser Knot.

A few Bar-tailed Godwits have been seen. At Waiongana there were three Turnstones, the first for two years. But the major excitement was the eight Australian Pelicans seen flying down the coast at Urenui and later that day at the Patea River estuary, although they only stayed for a few days. Then four were observed at Whanganui River, probably half of the Patea eight.

Two new birders flew in from the UK, have made themselves known and are getting to grips with the birdlife around their new home close to the boundary of Egmont National Park. A lot of the birds are European introductions now rarely seen in England.

A group of us meandered around North Egmont in early November. As usual car parks provided the best viewing, with seventeen bird species noted including both species of cuckoo. In December four brave or foolhardy members wandered around Pukeiti in cloudy wet weather in what was a sign of things to come for our summer, Bellbirds were common and Whiteheads were seen close to the lodge. Some of us visited Rapanui Grey-faced Petrel colony armed with a burrow scope to check for signs of occupancy. Results were mixed and more practise is needed, but we did learn that burrows go in many and varied directions.

We were lucky with the weather in January for the Beach Birds and BBQ at Waiongana, the largest turnout yet and our two new UK members were introduced to some New Zealand shorebirds including Banded Dotterel (one with bands on both legs) and also a pair of New Zealand Dotterels who seem to have taken up residency and are sometimes joined by another. 28 species were recorded. We all enjoyed another well-cooked BBQ, and if anyone went home hungry it was their own fault.

In contrast to other years no flocks of Pied Oystercatchers have been seen passing though Waiongana, but a few small flocks of up to 20 passed by the South Taranaki coast. Variable Oystercatcher breeding has once again had mixed results with some fledglings seen. New Zealand Dotterels continue to confuse observers, with breeding results along the South Taranaki beaches as yet unknown, and I have no idea what the two or three at Waiongana are doing; at one stage all were in breeding plumage but are now in eclipse.

The Messengers counted eleven species of bird nesting around their rural home and were woken on a couple of mornings by the dulcet tones of a Bellbird. Ian Dunning was visited by a pair of Bellbirds, an uncommon visitor to residential New Plymouth.

In February our field trip to Bushy Park south of Taranaki was another cloudy, windy day out. The 240 acre sanctuary has a predator proof fence and successful introductions include Robin, Saddleback and recently Stitchbird. In contrast to a visit by Julie and me in December when the Saddleback were very vocal and visible, this time despite being vocal it took sometime before they showed themselves. Robins, as always, were both vocal, confiding and in danger of being trodden on. One male Stitchbird was seen by some of us. The highlight was a flyover by a flock of New Zealand Pigeons in excess of 18 seen from the veranda of the historic homestead as members were feeding and preening. We returned home to

the news that three Australian Pelicans had been seen at the Awakino River estuary in Northern Taranaki – *PETER FRYER*

HAWKE'S BAY

In November we didn't have a field trip, but did complete the summer wader count and also the Blowhard Bush study. The Blowhard Bush count marked the end of our five-year study, which we undertook for the local Forest & Bird group who administer this reserve. Thanks to Helen Andrews who has overseen this project throughout this time. The data will now be collated. It is hoped that this information may be used for comparisons in the future.

Bernie took his kayak down to Porangahau in early January to get information on the Royal Spoonbill colony for the OSNZ Spoonbill Breeding Survey. The colony appears to be thriving there with numbers growing. We also undertook a survey of non-breeding birds in January.

On 12th January some of our members were happy to help out with a survey of Lake Runanga. This lake is surrounded by private farmland. One of the landowners is doing a lot of conservation work with restoring the lake level, doing a large amount of planting, and implementing some predator control. This survey was to establish a baseline, and we were able to cover the perimeter of the lake by foot as well as with kayaks. In total 21 Spotless Crakes were recorded, with two sightings. There is an area where Australasian Bitterns have been heard and also Fernbird. The plan is to perhaps monitor on an annual basis.

While Ahuriri has had the usual number of Bar-tailed Godwits, this summer there have been none of the smaller waders we usually see. Barbary Doves, which have most often been reported around the Clive/Haumoana areas, are now regularly seen around suburban Napier – *MARGARET TWYDLE*

WAIRARAPA

Wairarapa members and friends have had exciting birding over the past few months. Most recently we joined with the Greater Wellington Regional Council and Ducks Unlimited to mark World Wetlands Day. We went to Wairoa Wetlands to observe the work that has been carried out there over the recent past. Prior to that Colin Scadden and I went with DOC and GWRC to look at possible sites for a bird hide that would enable people to observe shore birds on the eastern side of Lake Wairarapa.

In December we held our annual Christmas party where we also contested the Big Bird Cup between teams from the north of the region and those from the south. Due to reduced numbers of people representing the south, the north area won the cup. This is always a hotly contested quiz that we hold on an annual basis, usually earlier in the year. Ian Armitage supplied the questions for the quiz and some of them were rather taxing to our members.

Water has been the theme for trips over the past few months with outings to Onoke Spit to observe Caspian Terns and we were looking forward to a healthy hatching. Unfortunately, just after some chicks had hatched, the colony moved from the spit, to where, we do not know. We also participated in the Royal Spoonbill breeding survey. This year, the species has not been seen in the same numbers as has

been observed over the past couple of years. However, we have scheduled a trip for the second weekend in February, as members of the public have alerted us to possible sites to investigate.

During November a group of five went to the east coast at Riversdale to see New Zealand Dotterels nesting. To our delight, birds were sitting on a couple of nests. For some of us, this was the first time that we had seen the species and they do not normally nest in this area. On our return to Masterton, we stopped off at a farm where the owners have an area of regenerating native bush and where they have established some ponds for freshwater birds. Tomtits were in abundance and we were accompanied up the track by their song. This trip followed on from a trip in October to the farm of Jim Campbell of Ducks Unlimited on which he has developed a large number of ponds for fresh water birds. Jim is passionate about providing an extensive habitat for wetland and fresh water birds and he is willing to share this with us.

As well as the monthly meetings and field trips, a few members have participated in five-minute bird count and eBird training. Both of these events were thoroughly enjoyed and we are now contributing our sightings to the database. The year 2013 was full of activity and we have planned a full schedule for the coming months – *PEGGY DUNCAN*

WELLINGTON

Matiu/Somes Island (24.9 ha) is the largest of three islands in Wellington Harbour. Over the last 30 years the island has been transformed with the removal of predators and an extensive re-vegetation programme. During this time Wellington OSNZ members have been involved in a number of projects, including bird surveys and translocations. Many of these projects have been instigated by other organisations including Forest and Bird, Matiu/Somes Island Charitable Trust, the Harbour Islands Kaitiaki Board and the Department of Conservation. A recently-completed survey of Spotted Shags carried out over a period of 10 years revealed an average of 210 birds/count and a stable or possibly declining population. There is an ongoing project on Little Penguins. Matiu/Somes Island supports approximately 300 pairs of penguins in a predator-free environment, which is marked contrast to the conditions on the mainland shores of Wellington Harbour.

In 2003 and 2004 Red-crowned Parakeets were transferred from Kapiti Island to Matiu/Somes Island. This was a highly successful transfer and Red-crowned Parakeets are now one of the most prominent birds on the island. In contrast, the transfer of North Island Robins in 2006 and 2007 was not successful. While transferred Robins bred on Matiu/Somes, today only one bird remains. Over the last three years Fluttering Shearwater chicks have been transferred from Long Island in the Marlborough Sounds to Matiu/Somes Island. This year, a third lot of chicks (77) has been transferred. Following transfer, the birds were housed individually in artificial burrows and fed daily until they were ready to fledge. The procedure used for the transfer relied heavily on the experiences of transfers of Fluttering Shearwaters to Mana Island. At the time of writing the 2014 transfer looks to be highly

successful with all but one bird having fledged and left the island. Bird 30 is expected to fledge in the next couple of days – *GEOFF DE LISLE*

NELSON

Nelson branch's indoor meetings have included a talk from Euan Young describing his work with skuas on the Chathams and Antarctica which will be illustrated in his forthcoming book, *Birds of the Ross Sea*.

The spring wader census was carried out under excellent conditions; not too warm, dry and not much wind. A total of 28,637 shorebirds were counted; 84% migratory and 16% endemic. About 85% of the birds occurred at three sites, 66% at Farewell Spit, 10% at Motueka Sandspit and 9% in Waimea East. Red Knots numbers in Tasman and Golden Bays were low or the species was not present (Westhaven Inlet). Red Knots and Bar-tailed Godwit numbers on Farewell Spit were just a bit lower than average. An impressive list of less common shorebirds or vagrants were observed: Terek Sandpiper on Motueka Sandspit and Great Knot, Greater Sand Plover, Oriental Plover, Red-necked Stint, Eastern Curlew and Sanderling on Farewell Spit.

The Variable Oystercatcher banding project in the Waimea continues, but the birds are getting very wary of human figures making it hard to catch them. Many helpers were out on the Wairau River banks at the end of last year and about 300 Black-billed Gull chicks were banded. Unfortunately, inclement weather subsequently washed out many of the colonies.

From 2005 to 2010 OSNZ members performed five-minute bird counts in the Flora Stream, Kahurangi NP. The counts were restarted in November 2013 to contribute to a meta-analysis of the effects of 1080. The study is being performed by the University of Canterbury and involves many sites around the South Island.

The region has recently purchased an acoustic recorder that can be left in the field, programmed to record birdsong at certain times of the day. The plan is to use the recorder, and others contributed by Project Janszoon and loaned by Friends of Flora, to better understand the distribution of wetland species such as Banded Rail, crakes, Australasian Bittern and Fernbird.

Among notable sightings was a Bar-tailed Godwit at Motueka Sandspit that was banded at Geoff Skinner Reserve in Australia in 2009 aged 2+. It had previously been seen at Bell's Island in August 2010 and Motueka Sandspit in October 2011 and March 2012. Several broods of New Zealand Scaup have been spotted at the Wakapuaka Settling Ponds and at Lake Killarney, Takaka. Five New Zealand Dabchicks were also noted at Lake Killarney; two parents, a spring-hatched juvenile and two young chicks. A single Australian Coot has been seen there too.

Caspian Terns got a good start to nesting on the Shell Banks in the Waimea Inlet, but were then washed out after high tides with winds. Weka have been making the news in the region with more than 60 being removed from Puangi Island in the Marlborough Sounds to the mainland, giving the Sooty Shearwater chicks a better chance. There have been several reports of Weka and chicks in the Nelson suburb of Atawhai, and single birds in a garden

in Woodstock with two found inside a house in December. Finally, three Cape Barren Geese were seen at the base of the Motueka Sandspit on January 20th - *ROBIN TOY*

MARLBOROUGH

December was a busy month for us with bird banding of gulls. We took a group of Kiwi Conservation Club (KCC) families to the Wairau River to band Black-backed Gull chicks, an annual event to introduce young people and their parents to the art of banding and the rationale behind it, using a non-threatened species. It is always a highlight in the KCC calendar.

We had a session on the lower Wairau banding Black-billed Gulls for an ongoing project. The colony was quite close to Blenheim and there was not a lot of water around it so we were surprised and delighted that so many chicks managed to fledge. We banded 295 birds with white numbered darvic bands, so if anyone sees one of these birds please let us know. E-mail claudia@wmil.co.nz if you see any anywhere.

Just before Christmas we had another banding session at the mouth of the Clarence River where we banded 50 chicks with yellow darvic bands. This colony was interspersed with Red-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns, so it was a challenge to separate them out. Reaching the colony was a mission and great fun, transporting gear across the river strapped to a rubber dinghy, then ferrying the team across on the same dinghy, using two ropes. For both these Black-billed Gull banding days we had welcome help from some members from the Nelson region, which added to the

fun and was a good way to keep in touch with our neighbours.

Around the middle of December a lady reported seeing a Pallid Cuckoo near Picton. She had a fleeting glimpse of it but had heard it calling for weeks. An effort was made to try and formally identify it but we were never able to see it and with visits to the area, using a recording, we were unable to hear it either. So we have only had verbal reports of the bird which appears to have been around for at least a month - *DIANNE JOHN*

SOUTHLAND

Since December local members of the society plus a few helpers from the Field Club have been involved with surveys for Royal Spoonbill colonies and Australasian Crested Grebe sightings in Southland.

Royal Spoonbill numbers in Southland just continue to grow and we decided to hire a light plane to do a count of the colonies that we were aware of around the coast. We first flew over Omaui Island and were quite disappointed to see that numbers had declined since previous visits, but there were still some birds nesting. We then flew over Bluff Harbour where last year we found a large colony on a small islet off Tikore Island. There were a good number of birds there but not quite as many as expected and we also found that they had spread to another small islet in Bluff Harbour where another colony had started up.

Our biggest thrill was when we flew over Awarua Bay and confirmed earlier reports that they were nesting in the middle of the swampy land well hidden from view by scrub and Manuka. This is probably the largest colony

in Southland with estimates of probably over a hundred individual birds. This is the ideal location for the colony as it is near impossible to get to and would have the least chance of disturbance of all the colonies. We also checked out reports of birds nesting at Fortrose and Slope Point but we were unable to verify this as there was no sign in the areas we visited.

The Crested Grebe survey is still waiting on results from around Southland but a couple of us checked out Green and Island Lakes on January 25th and there were no birds present.

We have had some really exciting sightings recently including a Marsh Sandpiper and two White Herons at the Tip Lagoon, an Arctic Skua at Slope Point and possibly one at Wakapatu Beach. A Canadian photographer took a nice photo of a Pacific Heron at Clifden, possibly the same bird reported in winter at Otapiri and another was seen between Athol and Garston. A German birder reported a Little Egret from Fortrose and Eric Black reported two Falcons over the back beach at Bluff near the wreck of the Olivia. Another was seen at the lookout on top of Key Summit by Phil Rhodes, Lloyd Esler and Greg and Shawn Herron reported one from Doubtful Sound. A pair of Australian Shelducks was spotted by Matt Jones at The Neck on Stewart Island. Glenda Rees reported on three Arctic Terns at Wakapatu Beach (this place is famous for them). To cap off all this Lloyd has heard parakeets on Bluff Hill now on his last two bird counts: well done to the pest destruction team down at Bluff, all the hard work is really paying off.

We are planning for a Southland Bird Week in late March - lots of birding activities and fun games for the kids - *PHIL RHODES*

Discontinued Back Issues of Journals

Paper copies of back issues of *Notornis* and *Southern Bird* will no longer be available after April this year.

With both our journals now available online, there is no further need to store spare paper copies.

Currently stored paper copies will be recycled. If you are keen to get hold of early editions of *Notornis*, then please get in touch with Roger Sharp by mid April!

Members will of course continue to receive paper copies in their letterbox.

Roger Sharp's contact details are:
5 Archer Rayner Place, Greenhithe, Auckland 0632.
Email: Roger_Sharp@xtra.co.nz



Nominations for Regional Representatives 2015

Each RR serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, though incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms.

Nominations for the RR of each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040) on 31st July 2014.

The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a member of the Society.

If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2015 year.

From the Membership Secretary

If your copies of *Birds New Zealand* or *Notornis* arrive damaged, for example wet and stuck together, please email me at membership@osnz.org.nz and I will send replacement copies.

Many thanks to those who have paid their subscription in response to a reminder I sent in February.

JULIA WHITE

Bird News

This feature contains news of sightings that have not received official acceptance by the Records Appraisal Committee of the OSNZ. Period covered: 1st September 2013 to 28th February 2014

The first **New Zealand Storm Petrel** egg to be viewed by a human being was found in a burrow on Little Barrier Island in late February.

Twelve **New Zealand Fairy Tern** chicks fledged this season; a record number since the protection programme began in the 1980s. Nine of those hatched were on the Mangawhai Wildlife Refuge where, for the first time for many years, there were six pairs breeding, no doubt aided by an intensive pest-control programme.

The first confirmed sighting of the **Tooth-billed Pigeon** in almost a decade was made by a team from the Samoan Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment on the island of Savai'i in early December.

Kakapo are breeding this year on Codfish and Little Barrier Islands, with maybe up to 15 nests on Codfish Island and one of three female Kakapo on Little Barrier on a nest. Unfortunately out of 15 eggs in seven nests on Codfish Island only three were found to be viable, with six being infertile and one dying early in the embryonic stage. One egg was found to be partly crushed, but later hatched after a repair using glue and tape.

Short reports:

The two **Plumed Whistling Ducks** at Anderson Park, Taradale (Hawke's Bay) were present until at least 1/1, though reports of them are few and far between these days, so they are probably still present. Probably wild/feral **Cape Barren Geese** were reported from Ohoka (Canterbury), with two in early September; Amberley Beach (Canterbury), one on 6/9; Motueka (Nelson), three on 20/1; and between Queenstown and Arrowtown (Otago), two in January. Two **Chestnut-breasted Shelducks** were at The Neck, Stewart Island on 15/12. A wandering **Brown Teal** was seen at Little Waihi (Bay of Plenty) among Grey Teal from 22/12-6/2. Another seen in the urban river environment of Warkworth (Auckland) 26/1 was said to have been present for a couple of years. A drake **Australian White-eyed Duck** was on a small lagoon behind Foxton Beach (Manawatu) from 30/9-21/11, sometimes being visible, sometimes not. Two small grebes that were felt by the observers to be probably **Hoary-headed Grebes** were on Kaituna Lagoon, Lake Ellesmere (Canterbury) 7-8/9. Unfortunately, although their colouration looked right they quickly swam out of range, with distance making a clinching identification impossible.

An **Erect-crested Penguin** was in Curio Bay (Southland) on 7/9. Another was found on a beach in Russell (Far North) in February, and taken into care. A somewhat off-course **Gould's Petrel** was off Stewart Island on 20/2. A **Bulwer's Petrel** picked up exhausted on New Brighton Beach, Christchurch on 22/1 was taken into care but later died. Single **Great Shearwaters** were in the Hauraki Gulf (Auckland) on 6/11 and near Mayor Island (Bay of Plenty) in early November.

Sightings continue to be made of **Australian Pelicans** following their recent invasion into the north of the North Island. The nucleus of the invasion continues to be the Wairoa River north of the Kaipara Harbour (Northland) with up to 11 present near Tokatoka in September and early October, decreasing to four on 18/11. At Ruawai further downstream 14 were present on 13/1 and 13 on 17/2. Nearby, five were at the south end of Tapora (Auckland) on 30/1 and eight on South Kaipara Head (Auckland) on 9/12. Further north up to seven were present in the Waipu Estuary (Northland) between 1-15/9, and six flew over Mangonui

Harbour (Far North) on 22/10. To the south four were in the Auckland suburb of Whitford on 10-11/2, and eight made a trip round Taranaki seen flying past Urenui before landing at Patea on 12/12. Four, maybe from the Taranaki group, were at the Whanganui RM (Whanganui) on 17/12. **Frigatebirds** not identified to species were reported from Russell (Far North) in early December, and a probable was glimpsed flying along the coast at Porirua (Wellington) on 11/12.

Pacific Herons were at Boggy Creek, Lake Ellesmere (Canterbury), two possibles on 7/9; Wayby, Wellsford (Auckland) off and on between 11/9 and mid-November; and the probably long-staying Southland individual was seen near Clifden on 8/12 and the same or another reported nearby between Athol and Kingston on the same day. Another unconfirmed report was of one on South Kaipara Head (Auckland).

Little Egrets continued to be present following the recent invasion of egrets. Three previously-reported birds stayed into the period covered by this report being seen at Mangere Watercare (Auckland) on 5/9, with one on 8/9. Another presumed long-stayer was the bird at the Ahuriri Estuary (Hawke's Bay) in October, though none were present in the regular haunt of the Clive Wetlands. The previously-reported Lake Horowhenua (Manawatu) bird stayed to 21/11. Newly-reported birds comprised two at Rawene, Hokianga Harbour (Northland) on 29/9, and two at Kaituna Lagoon, Lake Ellesmere 27/10 (one of these birds was probably at Lower Selwyn Huts until late-September). A further individual was reported by a German birder at Fortrose Lagoon (Southland) on 26/1. Away from the usual Whanganui River haunts, a **Nankeen Night Heron** was at Sawyer's Bay (Otago) on 13/12.

Glossy Ibis sightings continued, mostly with long-staying birds, though aggregations show birds are obviously moving about the country. Two at Little Waihi (Bay of Plenty) between 26/10 and 16/2 were probably the regular Ohiwa Harbour birds, as they disappeared about the same time. The regular Wairau Lagoons (Marlborough) couple were joined by other birds, with three present on 15/12 and four on 2/1. The regular 'wintering' Travis Wetland, Christchurch (Canterbury) bird reappeared on 19/2, the 17th year the species has returned - though probably not the same individual. Birds not regularly reported before were one just off the coast on Taieri Island (Otago) on 5/11, and two among a colony of Royal Spoonbills at Lake Wainono (South Canterbury) on 20/12. An intriguing couple of sightings were made of a probable **Australian White Ibis** at Peka Peka Beach (Wellington) on 21/12 (reported via NZ Birds Online), with maybe the same bird very briefly at Pharazyn Reserve on 11/1.

The seemingly present-for-ever **Black Kite** at Renwick (Marlborough) was reported on just one day, 18/9, displaying with a female Australasian Harrier. Tantalising sightings were made of large raptors, quite possibly **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, from three widely-spaced locations: Waitakere Ranges (Auckland) in late October/early November; the Manawatu RM (Manawatu) in mid-November; and Banks Peninsula (Canterbury) in early to mid-December. One or two probable **Nankeen Kestrels** were reported by members of the public near Auckland Airport between late November and mid-December. A possible **Black Falcon** was seen near Paeroa (Waikato) on 10/11.

A **Great Knot** in breeding plumage was on Farewell Spit (Nelson) in early November with another on the southern Manukau Harbour in the same month. **Sanderling** sightings were made from Port Waikato (Waikato) on 26/10; possibly three on Farewell Spit early November; Ashley Estuary (Canterbury) from 28/11 to 2/1; Crescent Island, Kaitorete Spit, Lake Ellesmere between 7/12 and 22/2, with a maximum of possibly three on 16/1; and South Kaipara Head, three on 23/12. **Black-tailed Godwits** were reported from Port Waikato, one possible on 29/9; Miranda (South Auckland), one in breeding plumage from 10/11 to



▲ Three Glossy Ibises in flight at the Wairau Lagoons by Will Parsons of Driftwood Ecotours.



▲ One of the long-staying Taradale Plumed Whistling Ducks by Nikki McArthur.



▲ Pacific Heron, Wayby Valley Road, by Tim Barnard.



▲ Bulwer's Petrel taken into care. Photo by Paul Scofield.



▲ Oriental Dotterel at Port Waikato by Neil Fitzgerald.

12/1 and Omokoroa (Bay of Plenty), one mid-February. Strangely, **Grey-tailed Tattlers** were only reported from the South Island, with two on Bells Island, Waimea Inlet (Nelson) in October, and one in the same estuary on Sand Island in mid-February. Other singles were in Blueskin Bay (Otago) on 5/2 and Farewell Spit mid-February. Fletcher Bay (Coromandel Peninsula) hosted a **Common Sandpiper** from 24-26/1, noted by a visiting overseas birder. Lake Ellesmere played host to a long-staying **Common Greenshank**, being seen on Greenpark Sands between 28/9 and 5/10 and Crescent Island, Kaitorete Spit between 9/1 and 22/2. A **Marsh Sandpiper** was at Miranda, probably throughout (reported 17/11 and 12/1), with another in the 'tip lagoon' of the New River Estuary, Invercargill (Southland) between early December and Christmas Eve. The only **Terek Sandpiper** reported was one on Motueka Sandspit in early November.

The Manawatu RM hosted a mystery grey-toned Pluvialis plover between 27/10 and 12/2. The consensus of overseas birders who saw it and know **American Golden Plover** was that it was an individual of that species. The clinching breeding plumage had not been attained by the time of the latest reported sighting, however. A **Grey Plover** was on the southern Manukau Harbour (South Auckland) during the November wader count there. **New Zealand Dotterels** seem to be spreading past their usual range at the moment with one at the Ohau Estuary (Manawatu) on 28/10 on the west coast, and a pair noted at Tora (Wairarapa) on 27/11 on the east coast within a few minutes' flying distance of Cape Palliser, the southernmost tip of the North Island. How long until the species is breeding in Wellington? **Lesser Sand Plovers** were reported from Little Waihi (18/1-16/2) and Farewell Spit in mid-February. **Greater Sand Plovers** were on Farewell Spit in early November and South Kaipara Head on 23/12. The first **Oriental Dotterel** for 14 years was an immature bird present at Port Waikato from 29/9 to 14/10. Probably the same bird (or another immature) was on Farewell Spit on 5/11. A wandering **Shore Plover** was at Miranda on 17/11.

Two **Pomarine Skuas** were off Tiritiri Matangi (Auckland) on 14/11 and one was in the same place on 30/1. A possible Pom was



▲ Australian White-eyed Duck at Foxton Beach by Phil Battley.

off Kaikoura (Canterbury) on 7/2 and two probables were in Cook Strait on 12/2. Kaikoura hosted a wayward **Black Noddy** on 7/2. Staying on the stray tropical tern theme a **Sooty Tern** was off Eastern Beach (Auckland) on 28/12. Outside their normal range two **Fairy Terns** were at Port Waikato on 16/2. **Gull-billed Terns** continued to be seen at Lake Ellesmere, with up to four on

Greenpark Sands on 3/10, up to four at Crescent Island on 16/1, and two there on 4/2 with another four up Kaitorete Spit at its 'tip'. A whole-lake count on 22/2 found 16 individuals. Elsewhere one was at Lake Wainono on 30/11. Records of **White-winged Black Terns** were received from widely scattered locations with one in breeding plumage on the Wairau River (Marlborough) on 10/11, one at Ruawai (Northland) on 13/12, one at Lake Onoke (Wairarapa) on 4/1, one at Lake Horowhenua (Manawatu) to late September, one at the Manawatu RM on 27/1 and two on the eastern shore of Lake Wairarapa (Wairarapa) on 3/2. Three Arctic Terns were reported from Wakapatu Beach (Southland), a regular site for the species. **Common Terns** were seen at Miranda (one immature on 10/11 and two birds on 17/11), Ashley Estuary (Canterbury, off and on from 22/11 to 6/2), Waikanae Estuary (Wellington, a possible on 27/11), Manawatu RM (two different single individuals from 8/12 to 12/2), and Kaipara South Heads (23/12).

Vagrant cuckoo records comprised an **Oriental Cuckoo** at Te Aroha 14/2 and a **Pallid Cuckoo** reported by a Picton (Marlborough) resident in mid-December. A **White-winged Triller** was reported from Tauranga (Bay of Plenty) in late November via NZ Birds Online. A possible **currawong** was reported via the same website as a Huia in Springfield (Canterbury) in February. Up to eight **Black-faced Woodswallows** were reported from near Rangaunu Harbour (Far North) between 6-9/2. Finally a probable **Tree Martin** was at Papamoa (Bay of Plenty) on 8/12.

Sources: Birding NZ, Birding-NZ Email group, BirdLife Top News, What's Up DOC? website newsletter, Gwenda Pulham, New Zealand Fairy Tern Charitable Trust website, Forest & Bird E-news, Kakapo Recovery website, regional roundups, Otago OSNZ regional newsletter, Waihora Ellesmere Trust website.



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