No. 10 June 2016

Birds New Zealand

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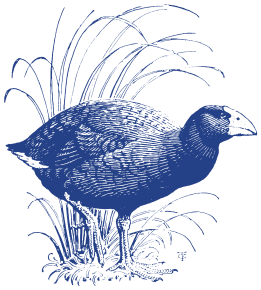

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We welcome advertising enquiries. Free classified ads are available to members at the editor's discretion. Articles and illustrations related to birds, birdwatching or ornithology in New Zealand and the Pacific region for inclusion in *Birds New Zealand* are welcome in electronic form, including news on birds, members' activities, bird studies, birding sites, identification, letters to the editor, reviews, photographs and paintings. Photographs must be sharp. Copy deadlines are 10th February, May and August, and 1st November. The views expressed by contributors to this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc), or the editor.

COVER IMAGES

Front cover: **Black-fronted Tern.**
Photo by Glenda Rees, New Zealand Birds Online.

Back cover: Chatham Albatross with chick, The Pyramid.
Photo by Mark Fraser, New Zealand Birds Online.

One of 47 Kakapo chicks hatched in 2016.
Photo by Sabine Bernert, Department of Conservation.

Record breeding season for Kakapo

Kakapo produced a record number of chicks in the 2015-2016 breeding season. Forty-seven chicks hatched from 58 fertile eggs out of a total of 123 eggs laid, making it the most successful breeding season in the 25-year history of the Kakapo Recovery Programme.

This is 14 more chicks than the previous record of 33 chicks in 2009. At time of writing, 36 of the chicks were alive and well, but it will be six months before they can be counted as part of the total adult Kakapo population, which currently numbers 123.

This season was also notable for the most first-time mothers (21) and for the majority of chicks fledging in the wild. Only 12 of the 47 new chicks needed to be hand-reared this year, compared to 27 out of 33 chicks in 2009.

Kakapo genome mapping a world-first

Members of an international team of scientists announced in March that they will attempt to sequence the genomes of all known living Kakapo. The "Kakapo 125 Genomes Project" will provide the detailed genetic information necessary to minimise the loss of Kakapo genetic diversity and optimise health and productivity in the existing population, which has since increased to 159.

"It will be a world-first scientific achievement as no-one has sequenced the genome of every surviving member of a species before," says team member and University of Otago Associate Professor Bruce Robertson.

A genome-wide understanding of genetic variation will help to develop breeding strategies to retain variation at genes important for species persistence, such as the immunity genes and their role in Kakapo diseases.

"We will also be able to explore the genetic basis of infertility in Kakapo; only 60% of eggs hatch (normally this should be about 90% in birds) and sperm abnormalities contribute to infertility. Solving the issue of infertility will greatly aid species recovery by maximising reproductive effort," says Bruce Robertson.

The crowd-funded project is a collaboration between researchers from DOC's Kakapo Recovery Group, University of Otago, Duke University (USA), Genetic Rescue Foundation and NZ Genomics Ltd.

President's Report

Annual General Meeting Weekend

I am looking forward to the annual meeting in Napier and to meeting members over the course of the weekend. I have been in contact with Bernie Kelly, Hawke's Bay Regional Representative, and I know that he and his small team have put a tremendous amount of work into its planning. It is a real credit to them that one of our smallest regions can organise our annual conference, which goes to show that any region can undertake this role.

Changing Personnel

Over the past year there have been a number of changes in key positions within Birds New Zealand. This shows that the organisation is in good heart as there are always people willing to step into the roles that become available. This is one way that members can put something back into the organisation. It also needs to be remembered that we are all volunteers and it is not possible for everyone to sit back and hope that someone else undertakes the administration of duties.

Michael Szabo has settled into his role as *Birds New Zealand* Editor. I am sure that we will see changes as he develops his style, building on the base that Nick Allen established previously. Later this year we will see similar changes as Dr Leigh Bull takes over from Jim Briskie as the new *Notornis* Editor. This is another important role that underpins our scientific role in society and we look forward to these changes.

There are several other vacancies that members should consider. The first is as Convenor of the Moult Scheme, which has been running for nearly 40 years. The Convenor does not necessarily need a high degree of understanding of the moult process. It is more of a supervising role, especially since the Council will be looking to bring this scheme into an online database in the near future. A job description is available online at: **www.osnz.org.nz**

Other vacant roles currently include Archivist for the Society's records currently held at Auckland Museum. At the same location our Honorary Librarian, Heather Rogers, is now in full-time study and will shortly be commencing a teaching role, so she will no longer be able to undertake the librarian's tasks. These two roles would suit an Auckland member with relevant experience and interests. If you are interested in taking on any of these three roles, please send me your letter of application and CV via email: *president@osnz.org.nz*

Youth Camp

The second Youth Camp was held on ANZAC weekend at the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust Centre. This was a well organised event under the leadership of Andrew Styche and Anne Buckmaster. I had the pleasure of attending the first day and mixing with the 11 enthusiastic young people on the course. During my welcome I advised them that I was envious of them because the opportunity to attend an ornithological youth camp was not available to me when I was their age. I take this opportunity to thank Andrew and his team and all of the tutors who freely gave of their time and expertise to enthuse this talented bunch of young people.

New Mapping Scheme

The Scientific Committee has been working with Council to develop a new mapping scheme that would encourage members to make observations in the field towards a long-term database. Previous mapping schemes have seen a surge in member activity and encouraged new members to join. It is hoped that this new proposal will have similar effects, but there is an even greater reason to undertake the scheme. This is to ensure that we can accurately map or determine any changing trends in populations of birds so that any actions can be taken at early stage. Rather than collate this information into a bound hard copy it is intended to investigate the use of the eBird reporting system as the basis for the scheme. This will be further discussed at the next Council meeting and there will be more details at the AGM weekend.

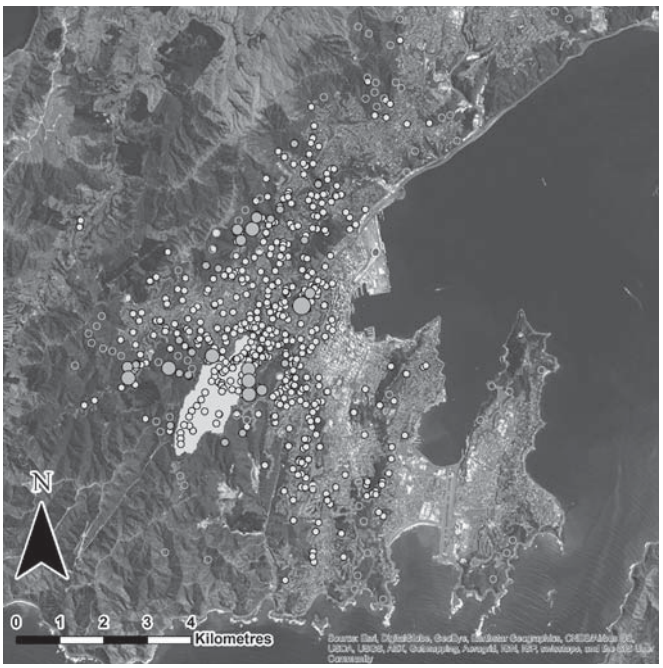
Birding Location Maps

Those of you with long memories will remember a project that I suggested about ten years ago, to prepare a series of maps of easily accessible New Zealand birding spots. Nick Allen and I have been working on this project since then and it is now ready to launch. The maps are currently being printed and it is hoped they will be available at the AGM. After the AGM they will be available from the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists Trust, either at the shop or by mail order, with all proceeds from their sale to be donated to the Project Assistance Fund. I take this opportunity to thank Nick for his work on this project. He visited every site to proof the information, which was a really onerous job! It is hoped that the maps will encourage people to get out and visit these interesting birding sites.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

New *Notornis* Editor appointed

Dr Leigh Bull, a consulting ecologist for Boffa Miskell Ltd, has been appointed as the new editor of the journal *Notornis*. Leigh has had a long affiliation with Birds New Zealand (OSNZ), first becoming a member while doing her Master's research on Little Blue Penguin. She has a strong background in seabirds, with over 20 years' experience conducting avifauna research and surveys in New Zealand, New Caledonia, Tonga and France. Leigh has worked as a practising ecologist and ornithologist for several organisations in a variety of roles, including Species Protection Officer (Biodiversity Recovery Unit, Department of Conservation), Marine Technical Support Officer (Marine Conservation Unit, DOC), and post-doctorate research fellow (Universite Paris). She has a keen interest in applied ecology and has worked with a range of groups, including private industry and government departments, to contribute to a number of documents guiding the conservation and management of New Zealand's flora and fauna. These projects have included researching and publishing on the efficacy of mitigation measures to reduce seabird bycatch in longline and trawl fisheries. Recently, she published the results of New Zealand's first comprehensive long-term study investigating avian mortality at an operating wind farm.



Distribution of Kaka in Wellington City, mapped using data from eBird, Zealandia and Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Realising the potential of eBird

The New Zealand eBird database has been developed by Birds New Zealand as its national bird recording scheme. Since its launch in 2008, 1,900 registered users have submitted over 81,000 checklists containing 750,000 bird records, making it the largest and fastest-growing repository of bird distribution data in New Zealand. The database has great potential to be used to map bird occupancy at local, regional and national scales by modeling the relationship between the presence of birds at specific sites and the multitude of habitat variables that are likely to be influencing bird distribution. For this reason, eBird also has great potential to engage other agencies and organisations tasked with managing New Zealand birds and habitats.

At present, a shortage of opportunities for members to learn the skills needed to submit high-quality bird data to eBird, combined with the relatively low profile the database currently has among local and central government agencies tasked with biodiversity management, is limiting its use and the achievement of its full potential.

With generous support from Fruzio and the Birds New Zealand Projects Assistance Fund, the Society aims to help solve this problem by delivering a series of eBird workshops and presentations across the country over the next 18 months, to provide members and conservation professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to use eBird effectively. This project, which was launched with a presentation at the Birds New Zealand Conference in June in Napier, is to be completed by December 2017 along with a report submitted to Birds New Zealand summarising the number of workshops and presentations, the number of attendees, and an analysis of trends in data submissions. To find out more about eBird workshops and presentations, email ***Nikki McArthur: nikki@wmil.co.nz***

NIKKI McARTHUR

Donations

We thank the following members for their generous donations to Birds New Zealand: Chris Foreman; Jack Davidson; Harry Battam; Stuart Nicholson; Richard Fenner; Ewan Fordyce; Thalia Sachtleben; Sandy Winterton; Rob Schuckard; Bernard Card; A J Beauchamp; Gillian Vaughan; Tony Simpson; Colin Miskelly; Dr Jill Hamel; Dr Michael Fitzgerald; Michael North; Cynthia Carte; Jean Flemin; Elizabeth Revell.

Benefits of Birds New Zealand membership

If you are not already a member of Birds New Zealand, join us today for just over a dollar a week. Whether you're a budding birder, a nature lover, a field researcher or a professional ornithologist, membership brings many benefits that will increase your enjoyment of birds. Most of all, you will be contributing to increasing the sum of ornithological knowledge of native birds in New Zealand and the South Pacific.

For our very reasonable subscription fee of $70 per year (students are just $35/see website for more details) you will receive *Birds New Zealand*, our quarterly magazine that reports on new bird studies, survey results and conservation work; *Notornis*, our acclaimed quarterly scientific journal; and free or discounted major Society publications such as Field Guides, Bird Atlases and Checklists.

You will also be able to access past publications and our extensive library of books and journals online via the Society's website, and the eBird New Zealand database. And you will be able to join one of our 17 regional branches and attend their regular presentations, field trips, and training activities, which include bird banding, nest recording, and wader monitoring. This is a good way to network with a knowledgeable community of people who share your interest in wild birds and the places they inhabit.

Birds New Zealand also encourages members to contribute sightings to the eBird database and to attend our annual conference, which is held in a different main centre each year. Data collected via the eBird database provides information on which research may be conducted, often with conclusions relevant to decision-making processes on the conservation of native bird species.

To join us, please visit the Society's website and fill out the online membership form: ***www.osnz.org.nz***
Or contact the Membership Secretary: ***membership@osnz.org.nz***
Or contact your Regional Representative via: ***www.osnz.org.nz***

Welcome to new members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members of Birds New Zealand: Oscar Thomas (Auckland); John Kelsey (Auckland); Lasse Riroriro Rahna (Wellington); Vanesa De Pietri (Canterbury); Alex Dempsey-Wood (Auckland); Matt Rayner (Auckland); Matthias Dehling (Canterbury); Sherry Galione (Auckland); Grace Sutherland (Nelson); Dayna Davies (Northland); Courtney Hamblin (Canterbury); Sue Blaikie (Wellington); Stephen Wilson (Auckland); David Fenwick (Waikato); Terry Johnson (Nelson); Anthea Reynolds (Canterbury); Sandy Winterton (Wellington); Annette Cunningham (Nelson); Bartek Wypych (Auckland); Ian McNaughton (Auckland); Anne Baxter (USA); Stuart Nicholson (Wellington); Jan Armstrong (Canterbury); Pamela Kane (Northland); Irene Ross (Marlborough); Sheena Hudson (Wellington); Matt Funaki (Auckland); Margaret Rutherford (Canterbury).

Tenth annual Garden Bird Survey

The 2016 annual Garden Bird Survey will be the tenth, and Landcare New Zealand is again asking Birds New Zealand members to participate. The survey is open to anyone who can identify the bird species in their garden. Taking part is easy – choose any day between 25th June and 3rd July and spend one hour looking for birds in your garden. For each species you detect, record the highest number you see (or hear) at one time. Full survey instructions, a bird identification guide, field tally sheet, and printable survey form are available online: ***http://gardenbirdsurvey.landcareresearch.co.nz/***

There is also an online data-entry form that you are encouraged to use to help reduce the volunteer time needed to enter data sent in by post. By participating in the survey you will help us build up a picture of how native and introduced birds are faring in our gardens over time and give us an indication of which species may be in decline, helping guide future conservation efforts. The survey is supported by Landcare Research, Birds New Zealand, Naturewatch, Forest and Bird, and Topflite®. Results of previous surveys are also posted on the survey website.

ERIC SPURR

OSNZ National Wader Census

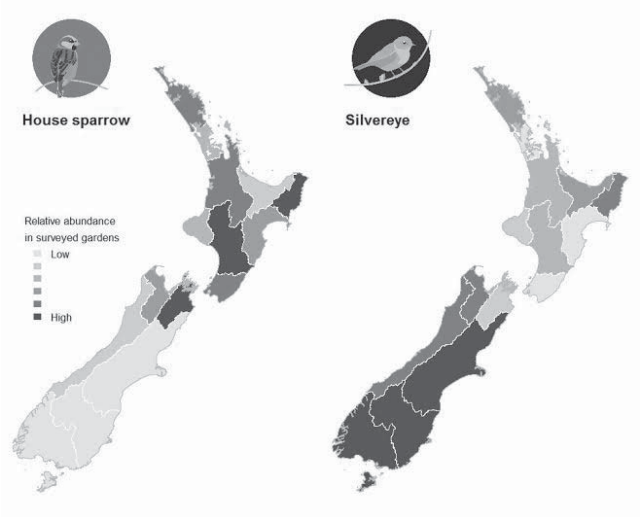
June-July 2015; Nov-Dec 2015; Jan-Feb 2016

A total of 118,337 waders of 19 species was counted during the June-July 2015 wader census, down from 122,822 in June-July 2014. There was good national coverage with only the two key sites of Parengarenga and Raglan not counted. Parengarenga was only partially counted in 2014 as well. Red Knot numbers were up on 2014, but Bar-tailed Godwit and SIPO numbers were down. The Wrybill count was similar, with 4,108 versus 4,112. Rarities included a Marsh Sandpiper and a Sanderling.

A total of 137,020 waders of 25 species was counted in the November-December 2015 wader census, up from 131,350 in 2014. National coverage was good with only the key sites of Parengarenga and Rangaunu not counted. The big difference was the Red Knot number; up by over 4,000 on 2014. The Bar-tailed Godwit count was similar to the 2014 number, but was still down on previous years. Ruddy Turnstone numbers were just below one thousand again at 992. Parengarenga was a stronghold for Ruddy Turnstone, so the lack of a count there will have influenced the overall count. Uncommon waders included a Great Knot, a Grey-tailed Tattler, a Lesser Sand Plover and two Grey Plover.

There was incomplete nationwide coverage in January-February 2016 with counts received from Lake Wairarapa, Nelson, Canterbury and Southland. Tables showing numbers of each species counted and sites with the largest counts are available via: ***www.osnz.org.nz***

ADRIAN RIEGEN



House Sparrow and Silvereye regional abundance

The New Zealand Garden Bird Survey was designed to monitor long-term trends in garden bird populations, but also provides data on their relative abundance in different regions. Since 2007, over 25,000 gardens have been surveyed, with some regions better represented than others. Results show House Sparrow and Silvereye are the most abundant species nationally, with House Sparrow more numerous than Silvereye in all regions except Canterbury, Otago and Southland.

Both species were twice as abundant in gardens where supplementary food was provided. Silvereye occurred in similar numbers in urban and rural gardens (with or without supplementary food), but House Sparrow was most numerous in urban gardens with supplementary food. Both species also varied in abundance regionally. House Sparrow counts were, on average, highest in gardens in the north (Gisborne, Manawatu-Wanganui, Marlborough), and lowest in the south (Canterbury, Otago, Southland). In contrast, average counts of Silvereye were highest in gardens in Canterbury, Otago, and Southland, and lowest in regions further north.

The high number of Silvereyes counted in southern gardens may be a response to harsher southern winters, forcing them to move seasonally from surrounding forests to seek food in gardens in southern regions more than in northern. Harsher southern winters may not affect House Sparrows in the same way because they are already mostly associated with human habitation. They may simply prefer a warmer climate. For more details, see: ***http://gardenbirdsurvey.landcareresearch.co.nz***

ERIC SPURR, CATRIONA MacLEOD AND SIMON HOWARD

"Introduction to Ornithology" course

Birds New Zealand has developed an "Introduction to Ornithology" course of seven lectures, each available as PDF files, and each running for 40-60 minutes. Subjects covered include bird identification, behaviours, physiology, conservation and morphology. The primary purpose is to increase ornithological knowledge, especially among younger people, and to enable more engagement with birds. The anticipated audience is the general public or students from high school age upwards with a basic understanding of biology. If you or anyone you know is interested in delivering the course lectures in local communities and schools, please contact your Regional Representative via *www.osnz.org.nz* under 'Contact Us'.

Youth Camp participants and tutors at the Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre, ANZAC weekend 2016. Photo supplied by Ray Buckmaster.

Youth Camp 2016

The second of the current series of Birds New Zealand youth camps was held at Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre over ANZAC weekend with 11 young people attending from different parts of the country, generously supported by Fruzio. This helped to keep student costs to a very reasonable $100. For many participants, conservation has become a core activity. Two are active with the Pirongia Restoration Society, two are youth ambassadors for the Zealandia wildlife sanctuary, one championed the North Island Kokako in Forest and Bird's 2015 'Bird of the Year' poll, and one is campaigning for the Maui's Dolphin. Most are also active in their regional Birds New Zealand branch.

The Shorebird Centre is adjacent to a Ramsar-listed wetland site on the Firth of Thames which attracts large numbers of shorebirds. The nearby Hunua Ranges have a population of North Island Kokako, so an early morning start to visit there resulted in most students hearing kokako calling. Weka-watching followed at the other end of the day.

The Centre itself is well-equipped with spotting scopes, so instruction in scope use was an early part of the course and there were several trips to the shoreline to aid with shorebird identification. The group's bird identification skills were good enough by the end of the course to attempt a census. This led to the discovery of four Black-tailed Godwit and close encounters with Wrybill. Rare birds seen during the course included Marsh Sandpiper and Arctic Tern.

All the suitable sites for cannon-netting waders were bereft of birds. In compensation, there were opportunities for mist-netting. Some students developed real expertise in net extraction and all had the chance to handle and band birds with the good selection of passerines netted in the grounds.

The course had an impressive list of tutors. Gillian Vaughan and Ian Southey ably took the lead in many activities. Danielle Sijbranda enthralled most of the students with her autopsies of Swamp Harrier and Pied Shag, so the students also learned a lot about bird anatomy. Paul Cuming, a previous participant, took control of one set of mist nets and John Dowding the other. John also provided an instructive exercise on band-reading and recording, and a useful introduction to the New Zealand threat rankings for bird species.

By the end of the course the students proved themselves to be a very congenial group. They share a real passion for birding and were enthused by what they had learned. Their feedback on the course was almost universally positive and their responses very encouraging when asked if they would attend next year's camp. So it was a very successful camp. We now have a good nucleus of students and tutors, and the ground work has been laid for this success to continue into the future.

Birds New Zealand would like to thank everyone involved, particularly the team from Birds Waikato, the detailed planning done by Andrew Styche and Ann Buckmaster, and Sharon Alderson - who was very much involved with them in the day-to-day running of the course - and who will be taking all of this experience through to the next Youth Camp in 2017.

RAY BUCKMASTER

Sharon Alderson

Helen Taylor

Birds New Zealand Personnel Changes

There have been recent changes in elected office holders on Council:

* Stefanie Grosser and Sarah Jamieson stood down due to moves overseas.
* Sharon Alderson and Helen Taylor have been elected to Council.
* Craig Steed stood down as Manawatu Regional Representative, so two RR positions are currently vacant: Manawatu and Gisborne.

Biographies of new Council members:

Sharon Alderson: I have a Master's degree in Biology and have worked at the Department of Conservation for ten years as an Issues Manager in the Operations Team. I have been an enthusiastic birder since staying on Tiritiri Matangi Island sometime early this century. That led to volunteering on the island, guiding walks and becoming a Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi committee member, and editor of the Supporters' Dawn Chorus newsletter. I also attended the Miranda Field Course which led to cannon-netting and wader-counting. Recently, I have concentrated on supporting young birders, in 2015, running the first Youth Camp held for quite some time. This year I supported a second Youth Camp and am keen to ensure they continue. I also believe there are great untapped opportunities to develop interest in birds through the arts.

Helen Taylor: I am a conservation genetics researcher at the University of Otago and have been working in bird research for seven years. I'm from the UK, but working with birds has taken me all over the world, from helping out with breeding bird surveys in Malta to scaling tall trees in the Peruvian Amazon to check macaw nests. I came to New Zealand to study for my PhD on inbreeding depression in Little Spotted Kiwi at Victoria University of Wellington. For the past 18 months I've been working at the University of Otago, studying the effect of inbreeding on male fertility in a variety of New Zealand native and introduced bird species. You'll normally find me out in the field analysing bird sperm swimming speeds with my custom-designed mobile lab, in the university lab running genetic samples, or in my office analysing the data. In my spare time, I like to get out into the beautiful New Zealand countryside, hike up mountains, and spot whatever birds I can while I'm up there. In a previous life, I was a public relations professional, and I maintain an active interest in science communication, advocacy, and outreach.

▲ The dead Royal Spoonbill photographed on Mt Arthur by Mel Whiting.

Royal Spoonbill on Mt Arthur

On 24th February 2016, Mel Whiting photographed a dead Royal Spoonbill in a limestone gryke. The striking thing about this discovery was the dead bird's inland location just below the summit of Winter Peak in the Mt Arthur massif, Kahurangi National Park (Lat -41.21681157, Long 172.69669094). This location is above 1500 metres and is 28 kilometres from the Moutere Inlet off Tasman Bay, the nearest site at which Royal Spoonbills are regularly found, some 50 km from Karamea, the nearest site on the West Coast at which Royal Spoonbills have been reported. The OSNZ Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand (2007) shows a smattering of inland records for Royal Spoonbill, mostly in grid squares containing large lakes. Schweigman *et al* (2014, *Notornis* 61: 177-187) discuss the migration of Royal Spoonbill in New Zealand, with the evidence pointing to coastal migration routes, although there are nomadic inland populations of the species in Australia. Presumably the dead bird photographed on Mt Arthur was either migrating overland or was blown well off course.

ROBIN TOY

First New Zealand record of Northern Fulmar

The latest addition to the New Zealand list is not a species that anyone expected. Fisheries observer Leon Berard photographed a Northern Fulmar east of the Snares Islands on 9th February 2014. He did not submit the photo for use on New Zealand Birds Online until late 2015, when he incorrectly identified it as a Southern Fulmar. When I saw the image before loading it to the site I recognised the bird as a Northern Fulmar. After circulating it to the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee (RAC), the record was unanimously accepted in March 2016. It is also notable for being the first record of this Arctic breeding species in the Southern Hemisphere.

COLIN MISKELLY, RAC Convenor

▲ Northern Fulmar (UBR 2015/71), the most recent addition to the New Zealand list. Photo by Leon Berard, New Zealand Birds Online.

Unusual Bird Report online database

A new database has been launched on the Birds New Zealand website, summarising all records submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee (and the previous Rare Birds Committee). It was initially conceived as a way to show members what has been submitted to the RAC, in order to encourage more submissions. Now you will no longer have the excuse that you thought someone else was going to submit an Unusual Bird Report!

Each new UBR submission is loaded onto the database within a day or so of being received, with a status of 'Submitted'. Batches of UBRs are sent to committee members every two months, at which point their status is changed to 'Pending'. Submitters will still be informed of decisions in person (usually via email), and the decisions ('Accepted', 'Not accepted', or 'Suspense') posted to the online database a few days later.

In addition to providing up-to-date news on recent UBRs, the database is a searchable repository of data associated with more than 1,660 UBRs dating back to 1947. These include links to species pages on New Zealand Birds Online and to more than 120 publications in *Notornis*, *OSNZ News* and *Southern Bird* that refer to UBR decisions, or provide details on individual sightings. The older publications have been newly scanned (*OSNZ News*) or re-scanned (*Notornis* and *Southern Bird*) so that you see just the relevant pages, rather than the entire issue.

The database can be used to generate lists of sightings by species, locality, status (Submitted, Pending, Accepted, Not accepted, Suspense), year of sighting, year of submission, details (Live, Breeding, Dead, Died, Aberrant), or first records for New Zealand. The data produced by any search can also be exported to a CSV file (Excel spreadsheet).

Recently-loaded information in the database must be treated with both caution and respect. Not all UBRs will be of the species claimed, and it is not appropriate for the veracity of submitted records to be debated publicly before the RAC has considered the UBR and notified the submitter of their decision. The information contained within a UBR is not posted on the website, and is confidential to the submitter, the RAC, and the relevant Regional Representative. The only person authorised to provide information on the precise location of a reported bird (if appropriate) is the local Regional Representative. The database is located here: **http://rare.birds.org.nz/**

First New Zealand records of Herald Petrel and Red-footed Booby have now been submitted to the UBR database by Tim Barnard, seen at Meyer Islets (29th March) and Napier Island (30th March) respectively by Tim and others during a Heritage Expeditions trip to the Kermadec Islands (see photo page 19).

Many thanks to Cheryl Walton, Grahame Bell, Mavis Hirini, Oscar Thomas, Raewyn Adams and Rochelle Marshall for their assistance with loading document links into the database.

COLIN MISKELLY, RAC Convenor

Monitoring Hutton's Shearwaters in the Seaward Kaikoura Range

The endangered Hutton's Shearwater breeds only between 1200 and 1800 metres above sea-level in the Seaward Kaikoura Range. Since 2005, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and The Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust (HSCT) have translocated chicks to establish an 'insurance' colony, Te Rae o Atiu, on Kaikoura Peninsula.

In *Birds New Zealand* No. 7, I reported on the first year of a programme comparing observations at the Kowhai River colony with those at Te Rae o Atiu. I have just completed the second year of work in which we monitored up to 27 accessible burrows at the Kowhai River among the many where it was not possible to reach chicks or adults, and all the nest boxes (artificial burrows) at Te Rae o Atiu that had birds visit them. These burrows had Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag readers installed to monitor bird movements. While it would have been useful to have had adult birds at all Kowhai River burrows tagged, it was not possible. Despite this, monitoring yielded some interesting results.

Two hundred Hutton's Shearwater chicks were taken to Te Rae o Atiu as part of the 2012 and 2013 translocations, with about 50 chicks each year taken from the Kowhai sub-colony under study here. During the 2014-15 season, only a single 2012 bird returned to Te Rae o Atiu. During the 2015-16 season, 12 of the 2012 birds and 15 of the 2013 birds returned. To date, no birds from the earlier 2005-2008 translocations have been recovered at the Kowhai River colony, nor were any birds from 2012 or 2013 seen.

However, PIT tag data from the Kowhai River colony had records of PIT tags from seven birds that were not implanted there. The finding that seven of the translocated birds had returned to the natal colony is remarkable as only 27 burrows were monitored in an area with more than 1,000 burrows. One bird (X17297) was recorded at two Kowhai burrows in January 2015 and again the next season. A second, and bigger, surprise was to record two birds at the Kowhai River that had previously returned to Te Rae o Atiu from Australian waters early in the 2015-16 season, albeit only on one day.

Two of the returned birds at Kowhai River were recorded at four burrows in one season. This is probably an underestimate of burrows visited as we only monitored a small proportion of those available. These movements are in keeping with observations at Te Rae o Atiu where most returning birds visited more than one nest box, with 2012 and 2013 individuals recorded in up to 15 nest boxes in their first season back.

Intuition would suggest that the development of chicks at the Kowhai River colony may be slower, and that they would fledge later than at Te Rae o Atiu, as adults carrying food to chicks at the Kowhai have to fly 1200 m higher and about an extra 20 km each way. Thus, for a similar amount of food collected, they should be using considerably more energy getting to the colony and providing less energy for chick growth than adults at Te Rae o Atiu. Chicks were weighed at all sites in early January and again in mid-February or early March, when wing-lengths were also measured. At comparable times, the average weights and wing-lengths at the two sites were similar, showing that there were no differences in chick development that could be attributed to sites.

Even though the sample from Te Rae o Atiu is small, the mean date of first emergence, as noted by chicks first triggering the PIT tag readers, and the mean fledging date, as noted by the last record at both sites, is similar for 2014-15. There were differences in 2015-16 when the dates for Kowhai birds were earlier than at Te Rae o Atiu, but the latter were influenced by one very late hatching bird.

Some birds at the Kowhai appear to have fledged the day of first emergence, whereas others were coming to burrow mouths up to 18 days before leaving, which is a lot longer than 1990s Kowhai River observations suggest. At Te Rae o Atiu, birds moved to burrow mouths for up to 22 days before fledging and we know birds there travel around and enter other burrows before fledging. There were three records of Kowhai River chicks from one burrow triggering the readers at another burrow, a smaller number than at Te Rae o Atiu where burrows are in closer proximity to each other. At neither study site have visual observations taken place, so there is an obvious need for cameras to be installed to see what happens.

Adult Hutton's Shearwater at Kowhai River. Photo by Mark Fraser, New Zealand Birds Online.

Nine of the breeding adult Hutton's Shearwaters at the Kowhai River colony have been recorded triggering the antennae coils at burrows other than those in which they were found on eggs. Except for one bird in 2014-15 and two in 2015-16, when two other burrows were visited, these birds visited one other burrow in a season. At Te Rae o Atiu in 2015-16, 27 birds from the 2006-2008 translocations visited an average of six burrows (up to 15), which is more than at Kowhai River, but the density of monitored burrows there is a lot lower and visits to unmonitored burrows will have been missed.

Adults probably stop feeding chicks for a period before they fledge as the chicks need to lose weight from their peak so they can fly. The PIT tag shows that adult birds may not be present for significant periods before the chicks fledge, but other adults have been recorded at burrows up to five days after the chicks have gone; it is not known how often chicks are fed during the last few visits by adults.

My conclusion is that there is no evidence from this work that chick growth, and chick and adult behaviour, differ at the Te Rae o Atiu and Kowhai River colonies. Therefore, our observations at Te Rae o Atiu are likely to be typical of activities at the natal mountain colonies.

LINDSAY ROWE, The Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust

Funding was provided for this project by NZ Lottery Grants Board, Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, LEH, Birds New Zealand Research Fund, HSCT, The Sargood Bequest, Reid Technology and Sistema Plastics. Della Bennet and DOC staff (especially Mike Morrissey) provided on-site support at Kowhai River, with some HSCT trustees and volunteers helping at Te Rae o Atiu.

Arctic Skua pair. Photo by Cyril Vathelet, New Zealand Birds Online.

New Zealand Birds Online tops a million

The number of visits to New Zealand Birds Online, the digital encyclopaedia of New Zealand birds, now exceeds 1.16 million. November 2015 was the busiest month recorded so far, with 59,261 visits, and December 2015 and January 2016 chalked up an increase of 24% on the same period in 2014-15. Another milestone was reached when the 9,000th photo was loaded in January: a pair of Arctic Skua at their Arctic breeding ground in Svalbard, taken by French photographer Cyril Vathelet (above). Many thanks to everyone who has contributed images, please keep them coming.

COLIN MISKELLY
New Zealand Birds Online Project Manager

Male bias in Orange-fronted Parakeet populations

A new study of the remaining wild populations of the critically endangered Orange-fronted Parakeet, conducted by Jonathan Kearvell and Megan Farley and published in *Notornis* (Vol 63, Part 1, March 2016), indicates the species currently has an adult male bias. Limited data suggest that prior to recent declines in the population size of Orange-fronted Parakeets, which were driven largely by introduced mammalian predators, the parakeets' adult sex ratio may have been closer to parity. The current excess of males in the wild populations indicates that the species currently has a compromised population structure, despite intensive conservation management undertaken since 2000 to limit predation. Given that many globally threatened bird species have been shown to have highly male-skewed sex ratios, this finding is concerning.

River works help protect Black-fronted Tern site

After breeding Black-fronted Terns left the Wildlife Management International (WMI) Clarence River study site for the winter, WMI carried out modifications to the islands on the braided river habitat there in May where the birds nest during the summer breeding season (see cover photo and page 19). These included deepening some of the river channels around the islands to prevent introduced mammal predators getting to nesting colonies next season and building up the height of the islands to make them more resilient to flooding. The work was carried out under a resource consent issued by Environment Canterbury. As a condition of the consent, WMI and Department of Conservation staff were present during the works to relocate any freshwater fish accidentally stranded as a result of the works. A total of 64 native fish and 35 introduced Brown Trout were relocated.

One of the translocated Chatham Albatrosses flexes its wings on its artificial nest. Photo by Nikki McArthur, New Zealand Birds Online.

Chatham Albatrosses spread their wings

The establishment of a new Chatham Island Albatross breeding colony at Point Gap on the main Chatham Island came a step closer in April after the last of 50 translocated chicks fledged there as part of a project to help safeguard the species. The Chatham Taiko Trust collected the chicks last year from the only existing colony, located on a remote rocky pinnacle island called The Pyramid, before translocating them to Point Gap, where they were hand-reared in artificial nests. It is hoped that the translocated birds will return to Point Gap at five-years-old and start breeding there at seven-years-old.

This was the third consecutive breeding season that 50-60 chicks have been translocated from The Pyramid colony, which is vulnerable to severe storm events washing away top soil, thus increasing the risk of nest collapse. To help encourage the chicks to return to Point Gap to breed as adults, the Trust has placed artificial life-sized 'decoy' adult albatrosses among the artificial nests along with a sound system that broadcasts the species' calls. The Trust plans to repeat these translocations in the next two breeding seasons.

Albatross translocation methods were pioneered by the Yamashina Institute of Ornithology, while attempting to establish a new breeding population of Short-tailed Albatross on remote Mukojima Island, Japan. They shared their methods with the Chatham Taiko Trust, and the Trust continues to partner with the Institute and Chatham Island landowners, Bruce and Liz Tuanui.

Landscape-scale stoat trapping benefits Tokoeka

A new study shows that a 15,000-hectare low-intensity stoat trapping network established in the Murchison Mountains in 2002 by the Department of Conservation, primarily to protect the last natural population of the critically endangered South Island Takahe, also benefits threatened Southern Brown Kiwi (Tokoeka) in the area.

The study, by Jane Tansell, Hannah Edmonds and Hugh Robertson and published in *Notornis* (Vol 63, Part 1, March 2016), compared the productivity and survival of Tokoeka living in three valleys that were covered by the trapping network with Tokoeka living in a nearby untrapped valley.

Chick survival to six-months-old was significantly higher in the trapped areas (37%) than in the untrapped area (19%). This doubling of chick survival was enough to change the rate of Tokoeka population growth in the study area from a projected decline of 1.6% per year without management to a projected increase of 1.2% per year with trapping.

Black-billed Gulls displaying. Photo by Peter Reese, New Zealand Birds Online.

Black-billed Gull National Census 2016-17

Black-billed Gulls are listed as "Nationally Critical" in New Zealand. A new national population estimate is needed to fully understand the extent of their decline because the last one, carried out in 1996-97, is outdated. Aerial counts of breeding birds were completed in Marlborough, Tasman, Canterbury (funded by Environment Canterbury), and Otago during 2014-15, and again in Marlborough, Tasman, West Coast, Canterbury (funded by Environment Canterbury), and part of Otago during 2015-16. Due to generous funding provided by Fruzio and the Birds New Zealand Projects Assistance Fund, it is now possible to repeat the survey for a third year (2016-17), thereby allowing the calculation of an average number of breeding birds over a three-year period for most of the country, and ensuring that any regions which were previously missed are surveyed at least once, such as Southland. Members and the public will be encouraged to participate, so please stand-by for when the time comes to help. Please also look out for colour-banded Black-billed Gulls because every sighting is important.

CLAUDIA MISCHLER

Call for applications for "Birds New Zealand Research Fund"

The "Birds New Zealand Research Fund" (BNZRF) is a national fund administered by Birds New Zealand on behalf of T/GEAR, a New Zealand charitable trust. Applications will be accepted from anyone prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of New Zealand birds or their environment. Approved applications will be funded retrospective for a 12 month period only.

Priority will be given to applications that:

- involve research with a measurable outcome and a commitment to have results published;
- involve people learning as well as being involved; and
- provide independent assessment of the proposal by an independent person or agency.

How to apply:
Download the application form:
http://osnz.org.nz/studies-and-schemes/birds-nz-research-fund
Email your completed application form to:
eo@osnz.org.nz
Typed and emailed applications are preferred.
Applications must be received by 1st September 2016.

DOC Director-General Lou Sanson and China's Vice-Minister for the State Forestry Administration, Chen Fengxue, signing the Agreement at Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre. Photo by Bruce Jarvis, Department of Conservation.

Agreement protects shorebirds at Chinese wetland sites

Department of Conservation (DOC) Director-General, Lou Sanson, and China's Vice-Minister for the State Forestry Administration (SFA), Chen Fengxue, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in March at the Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre on working together to protect, manage and restore wetlands visited by Red Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits during their long-distance migratory flights. The SFA administers Ramsar-listed sites in China.

The MOA covers seven kilometres of coastal habitat at Luannan, Bohai Bay. Fifty per cent of the Red Knots that spend the Austral summer in New Zealand stop there to feed on shellfish after flying non-stop from New Zealand. After feeding, they fly on to breeding sites in Siberia. The MOA also covers wetlands in Yalu Jiang Nature Reserve near Dandong on China's border with North Korea. Half the Bar-tailed Godwits that spend the Austral summer in New Zealand stopover there on their way to breeding sites in Alaska.

"The MOA we've signed shows DOC in New Zealand and the SFA in China are committed to working together to ensure these remarkable birds can continue to make these epic journeys," said Director-General Lou Sanson.

"It is humbling to see these small birds that fly non-stop between our two countries. They form a bridge between New Zealand and China. They connect us as people. We will work together to keep the bridge open," said Vice-Minister Chen Fengxue.

Trust members began visiting Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve 17 years ago. They established a sister-site partnership with the reserve in 2004, since when they have been working towards more formal protection arrangements between New Zealand and China.

Centre Manager and Birds New Zealand Council member, Keith Woodley, said it is vitally important to protect all these sites. "Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot populations are declining. To protect these birds we must protect their habitats, both here in New Zealand and in East Asia where they stopover during migration. We thank both governments for the steps they have taken today to protect migratory shorebirds. It will keep the birds coming."

Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots. Painting by Keith Woodley.

Black-billed Gull colony photo by Claudia Mischler.

Disturbance of Black-billed Gulls

Last summer appeared to be a poor breeding season for the Black-billed Gulls in the Nelson/Marlborough region. A colony on the Buller River was located early in the summer, but the nests were abandoned shortly after. This meant that no cameras were set up and no other colony was found on the river throughout summer, nor on the Awatere or Matakitaki Rivers. Eventually, a colony was found on the Wairau River, but it was only half the usual size. Consequently, this was the only colony in the region where cameras could be set up.

Two daytime and two night-time running cameras were set up to take a photo every minute from 21st November to 26th December 2015 at the Wairau River colony. Each camera faced in a different direction, covering various angles and all parts of the colony. A total of 61,829 daytime photos and 30,839 night-time photos were taken. Daytime footage was gathered for the entire period because at least one camera was working at all times. About 50.5 hours were not filmed during night-time, including five consecutive nights from 9th to 14th December.

During daytime, 405 disturbance events were recorded, all of which lasted approximately one minute. The cause/s of these events could not be identified. Where possible, two disturbance factors were identified. The main one was Australasian Harriers, which were seen 24 times, both flying and on the ground in the colony. Usually, the disturbance lasted one minute, but it ranged from three minutes to seven hours. The second disturbance was from people with a dog. They were seen in the colony for a period of about seven minutes. The frequency of disturbance increased from 8th December onwards, with most occurring between 18th and 25th December. Harriers were first seen on 1st December and their presence continued in fluctuations throughout the month.

During night-time there were a total of 32 disturbances, all of which lasted one minute. Unfortunately, the cause/s of these disturbances could not be identified. The most frequent number of disturbances (nine) occurred between 21st and 23rd November. In contrast, there were only five events between 29th November and 5th December. A Hedgehog was observed in the colony twice. On one occasion it came and went over a period of 45 minutes. On a second occasion it was only seen once. This was towards the end of the season (25th-26th December), hence there were only a few birds still sitting on eggs as the rest had moved away from the colony by then.

Harriers caused the most disturbances and were the most likely cause of predation at the Wairau River colony during the 2015-16 breeding season. The breeding success recorded at the colony was 0.61 chicks per nest (184 nests were counted at mid-incubation and 112 chicks banded before fledging). The footage of people entering the colony with a dog has also emphasised the need to continue to educate the public about the protected status of Black-billed Gulls and the threats they face.

The fact that this was a relatively poor breeding season for Black-billed Gulls in the region also highlights the importance of continuing this study. This will allow for the possibility of a more successful breeding season next year and, therefore, the opportunity to set up and use remote cameras at different colonies within various river catchments. Studying different colonies over multiple years will also help account for inter-annual variability in disturbance and/or predation because it is possible that different parameters impact colonies to varying degrees, depending on the season.

CLAUDIA MISCHLER

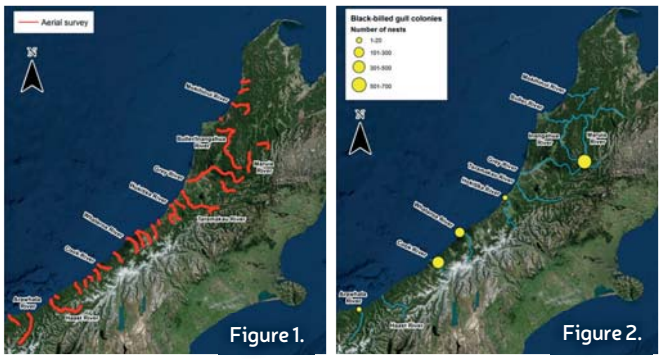


Figure 1. Map showing all rivers in the West Coast region that were flown on 12th–13th November 2015 during the Black-billed Gull colony survey. **Figure 2.** Map showing location and size of Black-billed Gull colonies found in the West Coast region during flights done on 12th–13th November 2015. Aerial photograph counts were used for the Maruia and Whataroa, and ground counts for the Hokitika, Cook, and Arawhata colonies.

West Coast Black-billed Gull Survey

Thanks to funding from Fruzio and Birds New Zealand Projects Assistance Fund, a complete aerial survey on the South Island West Coast for Black-billed Gull colonies was carried out at mid-incubation on 12th-13th November 2015. Thirty-one rivers were covered, including all braided sections where nesting gulls may be found (Fig 1). This included long days of flying in a fixed wing aircraft in sometimes very windy conditions. Photographs were taken while circling over the colony several times at heights that did not disturb the birds. Only breeding colonies were photographed to provide the best indication of population size in the region.

Five colonies were found, evenly spread throughout the West Coast region (Fig 2). The number of nests was counted in aerial photos by using Microsoft Paint to place a dot on each individual gull that appeared to be sitting on a nest. Ground counts were carried out on 13th November following the flights to distinguish between Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls in coastal colonies, and ground-truth aerial photograph counts (Table 1). An additional survey due to take place in 2016-17 will help determine annual trends. Overall, this survey has shown that there are a large number of black-billed gulls in the region.

The Maruia colony ground count was assigned to be done by someone else but it was not done as an exact count. The Whataroa colony was inaccessible on the ground, so there was no ground count and it is not known whether it was a mixed colony of Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls. The Arawhata colony was a mixed colony of Red-billed and Black-billed gulls, and White-fronted Terns. It is not possible to distinguish between Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls on the photograph, hence no aerial photograph count is shown. Red-billed gull colonies were also located and photographed; however, this information will be reported on separately in the report on the national Red-billed Gull census. Special thanks to the pilot for doing an incredible job and for donating their time, and to Mike Bell and Dianne John for doing the surveys. Thanks also go to Nikki McArthur for drawing the maps.

CLAUDIA MISCHLER

Table 1. Location and number of Black-billed Gull nests counted from aerial photographs taken on 12th – 13th November 2015 compared to ground counts carried out on 13th November 2015.

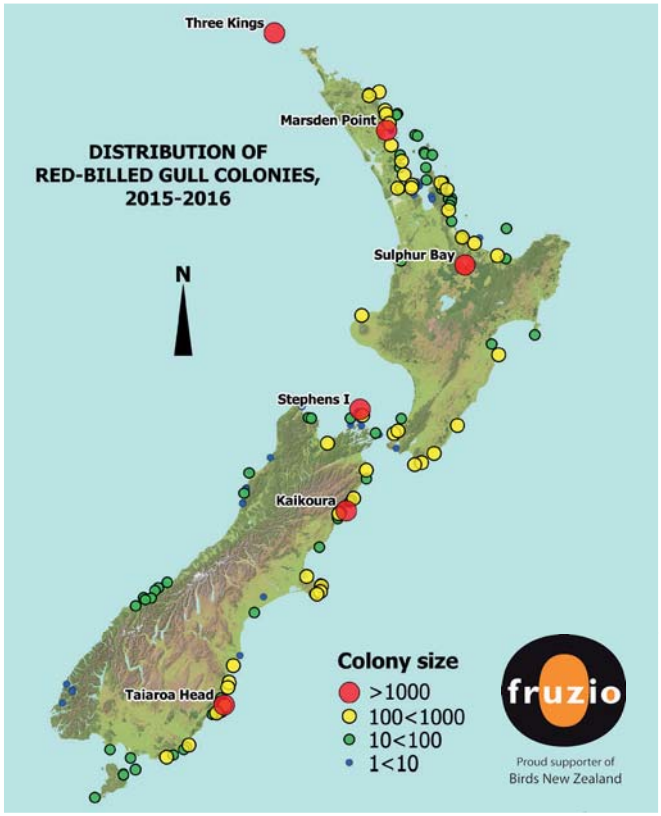
Colony	Aerial Photograph Count	Ground Count	Percent Difference
Maruia	537	300+[a]	-
Hokitika	6	6	0%
Whataroa	226[b]	-	-
Cook	288	390	26%
Arawhata	-	12	-

[a] *Estimate done on 12th November 2015*
[b] *Count may include Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls – colony was inaccessible and could not be confirmed.*

Red-billed Gull adult with juvenile (left). Photo by Rebecca Bowater, New Zealand Birds Online.

Status of the Red-billed Gull in New Zealand, 2014–2016

By Peter Frost and Graeme Taylor



Locations and sizes of 232 Red-billed Gull colonies on mainland New Zealand, 2015-16.

In a review of the status of the Red-billed Gull in New Zealand, carried out in the mid-1960s, Lou Gurr and Fred Kinsky concluded that there were about 40,000 breeding pairs nationally. They ended their review with the statement: "The Red-billed Gull is, therefore, obviously well adjusted to European settlement in New Zealand, is numerous and apparently is increasing." Many would subscribe to that assessment, even today. The Red-billed Gull is widespread and apparently common, occurring all around our coast and occasionally inland. It is often found about human settlement, not least during the non-breeding season. Why then is the Red-billed Gull classed as 'Nationally Vulnerable'? What has changed, if anything? And is Gurr and Kinsky's conclusion still true?

Evidence for a decline in the Red-billed Gull population comes primarily from the Kaikoura Peninsula, one of three prime breeding sites of the species historically (the others were the Three Kings Islands and the Mokohinau group). The birds breeding there have been the subjects of a long-term study by Dr Jim Mills, one that started in 1964 and continues to this day. When his study began, there were 4,380 nesting pairs. Numbers increased to a peak of 9,212 pairs in 1988, an exceptional number that perhaps reflected compensation for the somewhat abnormal season the year before that, when only 2,315 pairs nested (individual Red-billed Gulls do not necessarily nest every year).

Between 1983 and 1993, the number of breeding pairs averaged just over 6,000. From then on, however, numbers began to decline. Over the next decade, 1994–2004, the average

fell to 4,200 pairs, and then dropped further until, by 2011, there were only 2,635 pairs breeding at Kaikoura. This is a decline of around 56% in 17 years. The fall was ascribed to changes in ocean productivity and associated reductions in food availability, particularly of the euphasiid, *Nyctiphanes australis*, or 'krill', on which the gulls mainly feed during the breeding season. At the same time, there were anecdotal reports of crashes in the breeding populations on the Three Kings Islands and the Mokohinau group, each of which had been estimated by observers in the first half of the twentieth century to support over 6,000 pairs.

At the same time, and in contrast to these declines in the north, the population of Red-billed Gulls in Otago was increasing. Lyndon Perriman and Chris Lalas reported in 2012 that numbers there had risen from under 1,500 pairs in 1992 to over 4,600 pairs in 2011, an annual increase of between 6% and 10%. So what was happening? Were we witnessing a southward shift in the breeding distribution of the Red-billed Gull, or was its population in overall decline, despite this regional increase?

The Department of Conservation's threat assessment panel for birds, which convenes every three years to consider the status of New Zealand's bird species, had originally classed the Red-billed Gull as 'Not Threatened'. By 2005, this had been revised to 'Gradual Decline', largely based on reports of the drop in numbers at Kaikoura, and on the Three Kings Islands and Mokohinau group. In 2008 the panel reclassified the species as 'Nationally Vulnerable'. Given the apparent ongoing decline, the population was projected to fall by 50–70% over the next three generations. That is still its status, notwithstanding the regional increase in Otago.

There is an old management adage that says "You can't manage what you don't measure." In the case of the Red-billed Gull, it became imperative to assess the species' status in New Zealand as a whole, if only to establish a baseline against which future changes can be more accurately assessed. Therefore, over the two breeding seasons, 2014/15 and 2015/16, more than 150 members of Birds New Zealand, staff from the Department of Conservation, and members of the general public identified breeding sites and counted the numbers of breeding Red-billed Gulls at these, all with the aim of determining the total number of nesting pairs in the country.

Counts were made either directly on land or from a boat, or by counting nesting birds visible on photographs taken from the ground, a boat or aircraft. In initiating this survey, we hoped to get a better idea of where breeding birds are currently concentrated, the kinds of threats they face, and what conservation measures may be needed to stabilise the population.

We received information on 406 sites across New Zealand (some sites encompassed a number of separate colonies), of which 163 were unoccupied. The remaining 243 sites together supported around 26,908 nesting pairs of Red-billed Gulls: 14,441 in the South Island; 12,163 in the North Island; and at least 302 in the Chathams. The actual number may be slightly higher than this because there are a few colonies, active in 2014/15, that were not surveyed in 2015/16. Together, these unsurveyed colonies are unlikely to support more than a few hundred pairs.

The largest numbers were recorded at Kaikoura (3,210 pairs), Rotorua (2,277), Taiaroa Head (2,145), Three Kings Islands (1,763), Takapourewa/Stephens Island (1,250) and Marsden Point (1,190), where the birds are breeding among the pipes and around the storm-water basin of the oil refinery. Compare some of these numbers with those recorded in the first half of the last century. The Three Kings colonies were reported to support tens of thousands of birds; now there are less than 2,000. Likewise in the Mokohinau group where 2,000–6,500+ pairs apparently bred in the late-1940s; last season there were fewer than 60 pairs.

Some colonies have expanded. Those at Sulphur Bay in Rotorua, the only substantial non-coastal population, have increased from less than 430 pairs in the early 1960s to nearly 2,300 pairs today. These birds must be treating Lake Rotorua as a large inland sea but feed on different prey to that preferred by coastal-breeding birds. They feed on common smelt, *Retropinna retropinna*, an abundant species in Lake Rotorua, and also scavenge from terrestrial sources (e.g. picnic sites, rubbish dumps). The birds' productivity would be worth studying.

Overall, the figure of around 27,000 pairs is substantially less than Gurr and Kinsky's 1965 estimate of 40,000 pairs. If the latter figure was broadly correct, this means that the Red-billed Gull's breeding population has declined in New Zealand by about a third in 50 years. Of course, there are more birds than just 27,000 pairs because Red-billed Gulls do not start breeding until they are two to four-years-old; non-breeders can make up to half the population.

What could be the causes for this decline? We are not sure. As mentioned, Jim Mills and colleagues suggested that the decline in the Kaikoura population may be linked to changes in ocean productivity, resulting in a drop in the availability of high-quality food such as krill, on which the birds feed when breeding. Because Red-billed Gulls capture prey at or just below the surface, they must depend on surface-shoaling kahawai and trevally, which also feed on krill, driving these close to the surface. This creates well-known short-lived 'boil-ups' over which gulls and other surface-feeding seabirds feed. There is a lot of anecdote and some empirical evidence to suggest that the populations of these commercially-harvested fish species have declined in some regions. If so, then this could be reducing krill availability further because, presumably, the frequency and extent of these boil-ups would also fall, reducing feeding opportunities for breeding gulls.

Other suggested reasons for the decline include predation by introduced mammals, such as stoats, feral cats and rats, and by Southern Black-backed Gulls, a species whose population has grown in recent years alongside changes in farming practice, the expansion in landfill and other waste disposal sites, and enlargement of the fishing industry. Those colonies in Otago where there has been predator control do seem to have benefited and have grown accordingly, so predation is likely to be one factor. Nevertheless, it does not readily explain the declines noted on offshore islands, some of which are predator-free (e.g. Mokohinau). Displacement by coastal development also doesn't seem to be important, as witnessed by birds breeding in harbours, on a shopping-centre roof, and within the oil refinery at Marsden Point, although how successful these birds are is not known.

The Red-billed Gull is a slow-reproducing, long-lived species, with a maximum lifespan of around 30 years. On average, females only start breeding when four-years-old, and then usually only every three years after that; males start breeding about a year earlier. Jim Mills' study has shown adults only fledge an average of three young during their lifetime, with almost 40% of breeding females not producing any. Only about 20% of fledged young breed themselves.

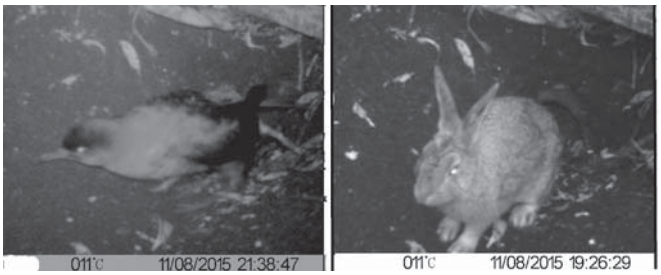
With this level of productivity, even small reductions could result in long-term decline. But given the longevity of the adults and a large reservoir of non-breeding birds, any changes in the population resulting from a slow accumulation of reproductive deficits will take time to appear. This may be the case with the Red-billed Gull. As shown by the sad history of other once-numerous species, we cannot take abundance for granted. Tracking changes through time, including of breeding success, is the only sure way of determining what is happening.

Acknowledgements: This survey could not have been undertaken without the inputs of many people, too numerous to mention individually here. The aerial surveys were generously sponsored by Fruzio, some Birds New Zealand regional funds, and the Department of Conservation, which kindly also provided some support to PF. We are most grateful to everyone for their contributions.

Census of small petrels in North Otago

Seabirds at Katiki Point in North Otago are monitored by Penguin Rescue volunteers in two-hectares of forest planted on pasture since 1984. Five seabird species have since colonised there, with most burrows located within the forest. Little Penguin began nesting there in 1991 (37 nests in 2014), followed by Sooty Shearwater in 1997 (203 nests in 2014), with the first Broad-billed Prion nest found in 2002. Two more burrow-nesting species have been recorded ashore but breeding has not been verified—White-faced Storm Petrel, first seen in 1994, and Common Diving Petrel, first seen in 2014. Evidence for breeding by these small petrels is derived mainly from an unfortunate source—the bodies of birds killed by cats during spring and early summer have enlarged gonads. However, cat predation has been greatly reduced since 2014 by supplementary feeding in association with trapping.

Katiki Point is the only mainland site known for Broad-billed Prion and White-faced Storm Petrel, and the second for Common Diving Petrel. However, breeding there has been verified only for Broad-billed Prion. The most likely reason is that these small petrel species share burrow entrances with the larger Sooty Shearwater. The Birds New Zealand Project Assistance Fund has funded the cost of seven motion-activated trail cameras over three years to locate and monitor burrows used by small petrels here. The deployment of cameras immediately produced a surprise—Sooty Shearwaters often share burrows with Rabbits. As expected, all initial records of these small petrels have been at burrows also occupied by Sooty Shearwaters. Most photographs lack clarity and we are having difficulties identifying species, but we now hope to rectify this by reducing the intensity of the infrared light source.



▲ Trail camera photos of Sooty Shearwater and Rabbit at burrow entrance.

CHRIS LALAS

Biodiversity 'Beyond Orokonui' in East Otago

◀ South Island Robin/Miromiro. Photo by Peter Reese.

Birds New Zealand has funded the Landscape Connections Trust to undertake a project to enhance indigenous biodiversity in East Otago by improving connections between areas of indigenous habitat on productive land where these habitat types have been most reduced. Known locally as 'Beyond Orokonui', the project is working with stakeholders to extend improved biodiversity management across a wider area than that already intensively managed within the 310-hectare pest exclusion-fence of the Orokonui Ecosanctuary.

The project has also involved trained volunteers in counting birds within the project area using 5MBCs to cover as many different habitat patches as possible. Birds were recorded at a total of 625 different count sites throughout the area between August 2014 and mid-December 2015. Thirty-three bird species were observed in the 5MBCs, 18 of which were indigenous species and 15 introduced. Three of the indigenous species are listed as Threatened or At Risk. South Island Kaka (Nationally Vulnerable) was observed only within the Orokonui Ecosanctuary, while South Island Rifleman/Titipounamu (At Risk-Declining) were recorded in low numbers and South Island Fernbird/Mata (At Risk-Declining) were only recorded rarely.

Study results emphasized the importance of indigenous forest habitat for birds in spring. Habitat type or extent explained the relative abundance of all of the modeled indigenous bird species except Grey Warbler/Riroriro, which is fairly uniformly distributed. Habitat type or extent also explained the abundance of introduced species such as Dunnock, Blackbird and Chaffinch.

Coastal forest and treeland appeared to be a poor spring habitat for Bellbird/Koparapara, which are omnivorous, and for Brown Creeper/Pipirihika, which are insectivorous, but coastal treeland was an important habitat for Chaffinch in spring when they feed their young on invertebrates. Coastal forest and treeland habitat within the study area tended to be heavily grazed and most of this habitat type sampled was not fenced to exclude stock. Depletion of food resources through the lack of a subcanopy and understorey, which provide habitat diversity, is the most likely cause of the negative relationships with Bellbird/Koparapara and Brown Creeper/Pipirihika. The frugivorous Silvereye/Pihipihi was significantly associated with broadleaved indigenous forest in spring, most probably because early-fruiting species such as native fuchsia which is common here. Their avoidance of exotic coniferous forest in spring is likely due to the lower abundance of fleshy fruited trees and shrubs.

Two introduced species - Dunnock and Chaffinch - were negatively associated with the more intact forest type, rimu-miro forest, but positively associated with more modified forest types. Together with Blackbirds, which were more abundant where there was less forest bird habitat, these relationships indicate that introduced bird species are more abundant where there has been greater loss and modification of indigenous forest habitats. South Island Robin/Miromiro showed an opposite tendency to Blackbirds, being more abundant where there was more forest bird habitat within easy reach of the count site. Type of forest habitat appeared unimportant for South Island Robin/Miromiro, as long as it was plentiful.

The ultimate causes of these habitat preferences are not known, but availability of food is likely to be the strongest determinant of forest bird distribution and abundance in the study area during the spring breeding period. It is also possible that pest animal densities differ in spring between different habitat types, which could affect the abundance of bird species differently in different habitats.

RHYS MILLAR

More details of this project are posted at **www.osnz.org.nz**

Beach Patrol Scheme 2014 Preliminary Report

This report is based on 231 cards for 2014 received as at 31.12.15. There were 262 in 2013, 324 in 2012, 352 in 2011, 315 in 2010, 385 in 2009, 381 in 2008 and 403 in 2007. This shows a continuing decline in the number of beach patrols carried out.

In 2014, 1,069 kilometres were patrolled compared with 1,388km in 2013, 1,625km in 2012, 1,846km in 2011, 3,210 in 2010, 4,470km in 2009, 2,524km in 2008 and 2,307 in 2007.

Dead seabirds found in 2014 totalled 1,388 compared to 4,851 in 2013, 1,924 in 2012, 57,920 in 2011, 3,266 in 2010, 4,763 in 2009, 3,906 in 2008, 3,786 in 2007 and 3,117 in 2006.

There were no significant wrecks and no very unusual records during the year. The largest single species wreck was of 80 Mottled Petrels on Mason Bay on 31/12.

The tail end of the Short-tailed Shearwater wreck of late 2013 was still being seen in early 2014. The recovery of a Red-legged Partridge was probably a first for the scheme.

The average nationwide recovery rate is 1.33 birds per kilometre compared with the 2013 average of 3.65, largely influenced by a significant wreck of juvenile Sooty Shearwaters that year, the 2012 average of 1.8, and the 2011 average of 31, which was boosted by a huge prion wreck.

Birds recovered in 2014 (brackets indicate 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009 figures): Royal albatross 0 (2, 1, 1, 2, 5); Wandering albatross 1 (5, 3, 3, 5, 6); Shy/White-capped Albatross 17 (18, 17, 25, 29, 40); Salvin's Albatross 1 (3, 1, 2, 2, 4); Black-browed/Campbell Albatross 1 (0, 1, 3, 1, 5); Grey-headed Albatross 4 (0, 1, 4, 8, 8); Buller's Albatross 23 (6, 14, 74, 27, 16); Sooty Albatross 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Light-mantled Sooty Albatross 7 (0, 4, 1, 3, 2); Yellow-nosed Albatross 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Chatham Island Albatross 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Albatross sp. 2 (11, 9, 7, 16, 10); Northern Giant Petrel 1 (1, 2, 6, 7, 6); Southern Giant Petrel 1 (3, 3, 0, 17, 8); Giant Petrel sp. 7 (0, 7, 6, 7, 6); Buller's Shearwater 42 (65, 43, 282, 107, 456); Sooty Shearwater 160 (2102, 253, 650, 1983, 417); Short-tailed Shearwater 84 (944, 50, 8, 157, 116); Wedge-tailed Shearwater 0 (0, 1, 0, 1, 1); Flesh-footed Shearwater 1 (8, 25, 119, 22, 24); Fluttering Shearwater 76 (184, 169, 471, 250, 402); Hutton's Shearwater 17 (35, 61, 63, 59, 127); Little Shearwater 10 (7, 1, 35, 14, 12); Diving Petrel 158 (86, 57, 1146, 86, 111); White-chinned Petrel 5 (2, 3, 5, 6, 2); Westland Black Petrel 0 (3, 1, 2, 0, 1); Black Petrel 3 (1, 3, 3, 1, 2); Grey Petrel 3 (1, 0, 0, 1, 0); Antarctic Fulmar 5 (0, 6, 1, 59, 3); Cape Pigeon 3 (2, 13, 25, 41, 36); Blue Petrel 4 (1, 1, 28, 9, 6); Fairy Prion 51 (117, 113, 2304, 192, 226); Fulmar Prion 0 (0, 1, 55, 2, 0); Broad-billed Prion 17 (36, 224, 34630, 47, 43); Thin-billed Prion 6 (4, 4, 1153, 14, 22); Salvin's Prion 1 (3, 8, 2257, 3, 3); Antarctic Prion 3 (1, 8, 1265, 4, 7); Prion sp. 87 (47, 123, 12169, 166, 109); Cook's Petrel 8 (5, 2, 9, 19, 11); White-naped Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Mottled Petrel 106 (16, 46, 40, 27, 44); Black-winged Petrel 1 (0, 0, 0, 2, 2); Pycroft's Petrel 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 1); Soft-plumaged Petrel 4 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Gould's Petrel 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Kerguelen Petrel 3 (1, 2, 2, 0, 0); White-headed Petrel 18 (8, 11, 9, 33, 7); Grey-faced Petrel 13 (3, 7, 15, 17, 13); White-faced Storm Petrel 4 (11, 5, 86, 6, 19); Grey-backed Storm Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Black-bellied Storm Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Storm Petrel sp. 1 (1, 0, 5, 1, 0); Unidentified seabird 32 (23, 2, 5, 21, 25); Yellow-eyed Penguin 2 (2, 2, 5, 5, 4); Little Penguin 64 (104, 61, 365, 420, 410); White-flippered Penguin 13 (5, 19, 18, 5, 19); Fiordland Crested Penguin 3 (2, 4, 3, 1, 4); Erect Crested Penguin 1 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0); Red-tailed Tropicbird 0 (0, 1, 1, 0, 0); Tropicbird sp. 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Australasian Gannet 66 (63, 116, 115, 429, 213); Black Shag 0 (2, 1, 3, 6, 4); Pied Shag 15 (11, 10, 33, 32, 25); Little Black Shag 1 (0, 0, 5, 1, 1); Little Shag 2 (0, 1, 6, 3, 1); Spotted Shag 46 (74, 146, 83, 47, 70); Stewart Island Shag 22 (1, 9, 7, 9, 5); Auckland Island Shag 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Pitt Island Shag 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Shag sp. 1 (1, 0, 6, 0, 0); White-faced Heron 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 2); Royal Spoonbill 1 (1, 0, 4, 2, 1); Black Swan 12 (26, 15, 8, 12, 8); Feral Goose 1 (0, 3, 2, 4, 7); Canada Goose 4 (6, 6, 1, 0, 7); Paradise Shelduck 3 (5, 13, 17, 4, 9); Mallard 1 (7, 4, 3, 8, 34); Domestic Duck 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Grey Duck 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 1); Grey Teal 1 (0, 3, 3, 0, 0); Australasian Shoveller 0 (0, 2, 1, 0, 0); New Zealand Scaup 0 (0, 2, 1, 0, 0); Australasian Harrier 1 (1, 3, 3, 4, 4); Wild Turkey 0 (0, 0, 1, 4, 0); Peafowl 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Chicken 0 (2, 0, 2, 1, 3); Pheasant 0 (3, 0, 0, 0, 1); Red-legged Partridge 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Weka 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Banded Rail 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Pukeko 3 (1, 0, 1, 2, 5); Pied Oystercatcher 4 (4, 6, 2, 1, 5); Variable Oystercatcher 4 (0, 2, 1, 5, 2); Oystercatcher sp. 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0); Pied Stilt 2 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Spur-winged Plover 0 (1, 0, 0, 1, 1); Banded Dotterel 0 (0, 0, 0, 2, 0); Bar-tailed Godwit 0 (0, 2, 1, 0, 1); Southern Black-backed Gull 74 (68, 108, 90, 185, 114); Red-billed Gull 17 (31, 28, 33, 21); Black-billed Gull 4 (6, 7, 10, 8, 8); Gull sp. 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1);Brown Skua 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 4); Arctic Skua 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0); Caspian Tern 1 (2, 1, 3, 8, 1); White-fronted Tern 14 (9, 15, 24, 34, 20); Arctic Tern 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Sooty Tern 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Tern sp. 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0); New Zealand Pigeon 3 (2, 3, 3, 2, 0); Feral/Domestic Pigeon 1 (3, 5, 3, 5, 2); Spotted Dove 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Kaka 1 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Shining Cuckoo 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Long-tailed Cuckoo 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Sacred Kingfisher 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Eurasian Blackbird 0 (4, 0, 0, 4, 1); Song Thrush 0 (0, 1, 4, 0, 4); Tui 2 (1, 0, 3, 1, 1); Common Starling 0 (0, 1, 1, 0, 1); Common Myna 0 (0, 0, 1, 1, 0); Yellowhammer 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Goldfinch 1 (1, 1, 1, 0, 2); House Sparrow 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Silvereye 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Australian Magpie 5 (5, 16, 14, 0, 9); New Zealand Pipit 0 (0, 1, 1, 0, 0); Stewart Island Kiwi 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Morepork 1 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Spine-tailed Swift 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Bird sp. 0 (0, 3, 2, 3, 3).

Section of Coast		No. of Cards	No. of Birds	km covered
Auckland East	AE	18	21	54
Auckland West	AW	61	343	348
Bay of Plenty	BP	20	155	84
Canterbury North	CN	16	101	148
Canterbury South	CS	3	12	2
East Coast NI	EC	0	0	0
Fiordland	FD	0	0	0
North Coast SI	NC	2	38	6
Northland East	NE	9	77	70
Northland West	NW	4	61	38
Outlying Islands (Chatham)	OI	0	0	0
Otago	OT	4	13	2
Southland	SD	54	385	189
Taranaki	TA	11	88	66
Wairarapa	WA	0	0	0
Westland	WD	11	10	30
Wellington South	WS	2	19	3
Wellington West	WW	16	77	30
Totals		**231**	**1,388**	**1,069**

This scheme's continued success is due to the dedication of those hardy souls who brave all manner of weather to trudge the weary miles in search of decaying corpses. Please note any banded birds on the forms/cards and any obvious cause of death. We have a large supply of blank cards for those who prefer them.

LLOYD ESLER

A revised edition of "Beach Patroller's Guide to Stormcast Seabirds" by Stella Rowe and Adrian Plant can be downloaded from the Birds New Zealand website via the Publications section.

FAR NORTH

Far North members Isabella and Derry Godbert have been doing annual May beach patrols on Ninety Mile Beach for over 30 years. They recently noticed a curious phenomenon: the number of beach wrecked seabirds found during these counts has declined dramatically. Little Penguins made up the bulk of beach wreck numbers, a species that still nests in the dunes behind the beach, and whose tracks the Godberts still see heading into the dunes – along with cat tracks. Their observations pose some interesting questions: Why this decline? Are cats implicated? What is the impact of local pine plantations? A second phenomenon was also observed. Given that the numbers of beach wrecked birds found was declining, the beach patrol team decided to also count live birds and post the results on eBird. On 7th May 2016 the team counted 1,429 Welcome Swallows during a 56 km beach patrol. Yet the team only counted 281 there in May 2015.

LES FEASEY

NORTHLAND

Paul Schofield at Canterbury Museum has confirmed that the dead seabird found on Ruakaka Beach on 10th January was, indeed, a New Zealand Storm Petrel. The bird has since been donated to the Museum for taxidermy and will be put on display. This is the first New Zealand Storm Petrel held in a New Zealand museum. There are only three other specimens held in overseas museums; one in London and two in Paris.

During January, two Whimbrels visited Ngunguru Estuary where they were seen by Wade and Jan Doak. On 20th February, Logan Forrest organised a count on Poutu Peninsula dune lakes with 13 people from Birds New Zealand, Fish and Game, DOC, Northland Regional Council, and Forest and Bird. It is hoped this will become an annual event. With a total of 1,956 birds, Paradise Shelduck were the most populous species.

On 27th February, there were 54 New Zealand Dotterels on the shell-bank at Johnson Point Road, Waipu. A Pied Shag colony on Paparoa Creek (Kaipara Harbour) was also checked on 27th March with 17 adult birds present, some with nests. By the end of March, Royal Spoonbills were arriving in Northland with nine birds counted at Ranginui and 28 on the Waipu River (21st April). A dead young Long-tailed Cuckoo that had flown into a large glass window was brought to our meeting. Finally, on 19th April four members patrolled the beach between the Ruakaka River and Waipu River and found 19 Cook's Petrels.

JANET SNELL

AUCKLAND

Thirty-seven people took part in the annual ANZAC Day South Kaipara Lakes Survey and Dabchick Census, which was organised by Judy Bendall, Denise Poyner and Paul Asquith. Sightings included 20 New Zealand Dabchick, five Australasian Little Grebe, three unidentified grebes, two Australasian Bittern, 70 New Zealand Scaup (up from six in 2015), 123 Australasian Shoveler, and 270 Canada Geese (up from 122 in 2015).

An Australasian Little Grebe was recorded at Strakas Refuge on 13th February and another later in the month at the Eyres Point Headland. On 12th March, New Zealand Dabchick were present at Mangawhai Spit Lagoon (one), Gambles Dam, Te Hana (five) and Strakas Refuge (two), while others were seen at Waiwera Oxidation Ponds and Burma Road Reservoir. The usual wintering flock of New Zealand Dabchick at the Tidal Storage Basin, Mangere, has been building, with 20 seen there on 27th March. Brown Teal have a thriving population at South Omaha Wetland with 16 recorded on 16th April, and another one at Strakas Refuge on 12th March.

An unusual sighting was an Australian Coot at the Tidal Storage Basin in Mangere on 27th March. Uncommon tern sighted included a Black-Fronted Tern at Papakanui Spit (7th April) and another at the Mangere Ponds over Easter weekend. An Arctic Tern in breeding plumage was at Big Sand Island in the Kaipara Harbour (9th April).

Recent wader sightings included seven Whimbrel at Big Sand Island (8th April), a Far Eastern Curlew and two Sanderling at Papakanui Spit (9th April), four Curlew Sandpiper at Island Road, Mangere (27th March) and two Pacific Golden Plover at Big Sand Island (9th April). Two smudgy stilts and a juvenile Black Stilt were among c.400 Pied Stilts at Big Sand Island (9th April). And a Grey-tailed Tattler was at the Mangere Shell Islands, Ambury Park (21st April), as were 230 Royal Spoonbills.

A juvenile Brown Booby was seen at Muriwai gannet colony (4th May). Nine Cattle Egrets were at Wilson Road on the South Kaipara Peninsula (25th April), and two New Zealand Pipits were at Warkworth A&P Showground (1st May). Birds Auckland has been looking to attend some public events to raise its profile and attract new members. On 27th February we teamed up with Birds South Auckland and Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists Trust to attend the "Goodbye to the Godwits" event at Ambury Park, Mangere. Telescopes and membership information were provided for the public. A good number of families attended and we very much hope they left with some inspiration to foster an interest in birding.

IAN MCLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

Some interesting reports have been received, including the first singing thrush of the season which was heard at Pukekohe East by David Lawrie on 31st March, Long-tailed Cuckoos were heard at Pukekohe East on 27th and 29th February by Terry Hatch, and a late Shining Cuckoo was found dead there on April 9th. Sad news again for Weka at Kawakawa Bay, with very low numbers counted there in the latest round of census, but they are still hanging on and breeding. A wandering Kaka was heard on Pukekiwiriki Pa in Papakura at dawn on 29th April.

The autumn wader migration produced some nice rarities at Miranda – a Marsh Sandpiper and 4 Black-tailed Godwits, but a Great Knot found by Ian Southey at Miranda on 12th April did not seem to stay. At Karaka on 23rd April, Tony Habraken found the long-staying Broad-billed Sandpiper while New Zealand Shore Plover remained along with three Red-necked Stints, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, two Whimbrel and a Far Eastern Curlew. Checking a reef off Karaka on 1st May, Heather Raudon reported a leucistic Pied Stilt with a Little Egret. Since banding the Banded Dotterels at Port Waikato, one of them was found at Tapora on 8th April by Gwenda Pulham. During the Youth Camp at Miranda we found an Arctic Tern at Taramaire on 24th April.

IAN SOUTHEY

TARANAKI

In March David Cockeram reported on the launch of the Biodiversity Trust, of which the Taranaki Branch is now a member, and we have since been asked for sightings of Little Penguin and Reef Heron. A field trip to Inglewood turned up a pair of New Zealand Dabchick. Blue Duck have been seen away from their usual territory with one on the edge of the Egmont National Park. Seven Royal Spoonbill were seen at Mokau in mid-February. Later in the month, 39 Banded Dotterel and three New Zealand Dotterel were seen at Sandy Bay. Barry Hartley reported two adult and three juvenile New Zealand Dabchick on the Opunake oxiponds and counted 69 Banded Dotterel at Sandy Bay on 22nd March.

April's field trip produced 16 Little Pied Shag and four or five Black Shag at Cowley Lake and at Waitara River mouth we counted 11 Royal Spoonbills.

A White Heron is back at Waiongana, which I found in mid-April, possibly the same bird seen there over the last two years, and seven New Zealand Dotterel are back on the beach. Our best count of 66 Banded Dotterel was less than in previous years. The field trip had us back in Waitaanga where the birds were quiet, but North Island Robins were abundant. No Fernbirds were seen in the wetlands. The Taranaki sighting of the month – and probably the year – was Barry Hartley's of a pair of Crested Tern at Opunake beach along with seven White-fronted Terns. Unfortunately, they flew away before he had a chance to take a photo

PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

Approximately 70 Bar-tailed Godwits were seen on a field trip to the Pourere and Aramoana coastal areas south of Napier in March. We also saw New Zealand Dotterels at both locations, as well as White-fronted Terns and Red-billed Gulls. At least two Spotless Crake were heard during a survey at Lake Runanga in April, with repeated views of one bird. Ongoing monitoring of Australasian Bittern around Lake Whatumaa came up with a mortality signal which enabled the deceased bittern to be located, but cause of death is unknown. At least six bitterns were seen simultaneously at the Horseshoe wetland near the Ngarururo/Tutaekuri River mouth. The actual number present was probably more than that.

Work is underway on preparations for the AGM and Conference in Napier. A lot of people have signed up to attend and the presentations are oversubscribed, which signals a successful meeting.

IAN SMITH

WHANGANUI

Lynne Douglas reports that at least two Bar-tailed Godwits haven't migrated to Alaska this year. Ormond Torr saw a flock of 19 apparently migrating Royal Spoonbills alongside four resident individuals on the Whanganui estuary in mid-April. The flock flew off northwards, but the 'residents' remained. He also reported two banded Caspian Terns, A98 and C90, both seen on South Beach, but also recorded from the estuary.

Stitchbird/Hihi had a successful breeding season at Bushy Park. Twelve females built a minimum of 25 nests overall, 22 in nest boxes and at least three in natural cavities. Overall, 48 chicks fledged, up from 31 the year before, with most of them individually colour-banded. One bird, the last remaining female from the original translocation from Tiritiri Matangi Island in March 2013, has now fledged 23 chicks over three seasons, 11 in the past season alone – and she is still alive. Colin and Robyn Ogle visited Broadlands, a protected swamp forest in the Pohangina Valley. No Spotless Crakes were heard this time but Bellbirds were numerous and conspicuous.

PETER FROST

WAIRARAPA

We began our year with an AGM followed by Paul Shortis explaining the local input to the Red-billed Gull Survey. Then we headed for White Rock where we saw Red-billed Gulls and Caspian Terns with juveniles in tow. The drought conditions in the Wairarapa have had unusual effects. Boggy Pond has had higher than usual water levels which perhaps convinced the Royal Spoonbills that 'here there be nesting sites', while immediately next door in the Wairio wetlands all was dust and weeds.

Next we explored Pukaha-Mount Bruce on its E-SE side where we encountered 19 species, including North Island Kokako. Despite local trapping, however, we saw a plump wild kitten and heard its call being answered as it sped off. Our local projects are being pursued with interest. On 14th May a line of 5MBC sites will be established and used in support of the voluntary work being done at Carter's Reserve wetland.

ROBIN LIST

WELLINGTON

The Wellington and Wairarapa regions have been at the forefront of recording current and historical bird observations on eBird. Much of the credit for this increasing database of bird observations goes to the tireless efforts of Nikki McArthur. Included in the eBird submissions are significant numbers of historical records which provide valuable information on trends in bird populations. However, there is a general paucity of observations of wetland birds such as crakes, Banded Rail and Australasian Bittern in the Wellington region. Recently, Delia Small carried out a survey of wetland birds at Taupo Swamp for the QE II Trust, the area of flax/raupo next to State Highway 1 just north of Plimmerton. She found Spotless Crake and, subsequently, Duncan Watson discovered them in another area of this wetland. To date, the only eBird record of Banded Rail in the Wellington region is from March 2003, which was a single bird from the Taupo Swamp. Delia did not find any during her survey there.

There are two eBird records of Marsh Crake in the Wellington region and in both cases the bird's identity was confirmed from photographs. Interestingly, there are no eBird records of Banded Rail, Australasian Bittern or the two crake species from the Pencarrow Lakes wetlands. This appears to be good habitat for wetland birds, especially since it now has some predator control.

GEOFF DE LISLE

NELSON

A Bar-tailed Godwit seen on the Waimea Estuary has now been recorded in Mokpo, SW Korea, in 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2016 (27th March). Two flagged Black-fronted Terns were among a group of 56 Black-fronted Terns on the Waimea estuary and a transmittered Kea normally on Mount Owen turned up in the Flora, 50 km away. Thirteen observers who participated in February's Top of the South summer shorebird census counted 58,500 shorebirds of 16 species (62% migratory species; 38% endemic). Sightings included New Zealand Dotterel, Wrybill, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-necked Stint, Far Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Lesser Sand Plover and Grey Plover.

An unusual sighting of Rock Wren was reported on eBird, with two birds seen at Cobb Reservoir, well to the east of any other eBird record, but within a grid square in which they were reported in the last OSNZ Atlas (2007). A photograph of a dead Royal Spoonbill taken on Mt Arthur prompted reports from members of seabirds including Kerguelen Petrel, giant petrel and mollymawks found well inland in the direction of Golden Downs, 35 km from the sea. Presumably these were storm wrecks, but possibly indicating a cross-country flight path. Australian Wood Ducks have been seen at three different ponds in the Tasman area, including a group of four at the same pond where a family of six were previously photographed. Four Blue Ducks were photographed on the Cobb River and there were a couple of near-coastal reports from Golden Bay.

ROBIN TOY

MARLBOROUGH

Despite a few good rains, Marlborough has had another very dry year, and some birds have been seen displaying slightly different behaviours. The pair of New Zealand Dabchick seen on Taylor Dam in spring stayed to breed. Regular Lake Grassmere counts found an unusually large number of Black-Fronted Terns this autumn, and large numbers of Red-billed Gull and Wrybill. There have been regular sightings of Black-billed Gull on the Taylor River, Blenheim, and the Picton foreshore. The long-staying Black Kite has been seen regularly flying

over the Lower Waihopai throughout summer and autumn. Early in March a number of members assisted with the transfer of South Island Robin from Long Island to Kaipupu Point near Picton. These robins have since dispersed throughout the reserve and hopefully some will breed there.

Rose and Will Parsons recently received a well-deserved Marlborough Chamber of Commerce Business award. For many years they have had a personal commitment to the enhancement of the Wairau Lagoons and Lower Opawa. The Fernbirds that live within their wetland are the only ones known on the coast between Havelock and Oamaru, so if you take the track from Hardings Road to the new reserve by the Council wastewater ponds you may be fortunate enough to see or hear one.

HEATHER DAVIES

CANTERBURY

Kaikoura sightings this year include Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Grey-backed Storm Petrel and Sub-Antarctic Skua. There have also been significant numbers of White-capped Albatross, several shearwater species and Common Diving Petrel reported. A large Arctic Skua flock has been regularly gathering in the evening on the sea in front of the Whale Watch Office, with over 100 birds counted there on one occasion.

St. Anne's Lagoon has hosted up to 30 Black-fronted Dotterel, a very high count for Canterbury, and a Marsh Crake. Also notable was an Erect-crested Penguin seen in early March at Goughs Bay. White Herons are returning from their breeding grounds and starting to spread out across the region. Another white bird, a Little Egret, was found again at Lake Forsyth in early May, the first report this year. Unfortunately, no-one has spotted the Glossy Ibis that has visited Travis Wetlands each autumn and winter for many years.

At our first meeting this year we enjoyed a variety of short presentations ranging from the feeding patterns of Hutton's Shearwaters to photos of a group of Riflemen ganging up to attack a single Rifleman. After a short AGM, West Coast photographer Murray Cave shared some of his favourite birding spots and photos with us. Next month, Andy Roberts (Department of Conservation) talked about his work in Southland with species such as Kakapo and Campbell Island Teal, and some threatened species closer to home – Black Stilt and Orange-fronted Parakeet.

Waihora Ellesmere Trust's February Lake Ellesmere survey, now in its fourth year, was well attended. The total number of birds seen has dropped each year, but only time will tell whether this is a part of a concerning trend. April's trip to Peraki Bush to see Riflemen didn't run smoothly as we were unable to find the reserve, which may no longer exist! We were rewarded with views of Brown Creeper, Bellbird and other bush birds. So far this year, Bev's mid-week ramblers have visited Brooklands Lagoon, Halswell Quarry and The Groynes where it's nice to observe the behaviour of the more common species that we sometimes overlook.

ELEANOR GUNBY

Scope viewing.

OTAGO

Otago Branch contributed a birdwatching event for the inaugural Wild Dunedin Festival over ANZAC weekend which brought good publicity and gave those attending close views of a Kotuku. This was the first time everyone attending had used a spotting scope so they were pleasantly surprised by how much plumage detail could be seen. Nineteen species were seen over two hours, which was a very good tally.

An unusual pure white Spotted Shag with pink bill has been present in Otago Harbour since 6th February (see photo, page 19). It was first seen on Quarantine Island, roosting with a mixed group of circa 20 Stewart Island and Spotted Shags. It has since been seen regularly feeding with other shags, with the latest report from 1st May. This is a very interesting observation as only two other records of albino/leucistic Spotted Shags are known: one reported by Walter Buller in 1891 and the other in 2007, reported in *Notornis* by Andrew Crossland (2012, Vol. 59: 82-84). This is only the third such record in 127 years! Another rarity for Otago Harbour has been the Reef Heron present since February near Aramoana saltmarsh; this is the first record in the area for decades. A Cattle Egret was seen in April; this used to be a regular occurrence but in recent years they have been a rare sight. New Zealand Falcons seem to be more common this autumn with several reports of birds in the Dunedin area. And we have completed a full year of seasonal counts at Sinclair Wetlands so a report will be written up and data entered on eBird.

MARY THOMPSON

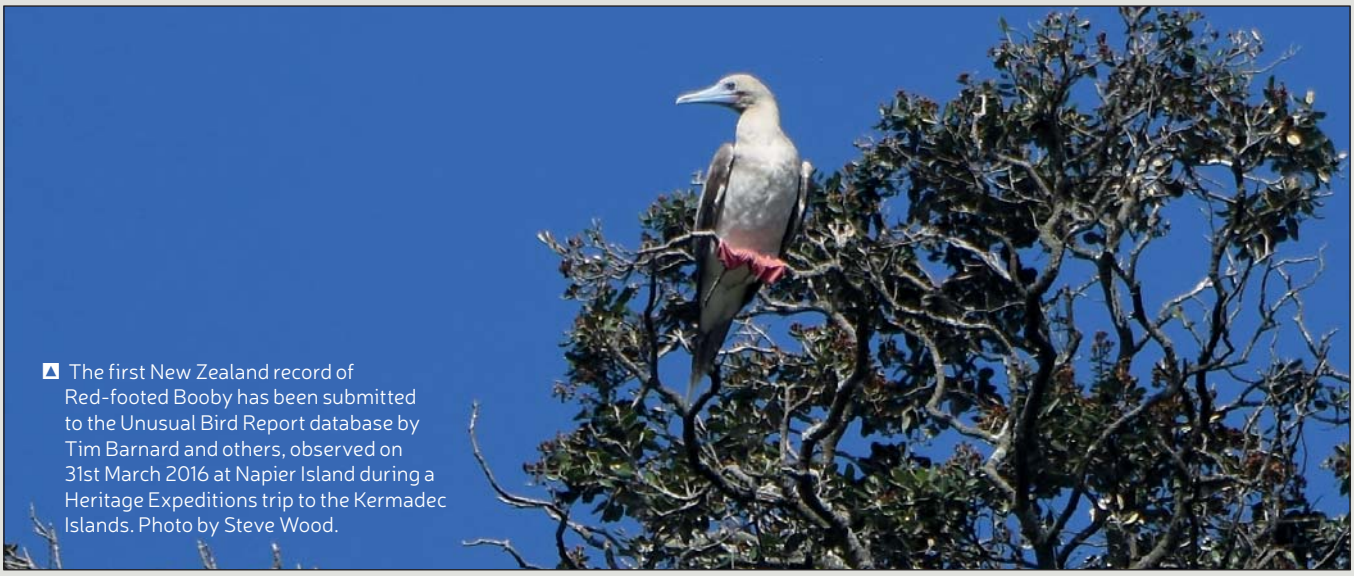
SOUTHLAND

In February, before our Summer Wader Count, Lianne and Marco canoed around Invercargill estuary and found a Cattle Egret, a White Heron and a Whimbrel. Unfortunately, these species were not seen during the official count, so canoeing may be a better way to get a more accurate count. We seem to have three small populations of Red-crowned Parakeets/Kakariki with four birds seen or heard at Otatara Scenic Reserve and Omaui Reserve. The Bluff Hill population's size is unknown, but several birds have been seen.

In March a sick juvenile Yellow-eyed Penguin was seen on a sandbank off Omaui Beach. Unfortunately, it washed up dead a few days later. In April there wad a report of a Royal Spoonbill at Rakatu Wetlands, a first for this site and well inland for this species. Also in April, local birders helping DOC with New Zealand Dotterel counts at Bandy Point/Cow Island saw a Grey-tailed Tattler. A visit to Awarua Bay the same day produced two Sanderling, a Wrybill and some Pacific Golden Plover. The following week a trio of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was seen there. Matt Jones reported three Cattle Egrets and a Reef Heron on Stewart Island and there were more reports of Cattle Egrets in the Thornbury area. Pleasure Bay Lagoon turned up at least three Little Black Shags, the second report of this species at this site.

PHIL RHODES

▲ Black-fronted Tern. Photo by Glenda Rees.



▲ The first New Zealand record of Red-footed Booby has been submitted to the Unusual Bird Report database by Tim Barnard and others, observed on 31st March 2016 at Napier Island during a Heritage Expeditions trip to the Kermadec Islands. Photo by Steve Wood.

▲ Pure white Spotted Shag (see Otago, page 18), Otago Harbour. Photo by Jurgen Goossens, Monarch Wildlife Cruises.

Chatham Albatross with chick, The Pyramid. Photo by Mark Fraser, New Zealand Birds Online.

Birds New Zealand

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