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# *Birds New Zealand*



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



# Birds New Zealand




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## COVER IMAGE

Front cover: **Emperor Penguin** with begging chick. Antarctica. Photo by Colin Miskelly, Adventure Network International/New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Ollie, Zef and Jay Brooks match their 'wingspans' with that of an albatross, Tairaroa Head Albatross Centre, September 2016. Photo by Scott Brooks/New Zealand Birds Online.

## New Zealand Birds Online tops 2 million

The New Zealand Birds Online website has reached another milestone. It has averaged just over 2,240 visits per day since February, with March being the busiest month ever (75,176 visits), and it received its two millionth visit on 21st April! It took 30 months to reach one million hits, and only 17 months for the second million, reflecting the steadily increasing use of the website. There are currently 476 species pages, written by 114 authors, and a total of 11,157 images have been contributed by 445 photographers. The 11,000th image was loaded by Scott Brooks in February. It was among more than 60 images on the website that he took during the Brooks family's 'Big Year', an epic adventure to see as many bird species in New Zealand as possible during 2016 (they saw 153 species).

COLIN MISKELLY, Project Manager





2017 Youth Camp participants and Birds New Zealand volunteers on board *El Tigre* at Tutukaka before setting out for the Poor Knights Islands. Photo by Les Feasey.



Vice-President Bruce McKinlay joined Dunedin Branch members at Tomahawk Lagoon to show members of the public local wetland birds during the Wild Dunedin Nature Festival. Photo by Mary Thompson.

# President's Report

I am in the process of preparing the annual report of the Council to present at the Annual General Meeting in June, details of which will be published in the next magazine. As I do so, I am amazed at the amount of work that has been done over the past year by the Council and the many volunteers that support our Society. The outcomes achieved are remarkable, all the more so because they flow from the paid contribution of 10 hours per week from our Executive Officer, Ingrid Hutzler, and our army of volunteers. It is the enthusiasm of all the volunteers and enjoyment of the important work we do that keeps me and the rest of the Council excited and motivated to contribute our time.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of our sponsors who are enabling us to undertake various projects, some of which we would not previously have been able to contemplate. Generous donations from the T-Gear Charitable Trust have enabled us to sponsor a large number of research projects, and a quick scan of the papers being presented at the scientific days during the AGM weekend illustrates the beneficial influence that this funding has had.

In recent years the generous sponsorship of Fruzio has also enabled us to undertake several projects in a much more comprehensive manner than we would have been able to achieve without additional funding. Their sponsorship has also supported the Youth Camp and several other measures aimed at increasing our membership.

The contribution made by the George Mason Trust, which funds the David Medway Scholarship, has also made a difference to major bird research. This scholarship has been given in the past on a bi-annual basis, but George is so delighted with the outcomes that he has now agreed that this should be done on an annual basis. During the past year there has also been a substantial donation from Kim Morrison, also to support the provision of the Youth Camp, which will be very useful as the Council strives to encourage young people into our Society.

Speaking of the Youth Camp, the third event in this current series has just been organised in the Bay of Islands and, according to participants and tutors alike, it was a roaring success. It is clear from the enthusiasm of the young people involved that these are likely to be the future leaders of our Society, hence the development of this programme can be considered a success.

Many of the young people involved in the Youth Camp have also been involved in the development of the Young Birders NZ

group, with which the Council is in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding. This will enable the Council to foster that organisation without directly running its affairs.

The development of this group is fulfilling one of the aims of the Society's strategic plan – developed a couple of years ago – to foster the involvement of young people. The group's main aim is to encourage young Kiwis all over the country to get involved in birdwatching. They have a website and produce a bi-monthly online magazine, "New Zealand Fledglings". If you know anyone who would like to receive their online magazine, they can subscribe to it at: [www.youngbirdersnz.wix.com/youngbirdersnz](http://www.youngbirdersnz.wix.com/youngbirdersnz)

I am also reminded that during the past year the Society lost one of its pillars, with the death of Brian Bell. A full obituary for Brian will be published in a future edition of *Notornis*, but on a personal level I grew into my birding activities hearing of the exploits of Brian and his Wildlife Service teams, and that inspired me to get more involved. To follow in his footsteps as the Society's National President is something which I would never have envisaged back then. It was a privilege for me, however, to have met and worked alongside him during the latter part of his life.

*Notornis* editor Leigh Bull has advised the Council that she has now settled into her role. She also advised, however, that the supply of papers barely fills each edition of *Notornis*. The Council is in the process of developing guidelines for prizes for the best student paper presented for publication each year, and another one for first time authors. This latter prize is to encourage people to write-up their projects or research in order to share the findings. We understand that the writing process can be daunting, but Leigh will offer all the help that she can and there are a number of people who are willing to act as mentors. After all, it is your journal and the contents can only reflect what is submitted.

By the time you read this, the AGM and conference weekend in Te Anau will have been held. The early indications are that, despite the reservations of some people about the distance involved in getting to Te Anau, the registrations are as high as recent events. The programme that Neil Robertson has developed will ensure an interesting weekend, no matter what the weather gods may throw at us. I hope to have met many of you at the conference, but in the meantime enjoy your birding.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

## Call for applications for the Birds New Zealand Research Fund

The Birds New Zealand Research Fund is a national fund administered by our Executive Officer on behalf of T/GEAR Trust, 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 for a 12 month period only. Details are available on [www.osnz.org.nz/Birds-NZ-Research-Fund](http://www.osnz.org.nz/Birds-NZ-Research-Fund) Please forward your completed application to our Executive Officer via [eo@osnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@osnz.org.nz) by 1 August 2017.

## Council Nominations 2017

Mel Galbraith and Keith Woodley have been re-nominated for another three year term as Council members. Denise Fastier has been nominated as the Council Secretary. As no other nominations were received by 28th February 2017 there will be no election and it can be assumed that these three will be appointed to Council for a three-year term.

Denise is a Senior Ranger, Biodiversity at DOC Hawke's Bay, with over 20 years' experience working in this field, including two years as Technical Support Officer for the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (now Zealandia), two years as island ranger on the Chatham Islands, and over ten years as a contractor. During this time she has participated in 28 translocations of a variety of bird species, and monitoring and pest control work.

## Banding database update

Marking of individual animals in a population is one of the most essential research tools for biologists, and acknowledging the value of bird banding for conservation, management and research highlights the need for careful management of bird banding data. The Banding Office is now pursuing the option of adopting and adapting a fit-for-purpose bird banding database and online interface from the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING), based at the Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town. Michael Brooks, SAFRING database developer, travelled to New Zealand in May to set up a Proof of Concept to enable DOC to test the functionality against the needs of the NZ National Bird Banding Scheme.

The new online interface will facilitate the use of banding data and contribution to bird conservation objectives by the banding and birding community. Registered banders will be able to upload their banding schedules and recovery spreadsheets directly, and members of the public will be able to report sightings of banded birds through the same interface, receiving immediate feedback. Reports of banding and recovery data per species, region or project will be available subject to login privileges and data sharing agreements or moratoria.

The aim is to have a central repository of all banding and recovery data that can be easily accessed and queried. Of course, this system will only work if the database holds all the relevant records and performs according to the expectations of the users.

The Banding Office will, therefore, be showcasing the functionality of the Proof of Concept and requesting input from stakeholders as to their anticipated use and requirements of the system to incorporate these into the final product. Banders need to be aware that there will be some changes to the current system in order to standardise the way that data is being collected and submitted. Level 3 banders will be trained in the use of the system and data upload, and they will be required to train Level 2 and Level 1 banders under their supervision.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW

## Seeking submissions to *Notornis*

*Notornis* is an important means for information on New Zealand birds to be published and the Society's longest running project, with a proud history dating back to 1943. There have been peaks and lows in its production over the years, largely due to the rate of submissions, and the effectiveness of the editor. We have been fortunate to have had very efficient editors over the past decade, but we are currently struggling to get enough copy to fill issues. If you have a near-complete manuscript that you haven't quite got around to submitting, please brush the dust off and send it to *Notornis* editor Leigh Bull, promptly.

Birds New Zealand Council is offering two new awards to encourage members across the threshold of getting their work published for the first time:

## Birds New Zealand Student Publication Award

This is a new annual award of \$500 for the best *Notornis* publication where a student or recent graduate is the sole or lead author. Applicants must be current members of Birds New Zealand, and must state when submitting their manuscripts that they wish to apply for the award, and that they are currently enrolled in a New Zealand education institute or have graduated in the last three years. There is no restriction on the number of submissions that a student may make in the course of their studies, and the award is open to students of all ages.

## Birds New Zealand New Author Award

This is a new annual award of \$300 for the best *Notornis* publication where the sole or lead author has not previously published in *Notornis* or any other scientific journal. Applicants must be current members of Birds New Zealand, and must state when submitting their manuscripts that they are a first-time author and wish to apply for the award. The award can be applied for once only. Students are able to apply for both awards (if eligible), but one award only will be granted to any one manuscript.

Birds New Zealand also offers an annual award for the best student presentation at the annual conference. I look forward to reading your research in a future edition of *Notornis*!

DAVID LAWRIE, President

## Welcome to new members

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members of Birds New Zealand: Edin Whitehead (Bay Of Plenty); K Richards (Marlborough); Jen Waite (Nelson); Yasmin Holden (Otago); Denise Martini (Otago); Gabriel Field (Otago); Robyn Bracey (Wairarapa); Andrea Wilson (Wellington); Mariana Bulgarella (Wellington); Victor Anton (Wellington); Romnald A. Javitch (Canada); Kerry Lukies (Auckland); Phillip Sprules (Auckland); Nancy Higgins (Canterbury); James Mills (Canterbury); Peter Sharpe (Far North); Jean Sharpe (Far North); Heather Wallace (Nelson); Ellen Rykers (Otago); Jan Stephen (Wairarapa); Helen Thomas (Wairarapa); and Francois Flanagan (Southland).

## Donations

We thank the following members for their generous donations to Birds New Zealand: Ewan Fordyce; Bill Campbell; Lance Pickett; Andrew Turvey; Colin Miskelly; Gordon Nicholson.



▲ Mudflats have been converted into dry land by “reclamation” along parts of the Yellow Sea coast. Photo by Nick Murray.

## 11<sup>th</sup> annual Garden Bird Survey

The 2017 annual Garden Bird Survey will be the eleventh, and Birds New Zealand members are again being asked to participate. It is open to anyone who can identify the bird species in their garden. Taking part is easy. Just choose a day between 24th June and 2nd July to spend an hour watching birds in your garden. For each species, record the highest number you see or hear at one time. By taking part in the survey you will help build up a picture of how native and introduced birds are faring in our gardens over time and give an indication of which species may be in decline, helping guide future conservation efforts. The survey is led by Landcare Research in association with Birds New Zealand. Results of previous surveys are also posted on the survey website. Survey instructions, a bird identification guide, field tally sheet, an online data-entry form, and a printable survey form are available here: <http://gardenbirdsresearch.co.nz>

## Mild winter means fewer garden birds counted in 2016

Mild winter weather meant fewer birds of several species were counted in 2016 than in previous surveys. Silvereye, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, and Greenfinch numbers were the lowest on record, and House Sparrow the third lowest. It is likely that mild weather meant more food was available in the surrounding countryside, so birds did not need to come into gardens in search of food as much as in colder winters. The ten most numerous species in 2016 were similar to those in 2015, except that Goldfinch dropped out and Song Thrush returned to the ‘Top Ten’, ahead of Chaffinch and Greenfinch. House Sparrow was again the most numerous species, and Silvereye the second. House Sparrow has been the most numerous species counted in each of the ten years, and Silvereye the second-most numerous. Blackbird and Starling have competed for 3rd and 4th place over the years, Myna and Tui for 5th and 6th, and NZ Fantail has usually been 7th. Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, and Greenfinch have competed annually for the last three places in the ‘Top Ten’: <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/science/plants-animals-fungi/animals/birds/garden-bird-surveys/celebrating-ten-years/top-10-birds>

ERIC SPURR

## Call for applications: Student Support 2017 Australasian Ornithological Conference

Birds New Zealand is offering financial support to students planning to present at the Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC) in Geelong (Australia), 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> November 2017, the biennial conference hosted jointly between Birds Australia and Birds New Zealand. Birds New Zealand is offering two \$1,000 travel grants to assist two postgraduate research students from New Zealand present their findings at the conference.

Applicants need to be Birds New Zealand members. In return, the successful applicants will be expected to write a short report on their conference experience for publication in Birds New Zealand magazine or to submit an article to the Society’s journal, *Notornis*. Applications close 1 August 2017. All details and an application form are available at: [www.osnz.org.nz/AOC-Student-Support](http://www.osnz.org.nz/AOC-Student-Support). For more information on the AOC see: <https://aoconference.wordpress.com/>

## NZ bird data highlights vital importance of Yellow Sea for migrant shorebirds

Populations of iconic wading birds that spend most of the year in New Zealand and Australia have been declining for decades, despite conservation efforts. A new study has revealed a major hurdle far from the birds’ Australasian habitat – a problem that can’t be solved through science alone. Data collected by volunteers around New Zealand and Australia has been an integral part of the study. Birds New Zealand President David Lawrie says, “The work that led to this result started over 40 years ago, when people had the vision and anticipated the need to count birds across New Zealand and Australia. It’s only that prescience that allowed us to answer this really important question.” Mr Lawrie personally has been contributing counts to this data set since 1964. “Birds New Zealand is delighted that the hard won data from years of slogging around estuaries counting birds has been able to contribute to this important study. The Citizen Scientists who have been undertaking the counts have seen migratory shorebird populations plummeting in New Zealand over many years,” he says.

The study’s lead author, Dr Colin Studds, Assistant Professor at University of Maryland, USA, says that despite the work being completed in Australasia, the activity affecting their populations is occurring thousands of kilometres away in China and Korea.

The study, published in *Nature Communications*, shows that a critical factor in the decline is how dependent the birds are on mudflats in the Yellow Sea, between China and Korea, during migration. Many shorebird species follow a migratory path from their non-breeding grounds in New Zealand and Australia to breeding sites in the Arctic, via rest stops in the Yellow Sea – a migration corridor known as the East-Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF). “These shorebirds spend several weeks refueling before they continue their migration,” says Dr Studds. Scientists have long believed that degradation in the quality of stopover sites could be related to population declines, but, as Dr Studds puts it: “There was no smoking gun.” Now, the new study provides one.

Dr Studds analysed citizen science data collected between 1993 and 2012 on 10 key species to find out see if a relationship emerged between reliance on the Yellow Sea as a migration stopover and rate of population decline. What he found was dramatic. The more a species relied on the Yellow Sea mudflats, the faster it was declining. Even though the birds only spend 1-2 months of the year at the mudflats, it was the most important factor in determining the population trend. The birds clearly need protection, but implementing conservation policy can prove difficult, says Dr Richard Fuller of the University of Queensland: “There are multilateral agreements in place on paper – most notably the EAAF Partnership of 36 governments and other organisations – but the pace of change on the ground is frustratingly slow. If we’re going to halt these declines and hopefully someday reverse them, it will take commitment from all the countries involved.”

“Members of Birds New Zealand and Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists’ Trust have been supporting survey work in China, especially at important migratory stopover sites,” says Mr Lawrie. “This latest study adds further impetus to both us and our Chinese colleagues. A recent announcement by the Chinese Government listing 14 sites for detailed investigation for World Heritage Status is an indication of the commitment of the Chinese Government to take action to safeguard these stopover sites so that the miracle of migration can continue for generations to come.”





■ Juvenile Little Spotted Kiwi. Photo by Andrew Digby.



■ The first New Zealand record of Cox's Sandpiper (Lake Ellesmere, 25/11) has been accepted by the RAC. Photo by Mike Ashbee.

## Severe inbreeding threatens Long Island's Little Spotted Kiwi

A population of rare Little Spotted Kiwi that was thought to be thriving on a Marlborough island sanctuary is seriously threatened by the effects of inbreeding, suggests new research led by Dr Helen Taylor of the University of Otago, published in the *Molecular Ecology* (Vol 26, Issue 3, Feb 2017). Dr Taylor and colleagues analysed the genetic diversity and reproductive success of two Little Spotted Kiwi populations; one on Long Island in Marlborough that was founded with two birds, and one at the Zealandia Ecosanctuary in Wellington founded with 40 individuals.

The researchers linked Little Spotted Kiwi population growth on Long Island to the ongoing breeding success of two Little Spotted Kiwi birds that were moved to the island in the 1980s; nearly two-thirds of the 50-strong population was found to be direct offspring of this founding pair. Dr Taylor says that it would normally be expected that the majority of a Little Spotted Kiwi population founded at that time would mainly be composed of second, third, and fourth generation offspring. "The overabundance of first-generation birds suggests that the damaging genetic effects of inbreeding are strongly affecting hatching, survival and possibly reproduction of the subsequent generations," she says.

The researchers found poor hatching success in the Long Island population compared to the Zealandia Ecosanctuary population, despite the birds making greater efforts to reproduce. These efforts included more than one egg per clutch and sometimes incubating two clutches per season. Autopsies of abandoned, unhatched eggs found that many showed no detectable development of an embryo. Embryos that were found in failed eggs were always malformed or wrongly positioned for hatching. Dr Taylor says the study highlights the pitfalls of using population growth alone as an indicator of the health of a bird species' population. "This Little Spotted Kiwi population is struggling to grow past the first generation. Once the original pair of kiwi die or become too old to breed, the population will likely go into decline".

The findings have implications for other populations of threatened species founded with a small number of individuals, especially in long-lived species. "Our research highlights the importance of collecting many kinds of data to measure population viability and conservation success - not just population growth. Just because a population appears to be growing does mean it is secure in the long term. We could never have worked out what was happening in the Little Spotted Kiwi on Long Island without genetic data," she says.

Little Spotted Kiwi were once widespread but had almost disappeared by 1900. Previous work by Dr Kristina Ramstad at Victoria University of Wellington showed that Little Spotted Kiwi have extremely low genetic variation, with all of the 1,700 existing birds being descended from just five birds. The 10 existing populations of Little Spotted Kiwi are currently managed by DOC as one large metapopulation, with birds being moved between populations to minimise loss of genetic diversity.

## Unusual Bird Reports

The Unusual Bird Report (UBR) online reporting system is working well, and is the main source of UBRs received. A total of 60 UBRs was received in 2016, and assessed between March 2016 and February 2017. Forty-two (70%) of these UBRs were accepted by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC). Three new species were added to the New Zealand list: Herald Petrel, Red-footed Booby and Laughing Gull.

The online UBR database was launched at the 2016 Birds New Zealand Conference in Napier (<http://rare.birds.org.nz/>) and provides almost immediate feedback on UBR submissions and decisions. It is a searchable database of all submissions and decisions since the 1960s and includes links to publications referring to individual UBRs, and to New Zealand Birds Online species accounts. A paper reporting on 139 RAC decisions from 2015-16 has been submitted for publication in *Notornis*.

COLIN MISKELLY, RAC Convenor

## eBird data support conservation

Every observation you submit to eBird is valuable, and with 400 million records gathered so far, eBird has grown into a premier information source on bird occurrence and abundance worldwide. Importantly, eBird data are curated, managed, and made freely available for education, research, and conservation use, and tens of thousands of people download eBird data each year. A new study in *Biological Conservation* highlights how eBird data are being used in a broad array of conservation applications worldwide.

Ensuring that conservation decisions are informed by the best available data is a fundamental challenge in the face of rapid global environmental change, say the study's authors. "Too often, new science is not easily or quickly translated into conservation action. Traditional approaches to data collection and science delivery may be both inefficient and insufficient, as conservation practitioners need access to salient, credible, and legitimate data to take action. Open access data could serve as a tool to help bridge the gap between science and action, by providing conservation practitioners with access to relevant data in near real time. Broad-scale citizen science data represent a fast growing resource for open access databases, providing relevant and appropriately scaled data on organisms, much in the way autonomous sensors do so on the environment. Several such datasets are now broadly available, yet documentation of their application to conservation is rare."

The authors use eBird as an example of how citizen science data can be used to achieve tangible conservation science and action at local, regional, and global scales. "Our examination illustrates how these data can be strategically applied to improve our understanding of spatial and temporal distributions of birds, the impacts of anthropogenic change on ecological systems, and creative conservation solutions to complex problems." It also makes clear that the effort each person puts into collecting and loading data on bird sightings into eBird is truly making a difference. Find out more here: <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand/>



▣ Twelve 'Young Birders' took part in the 2017 Youth Camp in the Bay of Islands, 17th-21st April. Photo by Les Feasey.



▣ Youth Camp participants and volunteers on Ninety Mile Beach where they carried out a beach patrol. Photo supplied by Les Feasey.

## Birds New Zealand Youth Camp 2017

During the April school holidays I was lucky enough to attend my third annual Birds New Zealand Youth Camp, this time in the Bay of Islands. On Day One, I met the other 11 participants at Auckland airport and we were driven to Russell. After stopping at Waipu Estuary to find a New Zealand Fairy Tern resting on the mudflats, we arrived in Russell for dinner and a briefing on Urupukapuka Island and "Project Island Song".

On Day Two we took the ferry to Urupukapuka where we split into four groups to practise five minute bird counts. I found myself becoming more confident with identifying the calls the more I counted, and especially enjoyed seeing a Whitehead and two North Island Saddlebacks. After catching the afternoon ferry back we explored the holiday camp ground and nearby mangrove. That evening we carried out a North Island Brown Kiwi survey. The four teams each went to a site nearby and sat for an hour, recording all kiwi calls heard, including the sex of the bird, the time it called, and the compass bearing of the call.

On Day Three we did some breakfast-time birding, finding Brown Teal and Fernbird. Then we were driven to Ninety Mile Beach for a beach patrol. En route we stopped to watch a Reef Heron and an Australasian Grebe. At the beach we found the wrecked bodies of a Little Penguin, a Fluttering Shearwater, and a skua. This was my first beach patrol and I really enjoyed it. Next we stopped at Awanui Wharf to view nearly 500 Royal Spoonbills and five Cattle Egrets. After another delicious dinner, and a briefing on seabird identification, we headed out to look for Barn Owls. This was my favourite bird of the trip, and I was really excited to get good views of it.

The main activity on Day Four was a pelagic trip out to the Poor Knights Islands. On the way out, we saw Australasian Gannets, Fluttering Shearwaters and Common Diving Petrels, but it was when we stopped the boat and poured some fish oil on the water that the real excitement began. Two Campbell Mollymawks landed near the boat, along with Flesh-footed Shearwaters. Black Petrels, Grey-faced Petrels and Fairy Prions, as Buller's Shearwaters flew by. Then, just before the return journey, we saw some New Zealand Storm Petrels. As the motor started again, I assumed we'd seen everything we were going to see, but passing The Sugarloaf we saw Grey Ternlets - 26 of them!

Before long, it was Day Five, last day of the camp. We all got up early to see a Banded Rail at the nearby mangrove. Then we practised five-minute bird counts at four stations around the camp ground before we were due to leave. On the way back to Auckland we stopped to see an Australasian Bittern on Marsden Point Road, where I had a quick glimpse of the bird's head among the reeds and saw first-hand how well camouflaged they are. After reaching Auckland airport on time we went our separate ways. All of the Youth Camps that I've attended have been very different, but they have all been really amazing experiences, and I've enjoyed each one. So, thank you - everyone - for organizing another brilliant Youth Camp!

ELEANOR GUNBY is editor of the Canterbury newsletter, "Wrybill".

## OSNZ National Wader Censuses

A total of 124,744 waders of 20 species were counted during the June - July 2016 wader census, up from 118,337 in 2015. There was good national coverage other than the key Far North sites of Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu, which were not counted. Parengarenga was not counted in 2015 either. Numbers of Red Knot were up again from 2015 with 1,763 counted and Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up from 7,781 in 2015 to 9,997 in 2016. South Island Pied Oystercatchers numbers held steady with 77,951. Wrybill numbers were up from 4,112 to 4,675. Rarities included a Marsh Sandpiper, a Hudsonian Godwit, a Lesser Sand Plover, and a New Zealand Shore Plover (Manukau Harbour).

A total of 128,236 waders of 26 species were counted in the November - December 2016 wader census, down from 137,020 in 2015. National coverage was again very good, although only a partial count was conducted at the key site of Parengarenga. The Red Knot count was the lowest since 2009, with 27,338. The Bar-tailed Godwit count was down 2,000 from 2015 to 72,702, the lowest count since 2006, when some important areas were not counted. This was one of the lowest counts on record, if not the lowest. Ruddy Turnstone numbers were up considerably from 992 in 2015 to 1,712 in 2016. The increases were in the Kaipara and Manukau Harbours and Farewell Spit. The Far North count of 267 was well up on the 2015 count of 2, when there was poor coverage. Uncommon waders included a Great Knot, two Pectoral Sandpipers, a Grey-tailed Tattler, a Wandering Tattler, a Greater Sand Plover and a Grey Plover.

Tables of counts showing numbers of each species recorded and the sites with the largest counts are available online at:

[www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)

ADRIAN RIEGEN



▣ Red-necked Stint, one of the Arctic migrant waders recorded in the 2016 National Wader Census. Photo by Mike Ashbee.





❑ Black-billed Gull with chick. Photo by Rebecca Bowater/New Zealand Birds Online.

## Black-billed Gull Census 2016-17

The national Black-billed Gull survey has been completed and the preliminary results summarised in Table 1. Survey flights were carried out in Southland on 20th October 2016 and in Otago on 21st October 2016. These dates were chosen based on ground visits done in early October, searching for colonies and checking on the breeding status of the birds. The aim was to carry out the survey when the breeding birds at the majority of colonies were between mid-incubation and hatching because that is when most breeding birds are sitting on nests. Using the aerial photographs that were taken, accessible colonies that were estimated to have less than 1,000 breeding pairs were counted on the ground in order to compare to the aerial photograph counts (22nd - 24th October 2016). Marlborough, Tasman, and the West Coast were done on 18th and 19th November 2016, and all but one (inaccessible) colony was counted on the ground following the flights.

The North Island was surveyed by local observers on the ground. Hawke's Bay Regional Council funded flights for three rivers in the region on 14th December 2016, but no colonies were located. Wildlife Management International Ltd (WMIL) sponsored a flight along the East Coast from Cape Palliser to Opotiki on 20th December 2016, but no colonies were located. One colony was found on the Ruamahanga River during a river survey funded by the Greater Wellington Regional Council on 6th January 2017. The Canterbury survey was funded by Environment Canterbury (Ecan), and carried out by WMIL (7th - 8th November 2016). Estimates in Table 1 for Canterbury are based on initial reported results from that survey and additional information provided by independent observers.

All aerial photographs will be counted by two observers and analyses will compare these counts to those done on the ground. Calculations will allow for the determination of an up-to-date national breeding population estimate by also including 2014/15 and 2015/16 survey results. Comparisons to the 1995-97 Census will then be done to determine changes in the national population. The genetic diversity of these gulls will be analysed in relation to the distribution of colonies across the country.

Region	Number of colonies	Estimated number of breeding pairs
Southland	40	33,000
Otago	6	3,000
Marlborough	1	400
Tasman	2	350
West Coast	6	1,500
Canterbury	27	12,500
North Island	13	900
<b>Estimated Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>51,650</b>

Thanks for the generous support for the flights provided by Fruzio via Birds New Zealand, as well as to Ecan and Hawke's Bay Regional. The flights would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and commitment of Heather Davies. Thanks also to all the volunteers that helped, especially Richard Schofield.

CLAUDIA MISCHLER



❑ Black-fronted Tern at the nest, Clutha River. Photo by Craig McKenzie/New Zealand Birds Online.

## Black-fronted Tern breeding survey

A new survey of Black-fronted Tern breeding colonies published in *Notornis* (Vol 64, Part 1, March 2017) recorded 2,512 individual birds at breeding sites during the 2014-2015 season across the species' entire breeding range. Researchers Ann-Kathrin Schlesselmann and Jamie Cooper of University of Otago and Richard Maloney of the Department of Conservation located 44 Black-fronted Tern breeding colonies with nest scrapes, eggs, and/or chicks present on the 28 rivers that they searched in the South Island during the study period, 9th October 2014 to 7th January 2015, as part of a genetic study they are conducting on this endangered species.

Black-fronted Terns have been reported from 61 rivers in the South Island in the most recent counts during the period 1988 to 2008, with major populations (> 200 birds) on only 13 rivers. The rivers surveyed in the 2014-15 study period included the same 13 rivers and others. Breeding colonies were recorded throughout the South Island from 46°S-41°S, and from 26-610 metres above sea level.

Colony size varied from a single breeding pair up to 300 pairs, with the mean size being 61 pairs per colony. The largest colonies were found in the Upper Ohau (600 individuals), Wairau (200), lower Rangitata (150), Clutha (100), Tekapo (100) and lower Waitaki (100).



❑ Bellbird photo by Craig McKenzie/New Zealand Birds Online.

## Identifying Bellbird and Tui by call

If you can see them, Bellbird (Korimako) and Tui are super easy to tell apart. Sometimes you can't see a bird, you can only hear it, so it is helpful if you can identify them by their respective calls. Both birds can sound quite similar, but don't worry, if you know what to listen for, then with a little practise you should be able to tell their calls apart. Start familiarising yourself with their calls by listening to recordings of them on the New Zealand Birds Online website ([www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz)), which has the songs and calls of almost all New Zealand species. Both Bellbird and Tui have fairly similar melodic and warbling calls, but the Tui adds some extra bits, including coughs, clicks, whirrs and grunts. Bellbirds do not, so the easiest way to tell their calls apart is to keep listening, and eventually a Tui will give itself away by adding one of these extra bits to its call. If the bird you can hear is a Bellbird it will keep singing its clear melodic song without adding any of these extra bits. With luck, you'll be able to track the calling bird and see it to confirm its identity.

ELEANOR GUNBY, from "New Zealand Fledglings"  
Subscribe at: [www.youngbirdersnz.wix.com/youngbirdersnz](http://www.youngbirdersnz.wix.com/youngbirdersnz)





▲ The Snares Islands have the southern-most breeding population of the endemic Buller's Albatross. Photo by Mark Fraser/New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Adélie Penguins on Antarctic sea-ice. Photo by Rebecca Bowater/New Zealand Birds Online.

## Birding the Southern Ocean to the Ross Sea

Article By Ian Armitage

An ambition to travel the Ross Sea in Antarctica to visit the restored huts of the British explorers, Captain Robert Falcon Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton, in the icy world where these heroic figures once walked, and to observe at close range the various bird species that can usually only be seen in the southern polar environment, were my reasons for joining an adventure tourism expedition in early 2016. Arranged by Heritage Expeditions, and sailing in their comfortable ice-strengthened ship *Spirit of Enderby*, the expedition was named "In the Wake of Scott and Shackleton - south to the Antarctic".

The Ross Sea region has some of the most majestic and awe-inspiring scenery in the world. Few people can visit this extraordinary region, with opportunities for non-scientific personnel limited in summer to a few adventure tourism expeditions.

Our first stop after leaving Bluff was at the Snares Islands where visits along the coastline are allowed, but no landings. Moving inshore in zodiac boats one can enjoy the pristine environment of this undisturbed island group. Snares Crested Penguins were an immediate attraction. Groups of penguins wandered out of the forest and onto rocks above the sea, an amazing sight in bright sunshine. Little black Snares Islands Tomtits often appeared on rocks and in shrubs, and Brown Skuas were always prowling to scavenge unguarded penguin chicks.

Numerous Buller's Albatross that nest on Snares Islands, also Royal Albatross and Cape Petrels, followed as we cruised southwards to Enderby Island in the Auckland Islands. Several expedition participants met to form a bird group, to swap notes on

the wildlife seen and to keep a daily record of observations; it met in the library most evenings for the rest of the voyage and led to a comprehensive record of our observations, 65 bird species in all. My own records were later entered into *eBird*, 11 species in Antarctica, 9 on the High Seas, and 15 on Subantarctic islands.

In fine weather we enjoyed tramping around the volcanic plateau landscape of Enderby Island. The nests of Southern Royal Albatross were conspicuous in the scrubby vegetation dominating the western part of the island. Cheeky little Auckland Islands Pipits ran along the track, or flew low over the scrub. An Auckland Islands Subantarctic Snipe darted its way through the low vegetation. Flying near the cliffs were several pairs of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross that periodically landed to feed fluffy chicks on the rock shelves below. Brown Skuas, Antarctic Terns and Northern Giant Petrels were nearby. Auckland Islands Shags breed on cliff edges and are common at Enderby Island.

On the grassy slopes of East Bay several Yellow-eyed Penguins were walking across the open ground towards the nearby Rata forest. Red-crowned Parakeets and Bellbirds are numerous, also Auckland Island Tomtits, some flying down to the shoreline to feed. Near the south coast were two flightless Auckland Islands Teal. A short visit into Carnley Harbour was notable for the shrieking winds, wind-blown spray and the dramatic cliffs near the harbour entrance, and also for the Sooty Shearwaters that wheeled around the ship in the thousands.

From Carnley Harbour the ship headed for Cape Adare, 1,000 nautical miles southwards, and the most north-western point of the Ross Sea. Shipboard life was always interesting and we enjoyed



▲ Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Auckland Islands. Tony Whitehead/New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Snow Petrel. Photo by Tony Whitehead/New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Antarctic Fulmar breeds at the Balleny Islands in the Ross Dependency, near Antarctica. Photo by Michael Szabo.

numerous excellent lectures, including on birds and other wildlife. My binoculars were always with me when on deck; Cape Petrels, Royal Albatrosses and White-chinned Petrels were common, and often flying about so effortlessly too were Black-browed/Campbell, Grey-headed and Light-mantled Sooty albatrosses, White-headed and giant petrels, and tiny White-bellied Storm Petrels that seemed to dance their way across the waves.

It was a bleak morning with a grey cold sea when the ship crossed the Antarctic Circle and also passed the first icebergs of the voyage. Having also crossed the Antarctic Convergence, that major point in the Southern Ocean where Antarctic water meets cool temperate water and is such a major influence on the weather in the Southern Hemisphere, the air and sea temperatures dropped sharply. No longer were the large albatrosses seen, but Southern Giant Petrels, Cape Petrels and Antarctic Skuas were now the dominant large birds. The small fast moving Antarctic Prion was seen regularly, darting amongst the waves usually close to the sea surface. Antarctic Skuas were not only common but were also constant companions of the ship, some flying so close they were only an arms-length away!

*Spirit of Enderby* was in calm water among pack ice and icebergs as we approached Cape Adare, at the northern-most point of the Ross Sea. Snow fell often, making the ship white, and it was in this icy world that beautiful white Snow Petrels and nimble little Wilson's Storm Petrels appeared. Never straying far from pack ice, Snow Petrels would often make a close 'fly-past' of the ship, passing quickly a few metres away. The ship slowly nudged ice floes to the side as it traced its way through narrow channels of clear water. Giant petrels are the largest flying bird in this silent frozen world and being dark coloured were easily seen against the stark white of the pack ice.

The high, snow covered Cape Adare forms the backdrop to Ridley Beach where Carsten Borchgrevink's Hut, built in 1899

and the site of initial exploration of the continent, is located. A large breeding colony of Adélie Penguins is on Ridley Beach. An adventurous zodiac cruise amongst ice floes allowed us to get up close to numerous Adélie Penguins, both adults and young birds. Many icebergs were spectacularly sculptured, some showing large white ice caves and long icicles, and others were deep blue in colour - very beautiful indeed. Elegant and nimble Snow Petrels flew close to the ship often, also giant petrels, and the bold and aggressive Antarctic Skuas were always nearby.

What a memorable experience it was being welcomed onto a frozen beach at Cape Royds, the westernmost point of Ross Island, by several Adélie Penguins and Crabeater Seals, then tramping across the volcanic landscape to Shackleton's Hut built in 1908 (from the Nimrod expedition). It was an immense privilege to visit Sir Ernest Shackleton's Hut, and equally importantly, to watch several thousand fledgling Adélie Penguins nearby that were moulting brown fluffy down and revealing their first year plumage. Although one should not get closer to wildlife than five metres, how do you stop these amusing and enchanting penguins from walking close to your feet? Cape Royds is the southern-most nesting site of Adélie Penguins in Antarctica, and in the world.

South of Cape Royds is Cape Evans, the location of the historic Scott Hut (from the Terra Nova Expedition), the largest, most comfortable and best equipped of the buildings of the heroic era of Antarctic exploration. It was constructed in 1910/11 as the site of the British Antarctic Expedition led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott. Restoration of Scott's Hut is superb, appearing as it would have been over 100 years ago, and is a tribute to the Antarctic Heritage Trust. What a thrill and a privilege to be able to walk inside. Furniture, sleeping bags, boxes, food, cooking utensils, candles, sledges, science equipment, clothes, books, tools and a mummified Emperor Penguin are among the many objects in the Hut. It was from this hut that Captain Scott and four colleagues set





▲ Antarctic Prion. Photo by Matthias Dehling.



▲ Snares Crested Penguin is endemic to the Subantarctic Snares Islands. Photo by Tony Whitehead/New Zealand Birds Online.

out for the South Pole in 1912, but tragically never returned.

What a breathtakingly beautiful, awe-inspiring, and magnificent scene it was to wander over the barren volcanic and icy landscape in clear sunny weather at Cape Evans, to look down to Scott's Hut near the beach, and to view icebergs and the distant Transantarctic Mountains. It was no less thrilling to be able to watch four mounting Emperor Penguins near Scott's Hut, also Antarctic Skuas, several of which were nesting on the ground.

The Cape Bird Field Research Station at the north of Ross Island supports a team of New Zealand biologists in the summer studying the Adélie Penguins and Antarctic Skuas that breed here. We landed onto the stony beach in calm weather to view many of the Adélie Penguins that were still present. They are certainly cute, easily approachable and fascinating to watch.

*Spirit of Enderby* passed Cape Crozier, the location of large nesting sites for Emperor and Adélie penguins, and the southernmost Emperor Penguin breeding site in Antarctica, as we sailed eastwards from Cape Bird towards the impressive Ross Ice Shelf. It was in the middle of winter in 1911 that three men of Scott's expedition trekked to Cape Crozier to retrieve three eggs of Emperor Penguins – immortalised in the book "The Worst Journey in the World" by Apsley Cherry-Garrard.

Several Emperor Penguins rested on the pack ice near Coulman Island and Snow Petrels were our regular companions as *Spirit of Enderby* sailed northwards. More seabirds were evident as we moved away from the Ross Sea, particularly Antarctic Fulmars and the tiny Wilson's Storm Petrels that appear to dance delicately across the rough seas. Antarctic Fulmars often flew nearby when passing Young and Sturge Islands (in the Balleny Islands), many flocking on the sea and scattering just as the ship arrived. When passing Young Island, with its steep icefalls dropping to sea level, the last of the graceful Snow Petrels were seen, as they rarely fly north of the pack ice.

Our final stop on this remarkable voyage was in Perseverance Harbour, Campbell Island, with tramps onto the slopes of Mt Honey and along the Lyall-Col boardwalk above Beeman Hill. Southern Royal Albatrosses breed in large numbers and, as several nests were close to the tracks, it was easy to pause and watch these remarkable birds at close range. Many adults were protecting their fluffy little chicks, while others, non-breeders, gather in small social groups. Subantarctic Pipits are very approachable, having re-colonised Campbell Island from offshore islands following the eradication of rats several years ago. Campbell Island Shags, Red-billed Gulls and giant petrels nest in small numbers along the Perseverance Harbour shoreline, and over the harbour large numbers of Sooty Shearwaters lift off the water and wheel about, together with Royal and Campbell/Black-browed albatrosses.

Ross Sea Antarctic Cruising, "In the Wake of Scott and Shackleton", can be recommended. Voyages provide opportunities for birdwatching, adventure and great fun, and are an opportunity to enter observations into *eBird*. Voyages in early 2018 commence in January and February. For further details see: <http://www.heritage-expeditions.com/cruises-expeditions-in-antarctica-voyages/>

IAN ARMITAGE is a member of the Birds New Zealand Council.



▲ Subantarctic Skua feed on the eggs and chicks of Adélie Penguins and petrels. Photo by Ian Armitage.

▣ The ethereal White Tern. Photo by Pete Phillips.



▣ (L-R): Ugi Rufous Fantail/Lars Petersson; Yellow-bellied Robin, Red-tailed Tropicbird, Masked Booby & Crow Honeyeater/Michael Szabo

## South-Western Pacific Odyssey

**Birds New Zealand editor Michael Szabo represented the Society on Heritage Expeditions' South-Western Pacific Odyssey aboard *Spirit of Enderby* in April 2017.**

Cruising the ocean watching dazzling tropical seabirds, gliding over corals in the company of colourful parrots, and exploring the lush forested landscapes of Island Melanesia, it's not hard to see why this is one of the premier birdwatching expeditions on the planet. It has consistently attracted birdwatchers and ornithologists from around the world over the past decade, and 2017 was no exception, with 40 participants flocking to join from New Zealand, Australia, North America, Britain and the Netherlands.

During the 2,600 nautical mile expedition, *Spirit of Enderby* traverses remote pelagic waters that would otherwise be difficult to reach and visits eight Melanesian islands, each with a unique community of endemic species. It also has a reputation for sightings of rare species like Beck's Petrel and Crow Honeyeater – and even undescribed species – so it was with high hopes that we departed Tauranga and sailed out into the Bay of Plenty. Those of us on deck were not disappointed, with sightings of a dozen seabird species that first day, including Black Petrels and Flesh-footed Shearwaters in flight, and small penguin-like Common Diving Petrels swimming at the surface. After dinner we all met in the library to share photographs and record observations, which became a daily ritual during the expedition.

The first Grey Ternlets appeared off the Mokohinau Islands in the Hauraki Gulf next morning, followed by good numbers of New Zealand, Wilson's and White-faced storm petrels skipping

around on the water. Continuing past the Poor Knights Islands to Cape Brett we logged another dozen new species, including elegant White-naped Petrels and Buller's Shearwaters, and dainty Fairy Prions. As the ship turned north-west beyond the Three Kings Islands out into the deep blue water of the Tasman Sea we started to see tropical species: ethereal White Terns, a pale morph White-bellied Storm Petrel, Gould's, Kermadec and Tahiti petrels, Red-tailed Tropicbirds (Amokura), and the majestic Masked Booby.

The closure of a wharf for maintenance prevented us landing at Norfolk Island, so instead of the planned day ashore we enjoyed scenic views of the volcanic cliffs before setting course for New Caledonia. The variety and abundance of tropical species increased through the day with a Providence Petrel winging its way across the bow, Great Frigatebirds gliding effortlessly overhead, and Little Shearwaters flickering past in fresh plumage. Entering New Caledonian waters, we were greeted by the sight of our first White-tailed Tropicbird and Red-footed Boobies wheeling around chasing flying fish, but there were none of the hoped-for New Caledonian Storm Petrels recorded on previous expeditions.

Soon after crossing the Tropic of Capricorn, the ship arrived in Noumea, from where we were driven to Parc Provincial de la Riviere Bleue, the top birdwatching site on Grande Terre. Everyone who visits here wants to see the iconic Kagu and





▲ Magnificent Petrel photo by Peter Harrison.



▲ Bulwer's Petrel photo by Tom Blackman.



▲ Makira Honeyeater, photo by Lars Petersson.



▲ White-bellied Storm Petrel photo by Tom Blackman.

extremely rare endemic Crow Honeyeater, so there were smiles all around when a bold Kagu pair strutted right up to us. Next up was a confiding New Caledonian Cuckooshrike and a rainbow of brightly-coloured endemics, including Horned Parakeet, New Caledonian Red-crowned Parakeet, and Yellow-bellied Robin. After lunch we found a devilishly handsome Crow Honeyeater near the giant "Kaori" tree.

The next day we drove to Mt Koghi, where we had no problem finding the tool-making New Caledonian Crow, giant New Caledonian Imperial Pigeon, and iridescent Metallic Pigeon. Locating the tiny Red-faced Parrotfinch took more leg work and the skulking New Caledonian Grassbird completely eluded us, but by the time we left Noumea we had seen 17 of the 18 endemics on Grande Terre. That afternoon *Spirit of Enderby* cleaved the glassy waters of the lagoon, and those of us on deck were rewarded with the sight of a New Caledonian Fairy Tern feeding near the barrier reef. After heading out into the Coral Sea we cruised north off the west coast, enjoying the spectacular panoramic view of the 350-km central cordillera that runs the length of Grande Terre. The many Gould's Petrels and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters we saw in flight were a sight to behold, but it was a pale phase Collared Petrel among them that dazzled the most.

The following day at sea, a trio of Band-rumped Storm Petrels scooted past. The genetics of their Pacific breeding populations have not been studied, so they may yet be split into separate species, as populations in the Atlantic have been. The star bird today, however, was the charismatic Magnificent Petrel that scudded across the bow. This is the distinctive dark-bellied *magnificens* subspecies of Collared Petrel, described only in 2010, and another candidate for full species status. For those seeking

a break from the sun there were fascinating lectures on marine wildlife and we all enjoyed the delicious catered meals. As the mercury rose outside, we were glad of the ship's air conditioning and the shade cloth over the top deck.

Arriving at Santa Ana, our first landfall in the Solomon Islands, we were greeted with an elaborate traditional welcome. Afterwards we walked along the coast, past a Lesser Sand Plover standing on exposed coral, and into the rainforest where we were pleased to see the likes of Silver-capped Fruit Doves, Pacific Kingfishers, and the dark-necked endemic Santa Ana subspecies of Rufous Fantail. That afternoon we sailed to nearby Star Harbour on Makira. As we walked past some cultivated gardens, a rare Bronze Ground Dove glinted past, giving us a taste of things to come. In the forest beyond we tracked down several Makira Honeyeaters thanks to their fluting calls, and gaudy Yellow-bibbed Fruit Doves and Yellow-bibbed Lories. En route to *Spirit of Enderby*, we saw a flock of Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons float over a clearing where we paused to gaze up at the burnt orange plumage of a Makira Cicadabird and a tiny pair of Midget Flowerpeckers.

Next morning on Ugi, a cinnamon Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove flew on to a nearby green palm frond and a black-and-white Makira Flycatcher whistled its song at the edge of the village. We found the endemic Ugi Black Monarch and Ugi Rufous Fantail in tall rainforest to the north, and at the tallest trees we stopped to marvel at a brilliant White-headed Fruit Dove. Two Stephan's Emerald Doves that flew past us were a welcome addition to the expedition list.

On Guadalcanal, we were driven from the capital, Honiara, to nearby Mt Austen to meet local bird guide Samson Hasi. He soon pointed out two Buff-headed Coucals and a breathtaking pair



▲ Ultramarine Kingfisher photo by Lars Petersson.



▲ Variable Goshawk photo by Lars Petersson.

of Blyth's Hornbills. Then, at the first lookout, we scanned the nearest ridge and found Song Parrots, Yellow-faced Mynas and Barred Cuckooshrikes. Fifty metres on, a White-billed Crow flew in and perched by the track, impressing with its pale pink bill and croaky rolling 'r' calls. Next, Samson found several blue-crowned Finsch's Pygmy Parrots and, as we studied a cobalt-capped Ultramarine Kingfisher, a Claret-breasted Fruit Dove landed in an adjacent tree. Walking back to the vehicles, an adult Solomons Sea Eagle soared overhead, closely followed by a pale-barred pair of Variable Goshawks.

Next day, off Barora Fa, we set out early from the ship in the zodiac boats to explore Poru channel, where the dense rainforest grows down to the water. The variety and abundance of birds flying around as we cruised over the submerged corals here was remarkable: cockatoos, lorikeets, pigeons, hornbills, treeswifts and terns. Arriving at Kupikolo village we found a Beach Kingfisher perched by a rooftop solar panel. Colourful Solomons Birdwing Butterflies flitted around flowering hibiscus, and luminous flocks of Cardinal Lorikeets scorched across the sky. A mercurial Red-capped Myzomela made a brief appearance, while a flycatching White-winged Fantail was a welcome sight during the rainforest walk. Once back at the village, expedition leader Matt Vance pointed out a Saltwater Crocodile swimming slowly across the nearby channel into the flooded mangrove.

After lunch, with no crocodiles in sight, we continued in the zodiacs to Vakao Island to explore a coastal track alongside pandanus swamp where we had good views of perched Moustached Treeswifts, a vocal pair of Ultramarine Kingfishers, a dapper Melanesian Kingfisher, and a dark phase Variable Goshawk. Meandering back to the ship in the late afternoon sun we stalked a sublime Yellow-throated White-eye that looked banana yellow in the bright sunlight against a green-leafed mangrove tree. Then, as the sun set, we were warmed by the golden glow of a Nankeen Night Heron gliding by.

On Kolombangara we drove to a small lodge 300 metres above sea level, which had a breathtaking view of the conical summit of 1,779-metre Mt Veve. Scanning from here we saw a volley of bright red and green Duchess Lorikeets blazing over the rainforest, and spied a rare Pale Mountain Pigeon perched in the top of a tree below us. We also located a White-capped Monarch at the nest, and the vivid purple and orange colours of the aptly-named Superb Fruit Dove. Persistence here paid off with good views of the Solomons White-eye, endemic Crimson-rumped Myzomela, and – to much acclaim – a male Solomons Cuckooshrike spotted by expedition bird guide Chris Collins. On the way back down the mountain, a Roviana Rail flushed, raising its wings as it ran across the road ahead.

From Kolombangara the ship sailed west across Blackett Strait, past Ghizo, and through Wilson Strait past Vella Lavella. In the last hour of sunlight we saw thronging flocks of Black Noddies feeding over the water, and dozens of Spinner Dolphins raised our spirits as some of them leapt out of the water. A group of 12 Sperm Whales spouted at the surface, the low sun lighting up their misty blasts before their tail flukes rose up and they slipped away in the coppery rays of the setting sun.

*Spirit of Enderby* sailed north-west across the Solomon Sea, following the west coast of Bougainville toward Latangai Island or New Ireland in the Bismarck Archipelago of Papua New Guinea. While cruising past the deepest point in the New Britain Trench – 8,236 metre "Planet Deep" – those on deck were rewarded with views of Dwarf Sperm Whales and Longman's Beaked Whales. Our luck held, with sightings of Streaked Shearwater and – to whoops of delight! – Heinroth's Shearwater, a very rare species restricted to waters off the northern Solomon Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago.

At dawn the ship was over 12 nautical miles off Silur Bay, New Ireland, where the recently rediscovered Beck's Petrel had been seen on previous expeditions. It was sunny and the sea





▲ Kagu photo by Michael Szabo.



▲ Heinroth's Shearwater photo by Peter Harrison.



▲ New Caledonian Cuckooshrike photo by Steve Wood.



▲ Beck's Petrel photo by Tom Blackman.

was remarkably smooth. Some wondered if we would see many seabirds in such calm conditions, but that thought was banished once the first Beck's Petrel flew past, low over the water, fluttering its wings between glides. Like Heinroth's Shearwater, this rare seabird has a small population of just a few hundred birds, and although it has been recorded off New Ireland, its breeding grounds remain unknown.

This was followed by a sighting of a bird that Chris Collins thought looked to be an undescribed species of *Pseudobulweria* that had been reported by another expedition in February. This dark *Pseudobulweria*-like bird had a distinctly *Pterodroma*-like flight. A little later, we had a closer sighting of a dark Bulwer's Petrel flying across the bow. Heading further south toward Cape St George, we saw more Beck's Petrels flying past, and a Manta Ray the size of a coffee table leapt clear of the water off the port side - twice! Incredibly, three rare Blainville's Beaked Whales surfaced near the ship, one showing its unusual raised lower jaw and teeth as it surfaced. I don't think I would have been very surprised if an Arctic Narwhal had surfaced next to them!

Up ahead we could see Short-finned Pilot Whales porpoising toward a large congregation of seabirds. As the ship drifted closer we could see large flocks of Black Noddies containing over 1,000 birds, and over 100 boobies flying around and diving. There were also several vocal Sooty Tern flocks swirling around, comprising at least 500 birds - mostly adults, but including dark juveniles, and adult Grey-backed, White and Little terns. I also counted over 100 Lesser Frigatebirds etching the sky overhead, sometimes swooping down to pirate fish. A tight flock of 23 Red-necked Phalaropes landed on the surface to feed and two squadrons of pink flying squid jetted out of the water. As the ship drifted past this remarkable gathering of marine life there was a palpable sense of elation among everyone on deck. It was our most exciting day at sea and, being the last day of "The Odyssey", there was a celebratory atmosphere that evening.

Next morning *Spirit of Enderby* anchored off Rabaul in New Britain, within sight of Tavurvur volcano. After disembarking to a nearby resort, participants departed for other destinations within Papua New Guinea, or flew to the capital, Port Moresby. The expedition had been a great success, recording 175 bird species and 11 whale and dolphin species, not to mention the many 'Attenborough moments' that we shared. For these reasons, I would highly recommend the South-Western Pacific Odyssey as an exhilarating journey of a lifetime.

For more information about future "Odyssey" expeditions or to register your interest, contact Heritage Expeditions: [info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com)



▲ New Caledonian Imperial Pigeon photo by Michael Szabo.



▲ Metallic Pigeon photo by Michael Szabo.



## FAR NORTH

The Youth Camp was held in the Far North this year (17/4–21/4). I'd like to acknowledge the phenomenal support for this that Birds New Zealand received from members and sponsors. There were 12 'young birder' participants and 8 volunteers at the camp, the volunteers giving a valuable week of their time. Council member Sharon Alderson, ably assisted by Lynn Adams and Ian Southey, put the camp together. It took many emails to iron out all the details in advance and select the participants (it was oversubscribed). Fruzio was our main sponsor, and a mighty vote of thanks goes to them for their generosity.

Three RRs volunteered, Ian Southey (South Auckland), Anne McCracken (Northland) and I. Lois Wegener and Jacqui Malcomb were the 'Camp Moms', preparing the menus, detailed shopping lists, and doing the cooking, sometimes getting up at 5.30 am to prepare breakfast for 7 am. I can't thank them enough. Members Russ Cannings and David Thomas shared the driving duties, and Ian Southey supplemented with his SUV. The camp would not have happened without their minivan driving skills. Many thanks go to all of you.

Russell-Orongo Bay Holiday Park volunteered the accommodation. Since Don and Angela are Birds New Zealand members and enthusiastic birders, and they have made the Holiday Park very bird-friendly, it was not surprising that there were plenty of interesting birds to see on site, including North Island Brown Kiwi, Weka, and Pateke. One morning everyone was up at 6 am to go birding before breakfast (a self-organised effort by the young birders). By the end of that day they had a list of 55 species.

The pelagic trip was a hit because of all the amazing seabirds we saw. Perfect Day Charters gave us a generous discount on *El Tigre*, and an expert birder captain. Far North members Isabella Godbert and Kevin Mathews helped with the Ninety Mile Beach day and the very successful Barn Owl search. We had perfect weather, saw great birds, and ate great meals, but the best part was the great participants. I heard again and again, "What a nice group of teens", from those who met them. I saw the learning and the good humour, and thought that whoever had the idea for a Youth Camp has created something special. – LES FEASEY

## NORTHLAND

A highlight for our Branch was the opportunity for a Northland 'young birder' to participate in the Youth Field Camp organised in April. Not only did she gain valuable fieldwork knowledge, skills and experience from the camp mentors, but it has already led to an opportunity for her to be involved in a field project with a local conservation organisation, and the possibility of further involvement. The enthusiasm and energy generated by the camp is already having a positive impact throughout the North. – ANNE MCCRACKEN

## AUCKLAND

Post-breeding flock counts of Northern NZ Dotterel included 259 birds at Mangawhai/Te Arai (4/3), 29 at Auckland Airport (6/3), 170 at Omaha (12/3), 19 at Waller Island (15/3) and 75 at Manukapu/Big Sand Island (30/3). The total number was 533, compared to 612 in 2016. Fear not! Their local population has not crashed, as small chicks, half grown chicks

and recently fledged juveniles were recorded at Te Arai, Omaha, Shakespear Park, Albany, Motutapu and Motuihe during these counts. We suspect these post-breeding flocks were not fully formed in March because of a late flush of breeding activity in the region.

The South Kaipara Lakes Survey and Dabchick Census were held on ANZAC Day. The attendance was exceptional with 33 participants. Overall bird numbers were down, with several of the small lakes surrounded by pines still dry. The count was 28 NZ Dabchicks and 1 Australasian Little Grebe. Tulare Wetland yielded the most diverse range of birds with 11 NZ Dabchick, 4 Black Shag, 16 Pied Shag, 13 Little Black Shag, 6 White-faced Heron, 6 Black Swan, 101 Canada Geese, 21 Paradise Shelduck, 15 Mallard, 8 Grey Duck, 10 Mallard/Grey Duck hybrid, 15 Australasian Shoveler, 25 Grey Teal, 12 NZ Scaup, 1 Australasian Bittern and 9 Brown Quail. Thank you to Denise Poyner and the many others who took part.

A significant transfer was the release of 20 Little Spotted Kiwi at Shakespear Regional Park on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula (29/4 & 30/4). To help increase the genetic diversity of the establishing population, 10 male birds were translocated from Tiritiri Matangi Island and 10 female birds translocated from Kapiti Island. Hopefully, this population with thrive within this predator-free sanctuary.

Beach patrols varied considerably over the autumn period in the number of beach cast birds, despite many cyclonic storms that had passed through. Muriwai Beach yielded 5 birds in March (singles of Australasian Gannet, White-fronted Tern, Hutton's Shearwater, Fluttering Shearwater & Shearwater sp). Very unusually there were no birds in April, while the May Patrol had 1 Sooty Shearwater and 2 Short-tailed Shearwaters. Pakiri Beach patrol on 9/4 was very different, with 16 birds of 9 different species including 2 Pied Shag, 4 Little Penguin, 1 Red-billed Gull, 1 White-fronted Tern, 1 Australasian Gannet, 2 Cook's Petrel, 1 Fairy Prion, 1 Flesh-footed Shearwater and 4 Fluttering Shearwater. Live birds there included 2 NZ Pipit, 44 Northern NZ Dotterel and 37 Variable Oystercatcher. Other sightings in the region included Banded Rails at Rangitoto Island wharf, 1 Royal Spoonbill in suburban New Lynn (2/5) and a possible Spine-tailed Swift on Tiritiri Matangi Island (29/4). – IAN MCLEAN

## SOUTH AUCKLAND

After the first big rain in mid-March, David Lawrie reported many dead House Sparrows and Starlings underneath a big roost in the centre of Pukekohe, and a flock of Canada Geese turned up at Ardmore. An Australasian Bittern turned up at Miranda on 9/4 and has been seen periodically since. New Zealand Dabchicks, uncommon near Miranda, have also appeared there. The first, a stripe-headed immature bird, turned up at the Shore Bird Centre and now there is a flock of 4 in the Bittern Pond. With all the water around there is a chance they may breed in spring.

Rain did not help our Weka surveys at Kawakawa Bay, either. Numbers are still very low, but the number of pairs near the coast is building up again and another good season should allow them to start recovering their earlier range. The big news in the Hunuas has been the release of 6 North Island Brown Kiwi from the Coromandel by Ngati Paoa and Auckland Council into the Kokako management

area, with more releases planned. This follows success with North Island Kokako management there, with very good breeding success reported since the recent 1080 drop. Certainly we have been seeing more Kokako lately at the southern edge of their range.

Given the damp weather, one of the recent highlights was indoors: a trial moult workshop run by Moulting Convenor Gillian Vaughan, assessing wing moult from photographs of flying birds. This is a promising way to gather information on many species given the number of cameras in use these days.

The shorebirds at Miranda and Manukau Harbour have been good, as usual. We continued the Ambury bird walks with the Auckland Branch with good attendance, except when weather forced a cancellation in March. At Miranda, there were 3 Pectoral Sandpipers over summer and Black-tailed Godwit numbers have risen steadily through autumn to 8 birds. They look fat now and have at least a little breeding plumage, but will they migrate, or is it too late? – IAN SOUTHEY

## HAWKE'S BAY

Four members visited Porangahau estuary in February where good number of shorebirds, notably NZ Dotterel and Wrybill, were present. On the return journey we visited a few wetlands to check for Australasian Bittern fitted with radio transmitters, and recorded individuals at 2 locations. One of these sites, Lake Purimi, also had many NZ Dabchick and other waterfowl, including a few NZ Scaup and Australian Coots.

A planned field trip to Mohi Bush did not take place as many local members were away. Our RR was working with Australasian Bittern and Spotless Crake in the Waikato, and others were on birding trips overseas. A couple of members again assisted with the reintroduction of Mottled Petrels at the Boundary Stream seabird site, and Pam Turner released a Black-winged Petrel there which she had rehabilitated after it was found inland. It did a circuit of the launch ramp and then made a bee-line for the coast 20 km away, a gratifying outcome after the time spent bringing it back to a healthy condition. – IAN SMITH

## TARANAKI

We had a good turnout at the February meeting. Most of us managed to get out and about, despite the weather. There seem to have been more NZ Dotterel about. From North Taranaki beaches, 2 were reported at Mohakatino and 3 at Waiongana, and from South Taranaki beaches, 2 were reported at Komene, 2 at Rahotu and 7 at Sandy Bay, but there was no sign of breeding. There were some Royal Spoonbills in North Taranaki, but smaller numbers than usual.

A photo published in a local newspaper of 154 White-fronted Terns on Ngamotu beach in central New Plymouth was mistakenly reported to be of Arctic Terns. At Waiongana, the banded Banded Dotterel was back for the 14<sup>th</sup> year, although overall numbers were well down on previous years, when up to 80 birds have been seen on the beach, but this year's count was only 50.

The March indoor meeting was brief, and held outdoors. Several NZ Falcon sightings were reported and a field trip organised. The field trip visited local oxidation ponds where there were 22 NZ Scaup and 5 NZ Dabchick: the



visit to the two small local hydro lakes was less successful due to power boat races, but a Black Swan pair with 2 cygnets, a Little Pied Shag, and a Australian Coot were seen.

Barry Hartley counted 312 Mallard, 24 Grey Teal and 4 Australasian Shoveler at Opunake oxidation ponds, the latter 2 being uncommon in Taranaki. At Sandy Bay he counted a flock of 68 Variable Oystercatcher and 18 South Island Pied Oystercatcher, 30+ Banded Dotterel, 2 NZ Dotterel and 346 Southern Black-backed Gull. There are thousands of Southern Black-backs around the coast, but we know of only one breeding colony, which prompts us to wonder where they all come from.

At Mokau there were 14 Royal Spoonbill, and at Awakino River mouth there were 5 Pied Shag. Ron Lambert was re-elected as RR at the May meeting. The monthly trip around Hawera had mixed results at Noelle's Lakes. The Cockerams saw their first Australasian Bittern along Welcome Swallow and NZ Dabchick.

The Messengers have at home a NZ Fantail with a white tail and Tui, Bellbird and Kereru visiting a large flowering Puriri. Barry had an annual visit from a Morepork, and there was a flock of 12 Caspian Tern at Mokau. In April, Julie and I visited Akaroa, the Bellbird and Kereru 'capital' of the world, and then earthquake damaged Kaikoura, where the compulsory trip with "Albatross Encounter" was as enjoyable as always. Among numerous pelagic species we saw 3 banded *gibsoni* Antipodean Albatross and 2 Black-fronted Tern, but no Hutton's Shearwater. - PETER FRYER

#### WHANGANUI

It has been another quiet period, with many birds being silent and covert while undergoing their post-nuptial moults. Dunnock started their winter calling in early-April, and the first Song Thrushes were heard singing on 5/5. Male Hihi (Stitchbird) at Bushy Park started giving their peetoolee winter territorial calls (as opposed to their spring peetchee and hihi calls) in mid-April. Hihi, Silvereye and Bellbird were also gorging themselves then on Hangehange fruits.

In April, we received a further report of the presence of Nankeen Night Heron upstream on the Waitotara River. The details have still to come in, but from the person who reported this, it seems that a pair of birds has been present on and off for the past few years outside the breeding season, when they disappear. This year they returned with a juvenile in tow. With records now having been received from both the Turakina and Waitotara valleys, the population may be slowly spreading beyond its traditional Whanganui River base. Unfortunately, because the birds are largely nocturnal, secretive and tend to roost in trees with dense foliage, sometimes away from the main rivers, their numbers and movements are not easy to track.

More recently, a member of the public commented on the increased numbers of Mallard present on the Whanganui River and wondered why. The explanation may have something to do with hunters refurbishing their maimai ahead of the upcoming waterfowl hunting season, causing disturbance and temporarily displacing birds. Lynne Douglas counted 106 Mallard on the mudflats of the Whanganui River estuary around this time, substantially more than are usually present. We've noticed in previous years that once the hunting season opens, increased numbers and

a wider range of waterbirds are recorded on the lower reaches of the Whanganui River within the town limits, where there is no hunting: e.g. NZ Dabchick; Black Swan; Grey Teal; and the ubiquitous Mallard. The question is: do experienced birds recognise increase human activity around their wetlands as presaging danger and disturbance? Understanding how hunting influences diet and seasonal patterns in the selection of wetlands and food within these would be a worthwhile study.

Lynne Douglas photographed a flock of 26 Royal Spoonbill flying onto the Whanganui River from the west in mid-April. Flocks in autumn usually fly east to west and we wondered if this was yet another example of birds being disturbed further west in the lead-up to the hunting season. Other notable sightings include large flocks of finches, House Sparrows and Starlings, along with Pukeko and 56 Paradise Shelduck, most being females, feeding in fields where grains have recently been harvested grain (Lynne Douglas), an Australasian Bittern on the Whangaehu estuary (Ormond Torr), and two Pied Shags on the Whanganui River in early May (Michael O'Shea). A field trip to the Whitiua Scientific Reserve produced little of note, other than a pair of Fernbird. - PETER FROST

#### WAIRARAPA

Wairarapa Branch brought the "Buller's Birds" exhibition from Te Papa to Aratoi, the Wairarapa regional museum of art and history, from 18/2 to 19/3. This included original artworks by Johannes Keulemans and woodcuts by John Buchanan; mounted specimens, and various volumes of Buller's published work. We were able to fund the exhibition out of branch funds and a generous donation from Fruzio. We kept the Birds New Zealand banner 'flying' outside the gallery during the exhibition and there was a good turnout for the opening day thanks to coverage in the regional free news and like-minded organisations' email networks. This resulted in a steady flow of visitors.

On 25/2, Dr Rebecca Rice, a curator from Te Papa, gave a very lively and informed talk about Buller and his books in their literary historical context. With a side-dressing of local wines and delicacies, Te Papa curator and Birds New Zealand Councillor Dr Colin Miskelly did the ornithological equivalent for an invited audience on the 9/3. Both groups were well satisfied and our membership has edged up a little, but our profile more.

"Birds New Zealand Branch; a device which allows people to generate endless activity without quite becoming a perpetual motion machine" - or as my mother used to say, "leave them alone and they'll play for hours". Our local members take their birding seriously but cheerfully, and there are always some local sightings going onto eBird and being noted by email around the group. We are growing quietly, engaging with other agencies, and having fun.

In April we held our quarterly "at home" show-and-tell. These are always successful evenings, and it's fascinating just what members manage to observe in the course of their daily lives. In the not-so-merry month of May, Pauline Nijman of the Wildbase Unit of Massey University's Vet School, gave us a lively look 'behind the scenes' at the research, rescue and rehabilitation of native fauna work in an

overwhelmingly agricultural and companion animal vet environment.

We have also put on our boots and, in increasing numbers, taken to the field to visit Pigeon Bush, a big restoration project being led by one of our members; Wairio wetland just before duck shooting, where we may have seen an Australasian Bittern, but the whole place was so constantly moving with waterbirds it was a joy to visit. For the Global Big Day Out we are splitting into teams of 2 and attempting to cover environments stretching from bush in the Tararua Range through wetlands out to the coast and Joxer Daley's. - ROBIN LIST

#### WELLINGTON

Our April meeting had the theme of Backyard Bird Observations. A number of members from throughout the region presented summaries of their observations and the procedures used to record them. Notably, there were a variety of different procedures, ranging from compiling monthly lists of species seen, to daily observations with counts of individual species. Allan Munro summarised his Shining Cuckoo records from his Melling property, which date back to 1988, with 8-70 records each season. The mean date for the first record of each summer was 8/10 and 3/1 for the last record. Comparing first Shining Cuckoo records from Backyard Bird Observations from members has the potential to provide insights into this species migration patterns and whether they are affected by weather patterns. Collectively the Backyard Bird Observations can address questions relating to the expansion of bird ranges associated with the halo effects from Zealandia Ecosanctuary and local predator initiatives. They also provide a useful activity for members to participate in their own time.

Dr Colin Miskelly summarised the scheme he uses for compiling monthly species lists and how he enters his data into eBird. Ideally, all Backyard Bird Observations should be entered into eBird so that they can be analysed on a regional basis. An important discussion coming out of this meeting was, "how can the Backyard Bird Observations be used to address questions about birds in our region?" Are we capturing the right data and is there some additional data we should be collecting? Detailed summaries of Backyard Bird Observations from Wellington members will be included in the next Wellington Region Newsletter. - GEOFF DE LISLE

#### NELSON

A visiting UK birder had great delight in reporting Cirl Buntings from Mapua in February. He commented that the latest RSPB magazine, *Nature's Home*, covered the story of a successful Cirl Bunting recovery project in England after the species was nearly lost there as a breeding species. Also in February, we had 2 reports of a Glossy Ibis seen for a couple of days in a marshy area by Cape Farewell Road, Golden Bay.

During April a sea-watch out to Tasman Bay from different coastal spots located several skuas harrying White-fronted Terns feeding among boil-ups at sea, along with gulls and shags, or a long raft of shearwaters. Our region did a third wader census, this time a summer count. Rob Schuckard reports that most areas were counted around mid-February, but because of a pilot whale stranding on Farewell Spit at the same time, that patch

was counted on 2/3. Also, due to unforeseen circumstances, coastal areas between Puponga and Totara Avenue were missed out. Overall, about 54,000 birds were counted, 49% being migratory. In total, 14 species were recorded, including Wrybill, Sanderling, Red-necked Stint and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (Marlborough).

Farewell Spit had the highest number of South Island Pied Oystercatchers (SIPO) since 1998, and Banded Dotterel numbers were the highest there since 2008. This may be an indication of migratory movements, starting from mid-February. Bar-tailed Godwit and Ruddy Turnstone numbers were average and Red Knot numbers very low. Birds were concentrated in the middle of the Spit, which made counting challenging in some spots.

In Tasman Bay, SIPO, Banded Dotterel and Ruddy Turnstone numbers were average, but Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot numbers were low. Thanks go to DOC for their ongoing support, providing a car and accommodation at Farewell Spit. It's very much appreciated.

Spread over 4 or 5 farm ponds in the Tasman area, anecdotal evidence suggest there are circa 22 Australian Wood Ducks this season. The 11 ducklings hatched last November seem to have survived, and from the same pond, an adult pair with 4 new ducklings was reported (18/2). There are many more ponds in the region that could potentially accommodate more of these waterfowl. Some birds may also go undetected or unreported. - GAIL D. QUAYLE

#### MARLBOROUGH

Jack and Kristin Taylor recently organised a great group outing down the east coast to see the wetland birds that have come in after the recent rains. Lake Elterwater, at Ward, has refilled after the drought, and currently has well over a thousand waterfowl on or around it, along with large numbers of Welcome Swallow, and some busy Grey Warblers. There are several hundred each of Australasian Shoveler, NZ Scaup, Grey Teal, Canada Goose, Black Swan and Mallard, and 1 NZ Dabchick. The roadside stop has a good viewing platform with easy access. The pair of NZ Dabchick that has been breeding on Taylor dam is still resident. Mike Bell has seen one on the ponds in the Wairau Lagoons and counted 30 Cirl Bunting in the salt marsh area.

Bill Cash and Will Parsons have, on several occasions, seen an Australasian Bittern at the Wairau Bar. The wetland is immediately to the north of the Wairau River outlet. Years ago this used to be a wonderful wetland with a number of interesting wader species. However, the blocking of the inlet preventing tidal movement led to the first pond becoming almost continuously dry, and this - combined with the area being used by 4WD and trial bikes - led to most of the birds vanishing. Recently the outlet has been opened and DOC has fenced the area off, so it is a great wetland again, with Royal Spoonbill and White Heron regularly seen. It is also a good high tide roost for gulls and terns, plus the odd wader.

A juvenile NZ Falcon has been flying around the Blenheim area. Bill has seen it at Pollard Park, Taylor Dam and the Diversion Bridge. They are such wonderful birds to see. Will has also seen Fernbird near Wairau Bar, 6 Golden Plover on the lower reaches of the Opawa River, and has noted the fledging of 3 more Glossy Ibis. It is great to have such a diverse range of birds in our region. - HEATHER DAVIES

#### CANTERBURY

Waders found around Lake Ellesmere so far this year include Red-necked Stilts, Pacific Golden Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones and the 3 most common sandpiper species. Two less common sandpiper species were spotted around the lake in February: Cox's Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper. The Sanderling and Hudsonian Godwit were also re-sighted, the godwit as late as April. At the Ashley Estuary, a Grey-tailed Tattler was seen in late January but has not been seen since.

In Kaikoura, a Black Petrel was seen on an Albatross Encounter pelagic trip in March. Also in Kaikoura, the Erect-crested Penguin finished moulting and left on 19/2. Another Erect-crested Penguin was spotted at Waikuku Beach a few days before the Kaikoura bird departed, and was removed by DOC shortly afterwards. More recently, an immature Yellow-eyed Penguin turned up on a beach near Southbridge.

A few final sightings of note included an Australian White-winged Triller that was reported in McCormack's Bay, apparently seen in the hand after being found trapped under some netting from mid-February to mid-March, but regrettably no local birders saw it, only the house owner. Two UK birders reported a Black Kite on the road to Hanmer Springs in February, and an Australian Tree Martin was re-sighted a number of times around the Bromley Oxidation Ponds, most recently in mid-March.

Our first field trip of the year was the all-bird count at Lake Ellesmere. Overall, the total tally was slightly up from last year, but still lower than the counts made in 2015 and earlier. Interestingly, the total of New Zealand waders is much higher than last year, and the gulls and terns total is also higher than in 2016. However, the total number of shags decreased. Kaitorete Spit had the majority of the migratory waders, including a Sanderling and the Cox's Sandpiper. A White-winged Black Tern was seen at Birdlings Flat, and 2 Arctic Skua were found at Taumutu/Timberyards Point.

Our 2 other field trips this year have taken us to Banks Peninsula - Oashore Reserve and Le Bons Bay. Predator control has clearly paid off at Oashore Reserve with a noticeable increase in bird life. Bellbirds, NZ Fantails, Kereru and Grey Warbler were the most numerous species. It is hoped with more time that other natives such as Riflemen and Tui will move into this patch. At Le Bons Bay we observed the same bush bird species as well as NZ Tomtit, Brown Creeper and NZ Pipit, and Rifleman were heard but not seen. We also counted 40 Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. - ELEANOR GUNBY

#### OTAGO

We had an active and positive presence during the Wild Dunedin Nature Festival. Guided birdwatching at Tomahawk Lagoon was offered on the Saturday and Sunday mornings, and we were kept busy showing 40 people the birds, including Pied Stilts, oystercatchers, Paradise Shelducks, Australasian Shovelers, a White Heron, and shags. Everyone was very enthusiastic about seeing them close-up with our spotting scopes: "oh, look at their red eyes"; "look how pink the legs of stilts are"; and "I've never seen the yellow on the face of a plover before" were some of the comments. Another group of us were very busy at our stall at the UrbanNature Expo, which attracted 750 people. Our student member team of Natalie Forsdick and Denise Martini had got together some really

imaginative prizes, quizzes and handouts for all ages. They were busy handing out information, answering questions and listening to bird stories for several hours as hundreds of people visited the stalls. It was great to have such a positive presence at this event and hopefully some new members will come from it.

We are now into our second year of Sinclair Wetlands surveys. Upon arriving, 2 huge flocks of Starlings circled over the car park, accompanied by a NZ Falcon. Tomahawk Lagoon continues to be a great place to go birding. As well as the regular waterfowl and gulls, NZ Scaup, several Pied Shags and a White Heron were present through April; species not often seen here. Pied Shags have been seen at several other places near Dunedin outside their usual range, so it will be interesting to see if numbers continue to increase.

Our Branch has been encouraged by the Council's Biodiversity Officer to undertake bird counts to monitor local reserves; we are planning to start with the Town Belt with a network of 5-minute bird count sites.

Our Regional Representative has been presenting the "Introduction to Bird Studies" course, which was developed by Birds New Zealand. An enthusiastic group of about 25 participants have faithfully attended the 7 weekly sessions on bird identification, breeding, moult, migration and counting methods. The optional field trip coincided with the Global Big Day promoted by eBird; we went to Waitati, which has a variety of habitats from estuary, exotic and native vegetation and farmland, to maximise the number of species seen.

Our Branch is also pleased to have granted Student Conference Support to 4 of our student members to attend and present their research findings at the annual conference in Te Anau. - MARY THOMPSON

#### SOUTHLAND

During March there were reports of a live Grey-backed Storm Petrel on Oreti Beach, as well as a Subantarctic Skua that was observed feeding on barnacles on a washed up log. Other interesting sightings were a Marsh Crake at Mirror Lakes on the Milford Road and the Snares Crested Penguin that Matt Jones reported at Horseshoe Bay, Stewart Island, which had hauled out to moult. Unfortunately some time later it was found dead.

Red-crowned Parakeets continue to be heard in the Otagara, Bluff and Omaui bush areas, no doubt surviving due to the ongoing intensive pest-trapping in these areas. A Glossy Ibis was reported from an area between Lake Manapouri and Lake Te Anau. Glenda Rees managed to get some good photos of a pair of Gull-billed Terns seen flying around Bandy Point at Awarua Bay. Several of these birds turned up at the Invercargill Estuary Lagoon a few years ago, that stayed around and gave local birders and visitors good views as they hawked around the lagoon.

We are now gearing up for the winter wader count and hoping for lots of enthusiastic volunteers to head out to try and cover as many areas as possible.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Neil Robertson for single-handedly organising this year's OSNZ AGM, as well as maintaining his duties as Regional Representative for Southland. We are hoping for a good turnout from local birders and look forward to catching up with everyone in Te Anau. - PHIL RHODES



# Reviews



## Swarovski EL 10 x 32 Binoculars RRP \$3,299

These new Swarovski binoculars are smaller (138mm by 126mm), lighter (595g), and more compact than the SLC 10 x 42s reviewed in December 2016. I can report that they performed extremely well in a wide range of conditions from cool temperate to tropical humidity when I tested them out during the *South-Western Pacific Odyssey* expedition in April.

Their sharp focus, excellent light gathering, and ample 120m/1000m field of view, stood out as the strongest optical features. The impressive light gathering was especially useful in darker forest sites where fantails and flycatchers were sometimes tricky to locate, and when trying to identify similar-looking species perched high in the canopy by fine details such as eye-ring colour.

They were also very comfortable to use, especially the four different eye cup positions. This helped accommodate my spectacles and allowed me to change the position to suit close-up viewing in a forest setting or for the larger field of view that's often best for birding at sea.

The smooth, fast action of the focus wheel also makes a big difference at sea, where one moment I found myself looking at a distant storm petrel, and then next, a tropicbird at close range, thus requiring a very fast change of focus over a great focal distance. Their light weight meant they were easy to carry, but this did not compromise the quality of the optics, and only enhanced their versatility. They were equally good for close up viewing of small forest birds and distant raptors soaring high overhead.

Their light weight also made it easier to hold them up to my eyes for long periods while birding at sea and watching birds moving about in the forest overhead, also for long periods. They handled very well when tracking fast moving subjects, allowing me to follow a Crow Honeyeater without losing sight of it as it flew through the forest to a new perch, and to keep up with a Yellow-throated White-eye flitting swiftly from branch to branch as it gleaned insects in a mangrove tree.

Overall, I found the Swarovski EL 10 x 32s to be remarkably versatile, high performance binoculars of impeccable optical quality. If you are looking to get a new pair of binoculars and these are in your price range, my advice is to visit your nearest retailer and try them out for yourself. Over 70 retailers stock Swarovski optics in New Zealand. See the NZ Ammunition website for contact details: <http://www.nzammo.co.nz/>



■ Snowy Wandering Albatross and Southern Royal Albatross paintings by Jeff Davies/CSIRO

## The Australian Bird Guide CSIRO Publishing RRP AU\$ 49.95

This excellent new paperback guide book will no doubt catch the eye of New Zealand ornithologists and birdwatchers, especially those with a special interest in waders, seabirds, waterfowl and Australian vagrants. Approximately 250 species in these groups that occur or have been recorded in the New Zealand region

are covered within its 576 pages. A further 40 or so introduced species and recent colonisers that now breed in New Zealand are also included.

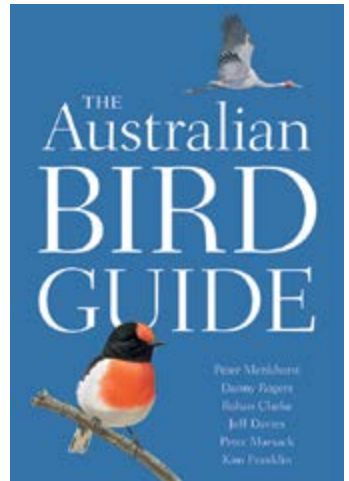
One early reviewer has already compared the *Australian Bird Guide* (ABG) with two of the most celebrated field guide books in the world: *Collins Bird Guide* (to the Birds of Europe), and David Sibley's *The North American Field Guide*. Like them, it covers a continent's worth of avifauna: over 4,700 individually commissioned colour illustrations of 927 species, all accompanied by species texts. This is supplemented with a wealth of relevant information within 30 pages of introductory material, a species checklist, and an index of Latin and common names.

The species texts include comprehensive identification and range details, and the illustrations contain a level of fine detail not found in any other Australian guides. There are notes on the latest taxonomy and, where helpful, the finer details of a species' range. Eight years in the making, a team of seven authors and illustrators gathered tens of thousands of digital images to inform their work, giving the illustrations a level of detail one might expect to find in a photographic guide, but here they have combined this with the artistry of painted plates. As with the *Collins* and *Sibley* guides, each species has multiple illustrations covering the sexes, various life stages, plumages, and a variety of views: perched, flying, standing, swimming and/or diving.

The seabirds are shown almost exclusively in flight, the way most birders will see them, and are generally better illustrated, showing more details, than the *Collins* guide. The seabird and wader illustrations are generally more accurate and detailed than in the *Sibley* guide. Some of the species illustrations stand out, such as the godwits, golden plovers, curlews, storm petrels and *Pterodroma* petrels. The ABG also has a more ordered and consistent layout than the other two guides.

The ABG's weight (1,450g) and size (25 cm x 17.5 cm) put it at the larger end of the field guide range, but it's still a handier reference than the print edition of HANZAB. On balance, the ABG is a very welcome addition to the canon of field guides covering Australasian species – in itself and for raising the bar. If you are looking at getting a field guide to the birds of Australia, the ABG is undoubtedly the best. An App version seems likely, given that it can be followed at hashtag [#ausbirdguide](https://twitter.com/ausbirdguide) on social media. The CSIRO website has more details: <http://www.publish.csiro.au/book/6520/>

– MICHAEL SZABO



■ Australasian Bittern painting by Kim Franklin / CSIRO

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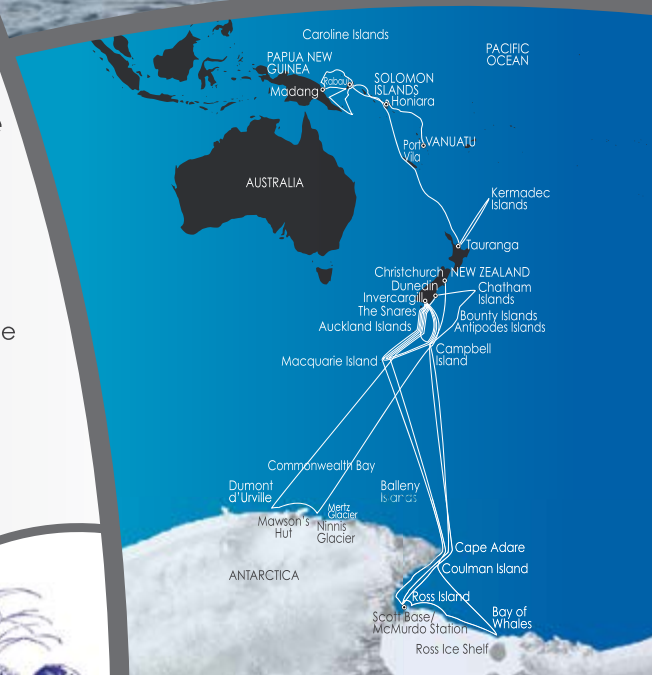


## Heritage Expeditions

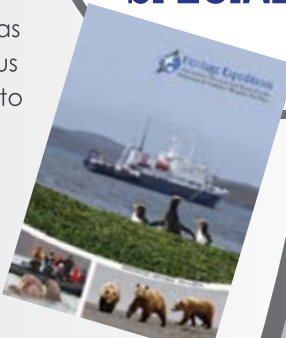
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