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Birds New Zealand

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Birds New Zealand

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We welcome advertising enquiries. Free classified ads for members are at the editor's discretion. Articles or illustrations related to birds in New Zealand and the South Pacific region are welcome in electronic form, such as news about birds, members' activities, birding sites, identification, letters, reviews, or photographs. Copy deadlines are 10th Feb, May, Aug and 1st Nov. Views expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of OSNZ (Inc) or the editor.

The Nicobar Pigeon of Melanesia is probably most similar to the Zealandian Dove. Photo by Lars Petersson.

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COVER IMAGE

New Zealand Storm Petrel, Poor Knights Islands. Photo by Mike Ashbee.

New extinct pigeon species found in Otago

A new extinct pigeon species, the Zealandian Dove *(Deliaphaps zealandiensis)*, has been identified from the St Bathans fossil site in Otago. Researchers say the pigeon lived in the South Island some 19–16 million years ago and became extinct during a period of global cooling which killed-off seed-bearing plants, possibly the pigeon's food source. The species is described in a new study published in *Paleontología Y Evolución de las Aves*, Proceedings of the 9th International Meeting of the Society of Avian Paleontology and Evolution (Diamante, Argentina) in May by researchers from Canterbury Museum, Flinders University, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and UNSW Sydney.

A wing bone is very similar to members of a group that includes Tooth-billed Pigeon (Samoa), crowned pigeons (New Guinea), and Nicobar Pigeon (Melanesia). Nicobar Pigeon is the closest living relative of the extinct Dodo and Solitaire from the Mascarene Islands (Indian Ocean). "Based on the St Bathans fossils, we think that the Zealandian Dove is part of this Indo-Pacific group. It is probably most similar to the Nicobar Pigeon and is therefore a close relative (or at least a cousin) of the famous Dodo", says lead author Dr Vanesa De Pietri from Canterbury Museum. "The Zealandian Dove is the first record of this group found in the southern part of the nearly submerged land mass known as Zealandia".

The Zealandian Dove is the second extinct pigeon found at the St Bathans fossil site. "Some years ago, we described the St Bathans Pigeon, which we believe is a relative of New Zealand's two living native pigeons and the Australian Topknot Pigeon," says Dr Paul Scofield from Canterbury Museum. "We have now also found a leg bone that we can attribute to this species. As a result, we can now confirm that the St Bathans Pigeon is also closely related to Indonesian and Melanesian mountain pigeons. It was an early offshoot within that particular group."

Dr Trevor Worthy of Flinders University adds, "Pigeon fossils are rare in the St Bathans fauna and are outnumbered by about 30 to one by parrots, which perhaps reflects the relative abundance of these tree-dwelling birds in the St Bathans Fauna. Many small parrots form large flocks, whereas pigeons typically live in only small groups, so perhaps these traits typified the early Miocene parrots and pigeons in Zealandia".

President's Report

Farewell

As I write this President's Report, I have come to realise that it will be my last as President. As I said in my previous report, I will be standing down at the end of the Annual General Meeting in June. This does not reflect any issues of dissatisfaction, it is just time for a different perspective as the Society moves forward. I believe that the Society is in a much better position at the present time than when I assumed the position at the resignation of the previous president. However, that situation has not been achieved due to my efforts, but rather it has been the strength and wisdom of the Council that has supported me over all of these years. During my term we have been fortunate that several major sponsors have decided to support our work, which has given us the ability to support bird research in New Zealand, the Youth Camps, and other project-related activities. I offer my full support to Bruce McKinlay and his team as they continue the work into the future to keep our Society viable and relevant.

Bird Photography

Many of our members are active in bird photography and with the equipment that is now available, quite startling results are achieved. There have been several instances where rare birds have been identified from a photograph, most notably the first New Zealand record of Cox's Sandpiper photographed by Mike Ashbee in 2016. Indeed, using photos as an identification tool is getting easier as the quality of photographic equipment improves. Photos are also a useful tool for illustrating aspects of bird plumage and behaviour, and for recording bands. I am still a little old fashioned, in that I believe in the power of observation and notes in field books as my identification tool, and I believe that there is still a place for notebooks to be retained. For example, a photo cannot display the 'jizz', or the nuances of bird movements, or behaviours.

The Society is blessed to have many very skilled photographers and in recent times several have achieved prestigious awards. Craig McKenzie was the overall winner of the 2018 Otago Wildlife Photography competition, which generated much local publicity. Glenda Rees was awarded the Geoff Moon Nature Trophy and a Photographic Society of New Zealand (PSNZ) gold medal for the best projected image illustrating New Zealand wildlife at the PSNZ Canon National Exhibition, and she has achieved recognition through her entries in the International Bird Photographer of the Year competition. Oscar Thomas, one of our Young Birder group, has also taken some amazing photos, and there are many others. *Birds New Zealand* magazine is a good showcase for bird photography and the editor welcomes submissions for publication.

Council Election

At the time of writing, voting is taking place for the selection of the final member of the Council, and I hope that you have all taken the opportunity to cast your vote. The Society was fortunate to receive two very high calibre candidates, which is another reflection on the health of the Society. However, the election process created a few headaches for the Council because elections have been so infrequent in the past. It also made the Council examine the Society's constitution to see how relevant it is in this modern world relating to the election process. While it is still workable, the Council will review this aspect along with a major review of the whole constitution in the coming years.

Conference and AGM

I have had several communications with Les Feasey, organiser of the 2018 Conference in Waitangi. By the time you read this report the Conference will have been held, but at the time of writing there are 150 registrations with more trickling in. This is a really good number, since the venue is at one end of the country. Les has organised a really interesting programme and I am looking forward to participating, not only because I will be handing over the role of President!

Youth Camp

Since my last report, another Youth Camp has been held. This time it was organised by Lloyd Esler, on Stewart Island and at Borland Lodge in deepest Southland. I have not yet seen the detailed reports, but the social media postings that I have seen clearly indicate that it was highly successful. This success is not only measured in the numbers of birds seen, but also in friendships and contacts that have been made, which should stand the young people in good stead for the future. It also helps to break down barriers between the older members, who are acting as tutors, and young members. There is often a perception that the 'generation gap' is a barrier, but in the study of birds, age is not a barrier. Speaking as an older birder, it is always good to have younger eyes in a birding group.

Global Big Day

On the first Saturday in May, Cornell University organised a global birding Big Day event. This was an opportunity to mobilise birders around the world to get out and observe birds, and to post their sightings on the *eBird* database. This year there were in excess of 25,000 observers who observed in excess of 6,500 bird species on that day. In New Zealand, there were 450 checklists submitted covering 130 bird species, about a third of New Zealand's bird species. It was pleasing to see several teams of young birders participating, presumably in response to discussions at the Youth Camp. My own contribution was a checklist of only 37 species, but this included Australasian Bittern and New Zealand Dabchick.

Viola Palmer

Viola, who is a very long-standing member from Wellington, has donated a bird hide which will be offered for sale or as a raffle prize at the Conference in June. Viola no longer utilises this hide and wishes for it to be put to good use, and to raise funds for the Society at the same time. I take this opportunity to thank Viola for this generous donation, which we will put to excellent use.

Rebranding

The Council has been active in continuing the work regarding the rebranding of the Society, as mentioned at the Annual General Meeting last year. Draft proposals will be submitted to the Annual Meeting this year and we hope that these are well-received, as they signal a bright and active future for the Society. The rebrand does not require any constitutional changes, but we are hoping that the majority of members will endorse the proposals submitted. Following the adoption of a new logo, the Society's website is to be redesigned and redeveloped, also as signalled at the AGM last year.

Last Post

The tradition of having a President's Report in the magazine is one that I started. I hope that you have enjoyed my comments over the years, since I have had very little feedback. It has been a pleasure to lead the Society during a phase where many changes were made, leaving the Society in a better situation for future growth. Remember, though, to enjoy your birding and to say hello if you ever come across me in the field.

DAVID LAWRIE, PRESIDENT (Retiring)

Banded New Zealand Storm Petrel, Poor Knights Islands (13/1/18). Photo by Michael Szabo.

Bird banding – closing the loop

In 1946, the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) set up a ringing sub-committee that launched the NZ National Bird Banding Scheme, which was inaugurated in 1950. The Banding Office would like to thank Society members for their valuable contribution to bird banding since the inception of the Scheme. Banding and recovery/resighting effort peaked in 1968, with 55,933 birds banded and 11,065 recoveries reported. Resighting and recovery reports remained consistent at about 21% of banding records over four decades, dropping to 7% in the last decade. Since 2000, the Banding Office has received an average of 19,000 records of birds banded and 1,300 recoveries per year. So, it appears that 50 years ago there was three times the current banding effort, and ten times the current resighting effort!

In this electronic age, banders are managing their own personal databases and spreadsheets. Some banders have not submitted banding and stocktake records for several years, and resighting and recovery reports are often sent directly to banders, and not to the Banding Office. In order to mitigate the risk of data loss, all these data should be centrally stored, readily available, and the results published. There are several instances of banding data being lost, and banded birds outliving research projects/researchers. When these birds are then recovered years later, we are not able to "close the loop" in terms of where and when they were banded. Similarly, if a band recovery is not reported, this data cannot contribute to our knowledge of the species. In essence, the banding and resighting effort would have all been in vain. Please continue to contribute your records and assist us in plugging the gaps. Every band tells a story.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW

12th annual Garden Bird Survey

The 2018 annual Garden Bird Survey will be the twelfth, and Birds New Zealand members are once again being asked to participate. The survey is open to anyone who can identify the bird species in their garden. Just choose any day between 30th June – 8th July and 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 you will help build up a picture of how 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 and full survey instructions are available online: http://gardenbirdsurvey.landcareresearch.co.nz

Backyard birds are signalling significant changes in our environment over the last 11 years, according to the *State of NZ Garden Birds 2017* report released by Landcare Research in May. The report distils a substantial information base of bird counts gathered from over 31,000 gardens since 2007 into simple metrics. Tui increases have been recorded across all regions by circa 22% over 11 years, Kereru by 12%, Greenfinch by 47%, and NZ Fantail and Common Myna both by 8%. In contrast, Silvereye counts have almost halved over the same period (down 43%). Six of the most common garden species (Starling, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Blackbird, Song Thrush) have also declined (10–31% over 11 years). It may be tempting to dismiss these declines of introduced species as unimportant. However, they are signalling change in our urban and rural environments which need to be better understand. For more info see: http://gardenbirdsurvey.landcareresearch.co.nz

ERIC SPURR

OSNZ National Wader Censuses 2017

A total of 113,155 waders of 20 species were counted during the June-July 2017 wader census, down from 124,744 in June-July 2016. There was good national coverage other than the key Far North site of Rangaunu, which was not counted. Numbers of overwintering Red Knot were down c.30% from 1,763 in 2016 to 1,150 in 2017 and Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were down considerably from 9,997 in 2016 to 7,033 in 2017. South Island Pied Oystercatchers were also down by over 4,000 from 77,951 to 73,172 in 2017 but Wrybill numbers were up slightly from 4,675 to 4,718.

Variable Oystercatchers continue their steady recovery with this count of 3,636 being the highest winter count. Rarities included 2 Sanderlings, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, and 3 Grey-tailed Tattlers.

A total of 134,880 waders of 25 species were counted in the November-December 2017 wader census, up from 128,236 in 2016. National coverage was very good with no key sites being missed. The Red Knot numbers were up by almost 3,000 since 2016 but still lower than in 2015. Of most concern is the Bar-tailed Godwit count, which was down again to a new low of 71,527.

The lowest since 2006, which was a year without complete coverage. The Parengarenga count was lower than expected and not all birds may have been found there. This is a worrying trend for our most numerous Arctic breeding species. Ruddy Turnstone numbers showed an improvement from the 992 in 2015 and 1,712 in 2016 to 1,934 in 2017. Another species slipping away from New Zealand shores is the Red-necked Stint with just 24 counted this summer. It is not so long ago that 24 would have been a single count in the Manukau Harbour or Southland.

This summer has seen a major influx of Pacific Golden Plover, although the census does not tell the whole story as the count on the Firth of Thames was 24 but over the summer a maximum of 129 were counted, with the majority being juveniles. Following the winter trend, Variable Oystercatcher numbers were up again to 2,275. Uncommon waders included, 2 Marsh Sandpipers, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 Grey-tailed Tattlers, 2 Hudsonian Godwits, 3 Black-tailed Godwits and 4 Sanderlings.

Tables of counts showing numbers of each species and the sites with the largest counts are available online at: www.osnz.org.nz

ADRIAN RIEGEN

New Members

Birds New Zealand warmly welcomes the following new members: Darren Markin, Leslie Graney (Far North); Jordi Tablada, Benjamin Butler, Yuxiong Liu, Emma Feenstra, Chelsee Neverman, Daniel Bidwell, Jo Turnbull, Sam Heggie-Gracie, Sharon Kast, Sue Frostick (Auckland); Sydney Hing, Alisha Hobbs (Waikato); Erin Patterson (Bay of Plenty); Simon Pierce (Taranaki); Mandy Brooke (Whanganui); David Vieco, Malin Undin, Chris Muller (Manawatu); Barbara Tomotani, Cora Frances McCauley, Rodrigo Tomotani, Leon Berard, Stephen Marsland (Wellington); Jack Dunlop (Marlborough); Jane Gosden, Scott Stocker (Nelson); Donald Goodale, Nyil Khwaja, Paddy West, Penny Carnaby, Alice Waterhouse (Canterbury); Ezra Ritchie (West Coast); Brittany Moller, Max Cunninghame, Paul Smale, Sue Maturin (Otago); Rebecca Jackson (Southland).

Donations

Birds New Zealand warmly thanks the following members for their generous donations: Michael North, Andrew Turvey, Geoff De Lisle, Greg Moorcroft, Rob Schuckard, Bill Campbell, Chris Smuts-Kennedy, Francis Gaud, Jill Hamil, Orongo Bay Holiday Park, Colin Miskelly.

Takahe photo by Glenda Rees.

Wild Takahē return to Kahurangi

Eighteen South Island Takahē were released into the wild at Gouland Downs in Kahurangi National Park in March as part of an historic attempt to create a new wild population outside Fiordland. "This translocation marks the next step in Takahē recovery. Currently, these taonga birds only have one large wild site to call home – the remote Murchison Mountains of Fiordland. Trying to establish another large wild population is a bold move and it might not work, but we must push the boundaries if we are to learn and make progress," said Department of Conservation Takahē Operations Manager Deidre Vercoe. "If the birds released successfully establish in Kahurangi, we are a significant step closer to achieving our goal of seeing Takahē in growing numbers in large areas of their former natural range."

Conservation Minster Eugenie Sage said the release marked an important stage in the species' recovery and highlights the importance of robust predator control programmes. "The past couple of years have been huge for Takahē with the population reaching a milestone 300 birds and moving from Nationally Critical to Nationally Vulnerable," she said. "With the population increasing a rapid 10% per year, secure island and mainland sanctuary sites that are currently home to most Takahē are filling up fast. We're at the stage where we have a blueprint for breeding birds successfully – but without suitable habitat with low predator numbers their future is still not secure."

Kahurangi is judged to be the most suitable place for a new wild population to survive, with large areas of intact tussock grassland and extensive predator control. DOC estimates it could eventually accommodate up to 30 breeding pairs. The Kahurangi Takahē release was made possible through the support of Takahē Recovery Programme partners Ngāi Tahu and Fulton Hogan, says Deidre Vercoe. Manawhenua Ki Mohua, NZ National Parks and Conservation Foundation, and Mitre 10 also supported the release, and Air New Zealand operated a special direct charter service to fly the Takahē from Queenstown to Nelson. The birds will now be closely monitored to track survival, health, habitat use and breeding success.

North Korea joins Flyway Partnership

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPR Korea) has become the 36th Partner of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), the network that cooperates to conserve the migratory waterbirds, habitats and livelihoods of people dependent upon the flyway. As part of the process of joining, the DPR Korea has nominated the Mundok Migratory Bird Reserve and Kumya Wetland Migratory Bird Reserve as their first two Flyway Network Sites in the EAAF. Mundok Migratory Bird Reserve is internationally important and has a visitor centre and a programme to raise awareness of the importance of migratory waterbirds and their habitats. In recent years, the DPR Korea has been increasingly active in collaborating with international organisations to identify priority areas for the conservation of migratory waterbirds through survey and monitoring projects along their coastal and inland wetlands. The country has also initiated an inventory of wetlands, which will yield important information on the biodiversity of those areas.

Jacqui Tizard

Conservation genetics of Chatham Island Taiko

Once the most abundant burrowing petrel on Chatham Island, the Chatham Island Taiko is now one of the world's rarest seabird species. After the arrival of introduced predators, the Taiko suffered a dramatic population decline and was considered extinct for almost 100 years until its rediscovery in 1978. Since then, extensive conservation efforts have allowed the Taiko population to increase to 31 breeding pairs in 2017, although it is still classified as critically endangered.

Taiko are difficult to locate and observe. Since 1996 almost every one caught has been blood sampled (289 birds). Many Taiko are first caught as adults and consequently, their parentage remains unknown. Some have only ever been caught in flight using spotlighting techniques and so even less is known about their origins. The aim of this project was to 1) develop a set of genetic markers specific to Taiko and 2) use these markers to determine familial relationships between individuals in order to inform management decisions. DNA from a single individual was sequenced. Using computer software, I searched the thousands of resulting DNA sequences for microsatellites. The number of repeats in a microsatellite differ between individuals and these differences are passed from parents to offspring. In this way we can use microsatellites to establish kin relationships, as is done in human paternity tests.

I developed 18 microsatellite loci that varied in the number of repeats between individual Taiko and utilised two microsatellite loci previously shown to amplify in Taiko. DNA was extracted from 157 Taiko blood samples. These included nearly all individuals ever known to have bred (n = 101 of which 93 were used in this study) and all individuals of unknown parentage (n = 64), including those birds only ever caught in flight. I used my 20 microsatellite loci to genotype all of these DNA samples and then analysed these genotypes to determine kinship between individuals and examine any structuring within the population.

I was able to assign many first-degree relationships with high confidence, expanding upon the known Taiko pedigree. Seven individuals were found to be offspring of known breeders, some of which were likely breeding for over 20 years prior to the discovery of their burrow. There was also strong evidence that active burrows remain undiscovered, justifying ongoing efforts to locate them. Additionally, there was evidence that inbreeding is occurring as breeding pairs were on average more closely related than expected by chance. This is likely a consequence of a reduced population size combined with strong natal philopatry. Analysis of population structure confirmed the hypothesis that all sampled Taiko belong to the single Chatham Island breeding colony. Further work is being undertaken to increase the number of microsatellite loci available for Taiko and to genotype the remaining 132 individuals, which would increase the power of the analysis and may uncover more unknown relationships.

I am very grateful to the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, which helped make this project possible. See www.osnz.org.nz for more details.

JACQUI TIZARD

Wader watching photo by Bruce McKinlay.

New National Bird Monitoring Scheme

The development of Birds New Zealand's new *National Bird Monitoring Scheme* (NBMS) took a major step forward recently, with Birds New Zealand engaging Wildlife Management International Ltd (WMIL) to assist with the design and delivery of this exciting new project. In recent years, there has been a growing demand among members for the creation of a new *NBMS*, to create an opportunity for members to contribute to a national-scale scheme aimed at monitoring long-term trends in the distribution and abundance of birds.

Recent reports of major declines of previously common farmland birds in Europe, detected by similar national-scale, volunteer-driven schemes underscore the importance of such schemes for detecting and responding to new and widespread threats to bird populations. Data from Birds New Zealand's two previous *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* projects contributed to a major report on the state of New Zealand's birds, published by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment in 2017.

With the 20th anniversary of the second *Atlas* fast approaching, early investigations by Birds New Zealand's Council and the Scientific Committee have focussed on options for designing a third *Atlas* project, with the aim of measuring bird abundance in addition to bird distribution. Up until recently, the *Atlas* schemes represented the only significant effort to measure trends in bird distribution on a New Zealand-wide scale. In recent years however, the Department of Conservation (DOC), Auckland Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) have embarked on national- and regional-scale bird monitoring schemes of their own, designed to monitor trends in the abundance and occupancy of relatively common and widespread bird species on public conservation land, and across non DOC-administered land in the Auckland and Wellington regions.

The creation of these schemes poses both a challenge and an opportunity to Birds New Zealand. The challenge will be to avoid designing a scheme that duplicates them, and instead design one that complements, or adds value to these efforts. By doing this, the *NBMS* will substantially improve our ability to detect changes in the health of bird populations nationwide, which will in turn help improve conservation decision-making by those agencies tasked with maintaining New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity.

Another change that has occurred since the completion of the second *Atlas* is that significant technological and theoretical advances have been made in citizen science and statistics, which need to be taken into account when designing a new scheme. The introduction of the online New Zealand *eBird* database (http://.org/content/newzealand/) has created a powerful new tool that allows birders to submit, store and share their bird observations with each other, and with researchers and conservation managers. Since its launch in 2008, over 3,000 birders have contributed almost 100,000 bird checklists to the New Zealand *eBird* database, exceeding the survey effort achieved in either of the two previous *Atlas* schemes. *Atlas* projects now underway in several US states are using the *eBird* database as a key tool for submitting and storing data, as well as providing volunteer observers with real-time updates on survey coverage. Recent advances in statistical modelling have also created powerful new techniques for analysing these data to examine patterns in bird occupancy, overcoming problems caused by observer variation and imperfect, or inconsistent spatial and temporal survey coverage. One further challenge for Birds New Zealand therefore, is to examine how our new *NBMS* can harness these new technologies to both maximise members' participation in the scheme, and produce results that will be as useful as possible to researchers and conservation agencies.

Given the complexity that these developments add to the task of designing a new *NBMS*, Birds New Zealand, with generous financial support from Fruzio, have engaged WMIL to assist with designing and planning the scheme. WMIL is a Blenheim-based ecological consultancy whose staff all have strong links to Birds New Zealand, including being enthusiastic and active participants in previous Atlas projects and the Society's other national surveys and schemes. Members of the WMIL team also feature prominently in the list of the 'top 100' contributors for New Zealand and have had previous experience helping to deliver GWRC's regional bird monitoring scheme, and DOC's nationwide 'Tier 1' bird monitoring scheme.

Over the next 14 months, WMIL will work with Birds New Zealand to finalise the design of the *NBMS* with the aim of having it ready for launch at the Society's 80th Anniversary New Zealand Birds conference in June 2019. This will involve engaging with agencies including DOC, Landcare Research and regional councils to create a scientifically-robust survey design, and liaising with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (US), to design data-capture and storage infrastructure linked to the New Zealand database. Most importantly, WMIL will also be engaging with Birds New Zealand members either directly, or via Regional Representatives, Birds New Zealand Council or Scientific Committee, to ensure that the resulting scheme meets the needs and expectations of the Society's members, and all those interested in birdwatching, and bird conservation in New Zealand. For questions, comments or more info, contact: Nikki@wmil.co.nz

NIKKI McARTHUR

Records Appraisal Committee update

A total of 97 Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) was received by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) in 2017 and assessed between March 2016 and February 2018. This was a substantial increase on the 60 UBRs received in 2016. Sixty-nine (71%) of the 2017 UBRs were accepted. Notable records accepted included New Zealand's first Cox's Sandpiper. Forty-nine UBRs were received between 1 January and 1 May 2018, including a record of 2 Pacific Gulls on 25th February 2018 at Punakaiki, Buller, West Coast (UBR number 2018/19), which is currently pending a decision. A paper reporting on 139 RAC decisions from 2015-16 was published in *Notornis* during 2017: Miskelly, C.M.; Crossland, A.C.; Sagar, P.M.; Saville, I.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Bell, E.A. 2017. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee 2015-2016. *Notornis* 64: 57-67.

COLIN MISKELLY, RAC CONVENOR

Youth Camp organiser Lloyd Esler (waving) with participants. Photo by Oscar Thomas.

2018 Southland Youth Camp

During the first week of the April school holidays, 22 young birders were lucky enough to attend the 2018 Birds New Zealand Youth Camp in Southland. We met in Invercargill on the Monday night, and caught the ferry to Stewart Island next morning, where we assisted with some local projects and enjoyed plenty of birding. My favourite day began with a visit to Ulva Island, where we split up into groups. We all saw Red-crowned Kakariki, Brown Creeper, South Island Robin, South Island Saddleback and Yellowhead; some also saw Yellow-crowned Kakariki. My personal highlight was seeing a Tokoeka or Southern Brown Kiwi. It was fantastic to see one during daylight as it walked clumsily out of the bushes and down the track. It also saved me having to search for them during the cold, wet evenings.

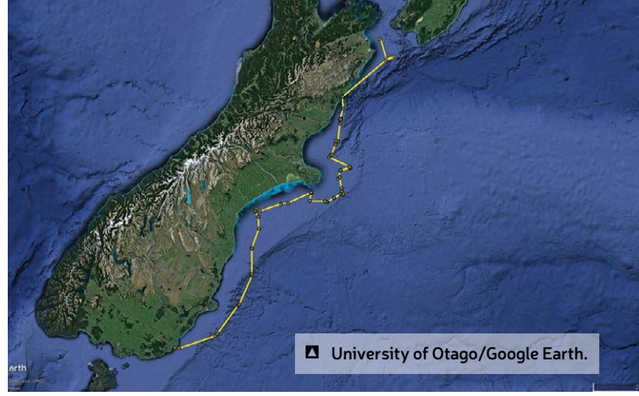
That afternoon there was a pelagic trip from Oban. We watched White-capped and Buller's Mollymawks, and Sooty Shearwaters soaring over the waves as we headed out. The most exciting bird of the day was the Snares Crested Penguin that we saw on Bench Island. Cape Petrels and a couple of Southern Royal Albatross settled on the water as we went out further. Common Diving Petrels, a Northern Giant Petrel, and a couple of Hutton's Shearwaters and Westland Petrels also flew past. On the way back, we added two Yellow-eyed Penguins to our tally.

While waiting for the ferry back to Bluff, we were surprised to find a Cook's Petrel sheltering in a pile of pallets on the wharf. Ian Southey carefully settled the bird back on the water. After the ferry, we drove to Borland Lodge, making a few stops, including at Tip Lagoon. Upon arriving, we heard that George had spotted a possible Australian Chestnut-breasted Shelduck just down the road. We all headed back and sure enough, that's what it was! We spent the rest of the day either observing the shelduck or on a bush walk. After dinner, there was a talk about *eBird* by George and Michael.

Next day, we drove to Milford Sound. After some short stops, we reached Monkey Creek where we had fantastic views of a Blue Duck pair and a group of Kea. At Homer Tunnel, I was excited to look for Rock Wren again after missing them there during the 2017 Conference. We spent about an hour in the rain and cold looking and listening, but we did not see any. After this disappointment, we stopped at Milford Sound, where we saw a White Heron standing on a campervan roof. The campervan drove slowly away with the heron still perched on it. The heron finally flew off, only to perch on another parked car. We made two stops on the way to Dunedin airport on our final day, at Rakatu Wetlands where we had nice views of a couple of Fernbirds, and at Nugget Point where we saw, among others, a Southern Royal Albatross and a Northern Giant Petrel. From there, we continued on to the airport where we said our goodbyes.

Thank you to everyone who made the camp possible – the other incredible Young Birders and the amazing adult leaders, especially Lloyd Esler for organising the whole thing. The Youth Camps are always brilliant, and this was certainly no exception, despite some terrible weather!

ELEANOR GUNBY



University of Otago/Google Earth.

Hoiho at-sea movements mapped

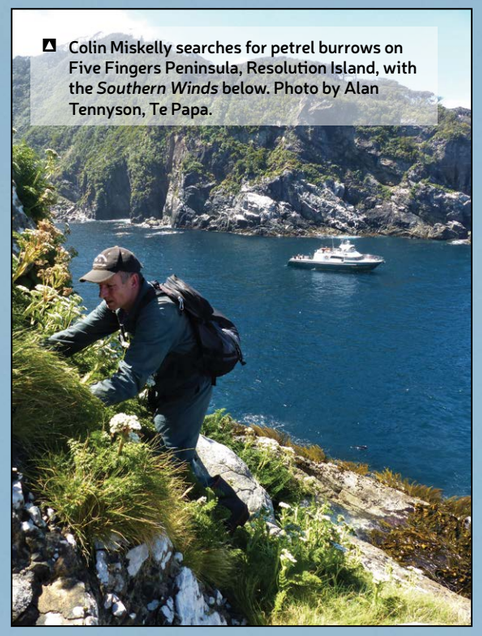
The first satellite tracking of a Hoiho or Yellow-eyed Penguin juvenile has mapped the at-sea movements of one bird which swam 954 km from the Catlins coast to Cook Strait during March *(see map above)*. The tracking was part of a research project being conducted by University of Otago researchers looking into the at-sea movements of this seasons' Hoiho chicks in the hope of understanding what is leading to dramatically declining survival rates for this endangered endemic species. Each of the 23 Hoiho juveniles in the study is equipped with a satellite tag that transmits messages to overhead satellites to record the penguin's position on the sea's surface. "We've seen a large decline in the number of young birds surviving to adulthood, and as a result the number of recruits has halved over a 70-year period," says Zoology PhD candidate Mel Young. Recent research by the University of Otago indicates a decline in both juvenile survival (to 20%) and recruitment to breed (to 12%). "The current recruitment rate is unsustainable. Breeding adults need to be replaced. We need to find out which factors are shaping juvenile survival of Hoiho at this critical life stage," she says.

Grants and donations from Birds New Zealand, China Travel Services, Antarctic Research Trust, Save the Otago Peninsula Society, and Forest and Bird contributed to funding the purchase of 20 satellite tags for this season's research, with last season's pilot study being funded by the Department of Conservation.

Fifteen of the 23 penguins were tracked moving away from the areas where they hatched, heading north up the east coast of the South Island. University of Otago Zoology researcher Dr Thomas Mattern says the study will provide crucial data to assist in pinpointing the factors leading to early deaths in Hoiho. "Survival rates in the first year of a Hoiho's life are very low. It is vital to determine where they go during that period in order to do what we can to improve their chances. There is quite some urgency, as we are facing the loss of the species from the New Zealand mainland in the next few decades," says Mattern. "We can use the data from satellite tracking to improve our understanding of important foraging areas and influence the management of regional threats to juvenile survival at these locations. Stopping the decline of Yellow-eyed Penguins relies on evidence-based decision-making, and the University of Otago is doing its part to gather that evidence."

Young Birders in the field. Photo by Charlotte Thomas.

Sooty Shearwater photo by Matthias Dehling /New Zealand Birds Online.



Colin Miskelly searches for petrel burrows on Five Fingers Peninsula, Resolution Island, with the *Southern Winds* below. Photo by Alan Tennyson, Te Papa.

Antarctic Prion photo by Cyril Vathelet /New Zealand Birds Online.

Adult Broad-billed Prion photo by Colin Miskelly/ New Zealand Birds Online.

Adult broad-billed Prion, Anchor Island, November 2016. Photo by Jean-Claude Stahl, Te Papa.

Broad-billed Prion chick, Dusky Sound, November 2016. Photo by Colin Miskelly, Te Papa.

Sooty Shearwater chick photo by Colin Miskelly/ New Zealand Birds Online.

Seabirds of southern Fiordland

By Colin Miskelly

Have you ever wondered which New Zealand bird species was the first to be given a published scientific name? The unlikely answer is the Broad-billed Prion, named as '*Procellaria vittata*' by 22-year-old Georg Forster in 1777. The second species was the Little Penguin (as '*Aptenodytes minor*') named by Georg's father, Reinhold Forster, four years later.

The two Forsters accompanied Captain James Cook as naturalists on his second visit to New Zealand in 1773-74. Their first landfall was Dusky Sound (Tamatea) in southern Fiordland, which the officers and crew of the *Resolution* explored for six weeks during March-May 1773. The prion and the penguin were among about three dozen bird species that they observed, shot, painted, described and ate during their stay.

Both species were observed in Dusky Sound in November 2016 by a team of scientists from Te Papa, that included Alan Tennyson, Jean-Claude Stahl and myself. We were based aboard the Department of Conservation vessel *Southern Winds* and assisted by local DOC staff. Searching for burrow-nesting petrels (including prions) was a major focus of our visit, and our findings were a stark contrast to what Cook and his entourage had found 243 years earlier.

The Forsters had noticed flocks of prions, which they called "grey eggbirds", "silvery petrels", "blackbanded petrels" and "blue petrils" over the open ocean as they sailed eastwards towards New Zealand from Cape Town, South Africa. It is likely that they confused several similar prion species during their voyage, but it is currently accepted that Georg Forster's 1777 description refers to the birds that they encountered in vast flocks on and around Anchor Island and the Seal Islands in Dusky Sound.

Broad-billed Prions lay their eggs in burrows or rock crevices in August or September, and most chicks fledge by Christmas.

The Forsters were clearly mistaken when they referred to *"innumerable young & old birds…which live in the above-mentioned holes & are fed there by their parents"*. There could not have been prion chicks present in April, but adult broad-billed prions are known to return to their breeding colonies at that time of year. There is a hint that the Forsters were hearing chicks of other petrels nesting alongside the prions. When naturalist John Latham summarised their observations in 1785, he described, *"On the north-west part of Anchor Isle [prions were] found in immense numbers, among other species; some on the wing, and others in woods, in holes in the ground close to one another"*.

Latham's cryptic reference to 'among other species' is the only clue that there may have been other petrels nesting in burrows among the prions in Dusky Sound in 1773. We found two other species there in large numbers in November 2016 – Sooty Shearwaters and Mottled Petrels – both of which have downy chicks in April. Why did the Forsters fail to mention them?

Broad-billed Prions were present in vast numbers in Dusky Sound in 1773, but had apparently gone 120-130 years later, when Richard Henry failed to find any during his 14 years living in Dusky Sound. *"Captain Cook mentions great numbers of blue petrels on Anchor Island in April, but I never saw one there, and thought it might be for want of going at the right time. So last April [1900] I had a good cruise round there at the same place and date, but there was no sign of them"*. A survey by Kim Morrison in 1984 also failed to find prions, but he did find Sooty Shearwaters breeding on the Seal Islands and Petrel Islands (near Anchor Island), and Mottled Petrels further up Dusky Sound on Front Island.

Our survey of 59 islands in Dusky Sound was timed to maximise our chances of finding all three species, as Broad-billed Prions have large downy chicks in November, while Sooty Shearwaters and Mottled Petrels are courting and preparing their burrows for laying.

We were delighted to find Broad-billed Prions breeding on two small islets among the Seal Islands, plus we found feathers likely to be of prions on several other islands. As the Forsters never actually saw a Broad-billed Prion chick in 1773, the six chicks that we handled (plus two old eggs) are the first confirmed breeding records for Broad-billed Prion in Dusky Sound (the type locality).

The most likely cause for the near-extinction of Broad-billed Prions in Dusky Sound is predation by rats (initially), followed by stoats. Fortunately, all the smaller islands in Dusky Sound have now been cleared of these introduced predators, giving many vulnerable birds and insects an opportunity to recover.

In addition to the prions, we found Sooty Shearwaters breeding on 35 islands, with a minimum estimated population of 21,500 pairs, and Mottled Petrels on 12 islands (5,500 pairs). Surely both species were present in good numbers when the Forsters visited Dusky Sound?

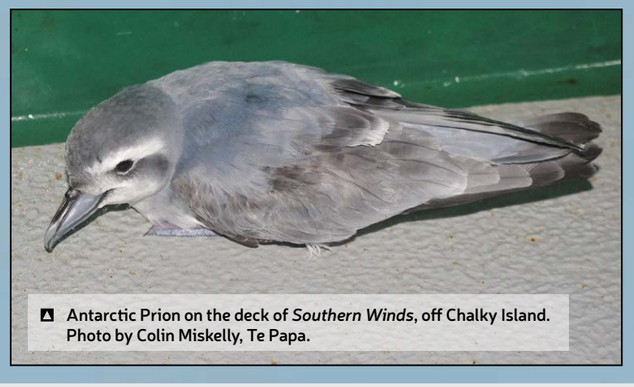
All these petrel species visit their colonies at night and (unlike us) the Forsters did not have the opportunity or equipment to undertake night surveys. Also, Weka were much more numerous and widespread in Dusky Sound in 1773 than they are now. It is likely that petrels breeding on islands with Weka chose sites well protected by rocks and tree roots, making it difficult for Weka (and naturalists) to access nest chambers. Reinhold Forster referred to hearing *"a noise of young birds in holes under huge stones & between rocks, but could get none of them"*, and Captain Cook himself described the petrels as being *"under the roots of trees and in the creveses of rocks where there was no getting at them and where we supposed their young ones were"*. The prions were the only petrels that they identified flying about at night and leaving at dawn, but it is likely that these two larger petrel species were breeding among them.

While we answered several questions about Dusky Sound petrels, there is at least one big mystery remaining. One of the survey techniques that we used was shining spotlights over islands at night (from the boat), to see what species of petrels were flying over them. Many species of petrels (including all the Dusky Sound species) are attracted to bright lights, and this technique was used to rapidly assess whether an island held an active colony or was empty habitat. To our great surprise, we saw tiny Grey-backed Storm Petrels in the spotlight beam at two sites, including at least two birds (seen simultaneously multiple times) alongside Oke Island in Wet Jacket Arm. This site is completely

Grey-backed Storm Petrel photo by Mike Ashbee/ New Zealand Birds Online.

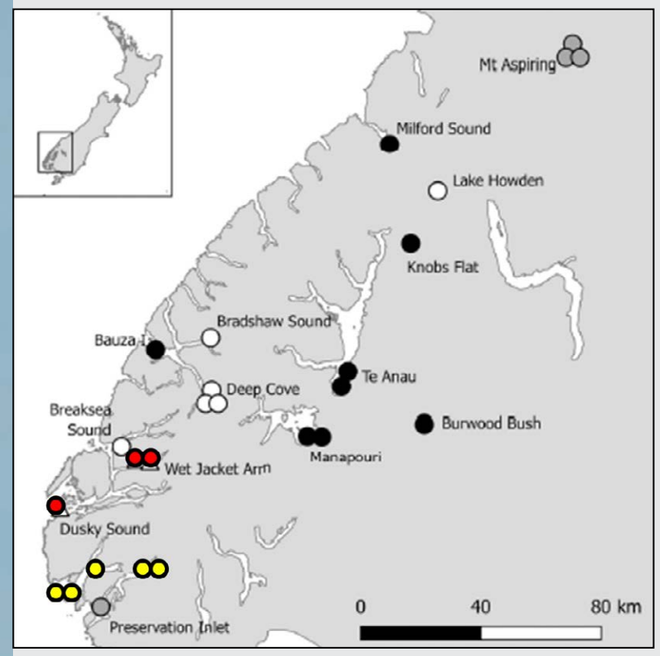
Mottled Petrel adult and hatchling (The Snares). Photo by Alan Tennyson/New Zealand Birds Online.

Grey-backed Storm Petrel adult photo by Colin Miskelly/New Zealand Birds Online.

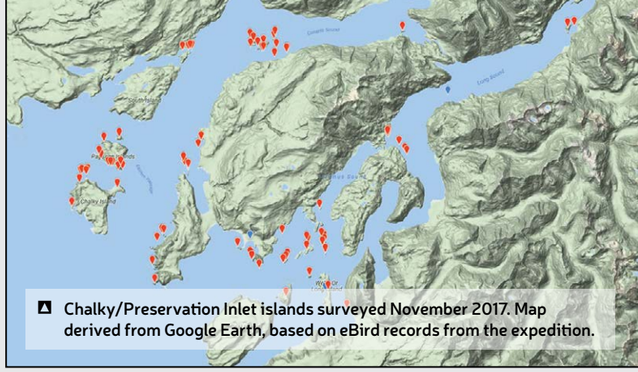


Antarctic Prion on the deck of *Southern Winds*, off Chalky Island. Photo by Colin Miskelly, Te Papa.

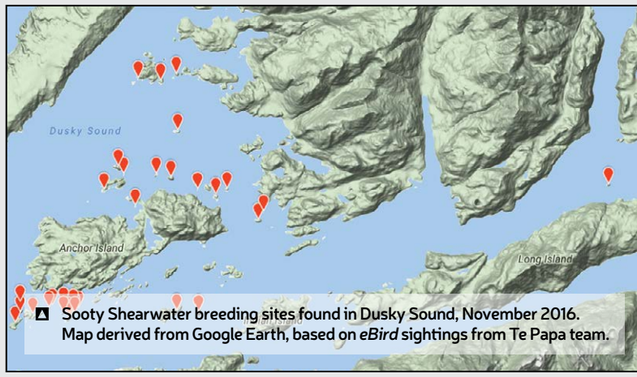
Broad-billed Prion (left) and Antarctic Prion (right), Chalky Inlet, November 2017. Photo by Colin Miskelly, Te Papa



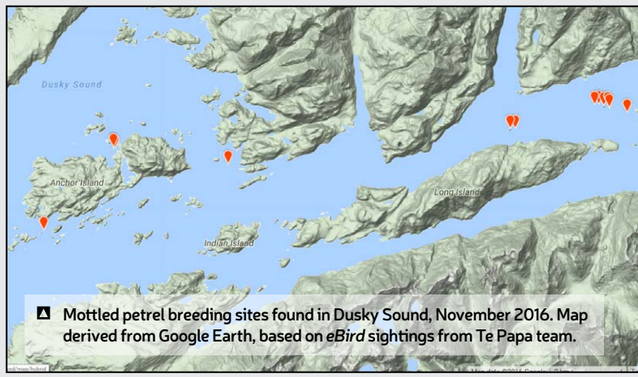
Grey-backed Storm Petrel records from Fiordland. Yellow = Nov 2017; red = Nov 2016; white = Aug-Nov records; black = Feb to April records including 2 known fledglings; grey = undated records. Base map from *Notornis* volume 64 (p. 112), reproduced with permission of the editor [article title 'Do grey-backed storm petrels breed in Fiordland?].



Chalky/Preservation Inlet islands surveyed November 2017. Map derived from Google Earth, based on eBird records from the expedition.



Sooty Shearwater breeding sites found in Dusky Sound, November 2016. Map derived from Google Earth, based on *eBird* sightings from Te Papa team.



Mottled petrel breeding sites found in Dusky Sound, November 2016. Map derived from Google Earth, based on *eBird* sightings from Te Papa team.

surrounded by mountains and is a tortuous 27 km from the open sea.

There is a long history of Grey-backed Storm Petrels turning up in odd places throughout Fiordland, when other petrel species rarely do so. As the nearest known breeding sites for this cryptic little seabird are on the Chatham Islands, Auckland Islands and Antipodes Island, seabird biologists have long wondered whether Grey-backed Storm Petrels might breed somewhere in Fiordland. Our observations of at least three birds in calm conditions (i.e. not storm-driven) so far from their normal open ocean habitat strongly suggest a local breeding site.

Year Two - even further south

Most tourists' impressions of coastal Fiordland are based on their experiences from cruises on Milford Sound (Piopiotahi) or Doubtful Sound (Pātea). These two sounds are many hours of steaming north of where Alan Tennyson and I ended up in November 2017, when we joined a Department of Conservation-led survey of seabird colonies in remote Chalky Inlet and Preservation Inlet in southern Fiordland. We boarded the DOC vessel *Southern Winds* at Deep Cove in Doubtful Sound, and it was 6.5 hours later before the team landed on Cemetery Island in Preservation Inlet – an ironic 'start' to the survey.

The four major fjords of southern Fiordland (from Breaksea Sound south) hold hundreds of islands, and the superb weather and sea conditions in late November allowed the team to land on an astonishing 77 islands and achieve more than expected. The survey was to locate colonies of burrow-nesting petrels, building on the highly successful Te Papa survey completed in Dusky Sound the previous November. The 2016 survey resulted in 49 colonies of three petrel species being found on 44 islands, with 42 of these colonies being previously unknown or unreported.

The larger islands in southern Fiordland are important sites for many rare and threatened land birds, such as Kākāpo, Little Spotted Kiwi, Tieke/South Island Saddleback, Mohua, and Kakaruwai/South Island Robin, but it was the smaller islands that we focussed on for both the 2016 and 2017 surveys. Petrels do all their foraging at sea and can breed at densities of three or more burrows per square metre, and so even tiny islets and stacks can hold large populations.

The three petrel species known from Fiordland (Sooty Shearwater, Mottled Petrel and Broad-billed Prion) have overlapping breeding seasons, with November being the best month to find all three species present at the same time. Our survey technique was to locate and count burrows on as many islands as possible, and to estimate the number of burrows on each island.

The next challenge was to identify which species had made or was occupying the burrows we found, with the added complication that more than one species is often present on the same island.

Sometimes an adult or chick might be within reach from a burrow entrance, but more often we had to identify the burrow occupants from feathers, skeletal remains, or failed eggs from previous seasons that had been dug out of burrows. Our task was aided by plucking sites left by predatory New Zealand Falcons, with these falcons and their feeding sites being found on many of the islands.

If we were unable to find birds, feathers, bones, or eggs, the petrel species present could usually be determined by characteristics of their burrows, including entrance diameter, location on the island, and the vegetation that they nested under or among. By the end of the week-long survey, we had landed on 77 islands and had found 50 petrel colonies, 33 of which were previously unknown. All the colonies were of the three petrel species known to breed in Fiordland, but we also encountered three additional species at night.

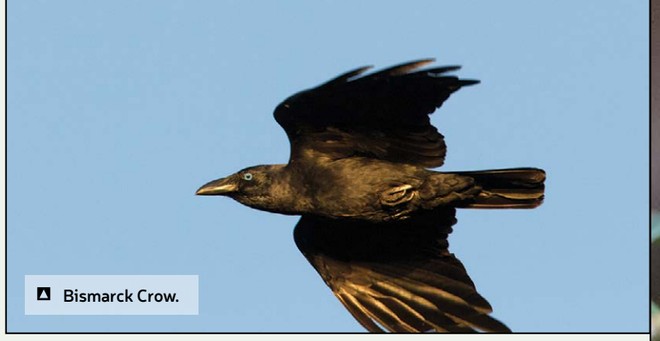
Spot-lighting is a recognised survey technique for seabirds, and we undertook standardised surveys from the boat at five different overnight anchorages. Grey-backed Storm Petrels were seen at three sites, with at least two individuals (and probably more) at two of the sites. One Grey-backed Storm Petrel was captured during a spot-lighting session and was found to have a bare brood patch. Petrels normally have dense down under their belly feathers. However, they shed a large patch of this down when breeding, to allow effective transfer of body-warmth to their single enormous egg when incubating. The bare brood patch on this storm petrel was an indicator that it had a nest nearby – but we still don't know where.

Two Common Diving Petrels were caught off the coast of Chalky Island, but a bigger seabird surprise was that the first prion we caught there was not the species we expected. We were anchored within a few hundred metres of a Broad-billed Prion colony, but the first prion captured was an Antarctic Prion. The nearest known colony for this species is on the subantarctic Auckland Islands, 500 km to the south. The bird had a downy brood patch, and so was most likely a young bird not yet in breeding condition.

With many thanks to Colin Bishop (DOC) for organising the 2017 survey, *Southern Winds* crew members Chris Pascoe, Pete Young and Pete Kirkman for getting us there and back safely and comfortably (and for skilfully getting us on and off so many islands), and Colin Bishop, Graeme Taylor, Max Smart, Hannah Edmonds and Terry Greene (DOC), Riki Parata (Kāi Tahu), and Lawrie Mead for assisting with the field work on and off the boat.

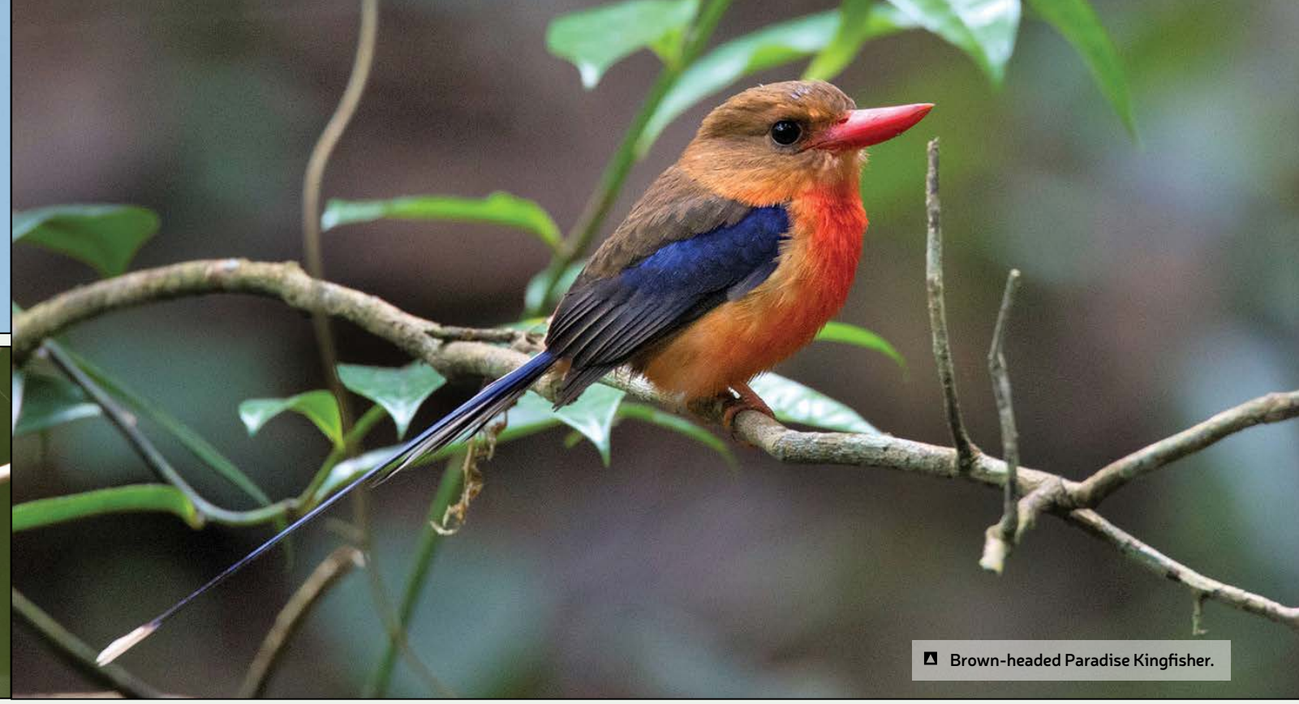
Colin Miskelly is Curator Vertebrates at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand and a member of the Birds New Zealand Council.

Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise (male) or Kumul is the national bird of Papua New Guinea. Photo by Markus Lilje.



Bismarck Crow.

Black Sunbird (male).



Brown-headed Paradise Kingfisher.

Pheasant Pigeon.

Golden Monarch (male).

Stout-billed Cuckooshrike.

Papua New Guinea – Birds-of-Paradise and Paradise Kingfishers

Article by Michael Szabo. Photographs by Lars Petersson.

A brief stop in New Britain at the end of Heritage Expeditions' South-West Pacific Odyssey in April 2017 (see Issue 14, June 2017) was a chance to see some of Papua New Guinea's endemic species before I flew back to New Zealand. As *Spirit of Enderby* arrived and anchored off Rabaul, a majestic pair of Blyth's Hornbills and an endemic Bismarck Crow flew over the coast. Once ashore, a group of us checked the fenced grounds of a local resort, where we saw an iridescent male Black Sunbird hovering by the yellow flowers of a Coconut palm and a beautiful pair of endemic green and orange Knob-billed Fruit Doves perching on a palm frond. Even the short drive to the airport here produced a sighting of the endemic New Britain Friarbird flying over the road.

After the flight to Port Moresby, I met Daniel Wakra, an expert birdwatching guide who had been recommended to me by Erik Forsyth of Rockjumper Tours, and we drove to the nearby Pacific Adventist University. At this leafy fenced campus, Daniel took me to see a handsome Fawn-breasted Bowerbird by its bower, which was adorned with bright green items, a nearby pair of Black-backed Butcherbirds in a tall tree, and a well-camouflaged Papuan Frogmouth that was snoozing below them. In the adjacent cultivated area, he pointed out a flock of endemic Grey-headed Mannikins and we listened to the rich melodic whistling of an endemic Brown Oriole. Another highlight was a walk around some ponds where we saw three whistling duck species: Spotted, Wandering and Plumed, plus several elegant Pied Herons, and a hulking Pheasant Coucal that we flushed from the grass. We drove back to Port Moresby as the sun started to set, pleased with our afternoon tally of 35 species.

Daniel picked me up at my accommodation at 5.15am the next morning and we drove straight to Varirata National Park, arriving shortly after dawn at 6am. PNG's first national park, Varirata is 40 kilometres north-east of Port Moresby via Sogeri Road, which runs along the scenic Laloki River Gorge. Its varied habitats make it an ideal birdwatching destination near the capital. The park sits between 580 and 760 metres above sea level, comprises montane rainforest, gallery forest and eucalyptus savanna, and protects the western end of the Sogeri Plateau, across to the Astrolabe Mountains. Papua New Guinea has 743 bird species, including eight endemic bird families and 114 endemic bird species. With so many species of ratite, rail, parrot, cuckoo, pigeon, kingfisher, robin, honeyeater and fantail, it has strong avian affinities with Australia and New Zealand. Varirata itself has a checklist of 193 bird species.

We stopped at the park gate, where our first sighting was the endemic Hooded Pitohui, a fascinating bird notable for having toxic compounds in its feathers and skin, which are thought to be derived from their diet, and that may function to deter predators and protect the bird from parasites. From here we drove up the road to a forest track that leads to a Kumul or Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise lek display site, where some males were calling. This is, Daniel explained, PNG's national bird. We crouched down to watch four spectacular large males hopping around on branches at mid-forest height. My eyes were immediately drawn to their golden-crowned heads and iridescent green faces as they gave their chuckling crow-like calls, and they started to ruffle-up their long rufous flank feathers. With the breeding season still a few weeks away, there were no females at the lek, so the males did not get beyond a warm-up rehearsal.

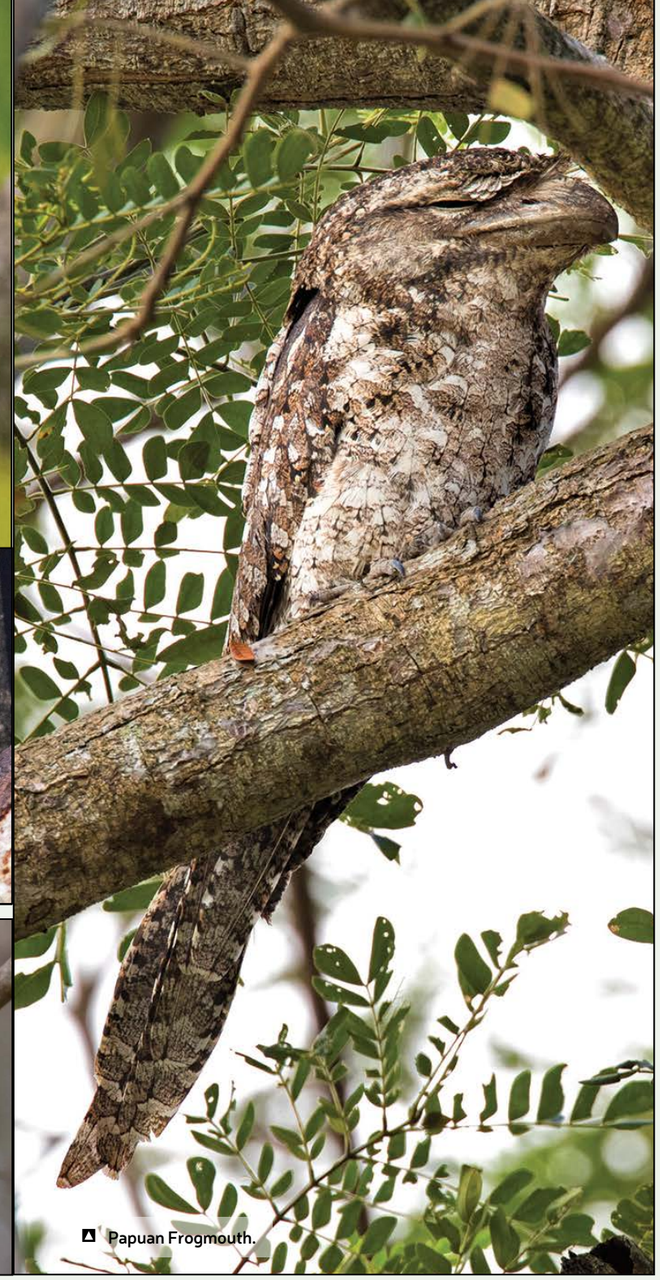
The forest around us was alive with bird calls. From here we continued on foot about 100 metres, stopping to watch a vivid red and green endemic Papuan King Parrot fly in and perch near an endemic Rufous-bellied bellied Kookaburra. We found Several female Kumuls moving around in another tree, that were less colourful than the male Kumuls we'd seen back at the lek. Daniel stopped again for a pair of endemic Stout-billed Cuckooshrikes. The male was bluish-grey with a black facial mask, which reminded me of a Kokako, but without wattles. A little further on, we saw a sublime Trumpet Manucode in a tall eucalypt, a long-legged Bird-of-Paradise with black feathers that glisten iridescent blue and purple. Daniel's expertise was apparent. He was able to identify every species from its call. The next call we heard was Yellow-billed Kingfisher, he said. Sure enough, a few seconds later, he located a pair perched nearby.

From here we drove to the main picnic area and walked along a track to a stream where three endemic Black-billed Brush Turkeys were calling. We had got about 50 metres up a ridge track, when Daniel motioned for me to sit down on a log. He called and almost immediately, a sublime Pheasant Pigeon flew onto the track ahead. Then, as it turned, it cocked its big tail, making it seem more pheasant than pigeon. I was almost holding my breath as it walked closer to us, when a blue endemic Chestnut-backed Jewel-Babbler briefly walked on and off the track near the Pheasant Pigeon.

After several minutes, the Pheasant Pigeon flew away and we continued up the track, where we soon found more endemics. Daniel stopped to point out each species: a beautiful green songbird with a decurved bill was Dwarf Honeyeater, a dainty

Fawn-breasted Bowerbird.

Barred Owlet-nightjar.



Papuan Frogmouth.

Orange-bellied Fruit Dove.

Barred Owlet-nightjar.

Yellow-billed Kingfisher.

Daniel Wakra photo by Steve Wood.

Pink-spotted Fruit Dove.

Rufous-bellied Kookaburra.

Black-backed Butcherbird.

songbird fanning its tail was Chestnut-bellied Fantail, and a glossy black songbird was Black Berrypecker. Then a quizzical face peered at us from a tree hole a few metres away. Daniel gently scratched the tree with a stick and, as-if-by-magic, the bird slowly stood up, revealing it to be the endemic Barred Owlet-nightjar.

After this we walked back to the stream and along a track next to some gallery forest, where we heard some female Kumuls calling. Daniel soon found a female endemic Growling Riflebird among them. While we watched it, a pair of White-faced Robins flew in and perched on a nearby vine. Then a glossy black songbird appeared overhead, which Daniel recognised as a male endemic Pygmy Drongo. It was especially pleasing to see this species, which is now recognised as a sister species to Fiji's Silktails, with which it forms a sister clade to the fantails. A short distance further along, Daniel found a dazzling male endemic Golden Monarch perched at mid-forest level. As we walked back along the same track, Daniel pointed out a pair of endemic Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeons and three endemic Rufescent Imperial Pigeons feeding in a fruiting tree.

We ate our picnic lunch during a brief heavy shower. The sky soon cleared and a pair of Brahminy Kites flew over. After they passed, we saw a flock of Orange Fruit Doves, Pink-spotted Fruit Doves and Dwarf Fruit Doves fly in to feed on berries growing on a tree near the covered picnic table. A short walk along the next track produced encounters with a sublime endemic Brown-headed Paradise Kingfisher and two tiny Rusty Mouse-warblers.

Then Daniel said it was time to check the open savanna eucalypt woodland habitat below the park gate. From the picnic area we drove downhill until we reached an area of large eucalypts, tussock-like grasses, ferns, and termite mounds, which reminded me of Australia. At our first stop here, Daniel spied a Lemon-bellied Flycatcher and a noisy party of endemic Bare-faced Crows that flew over and landed in a tall tree nearby. We could see several immature birds with pink bills and facial skin, blue eyes, and pale grey-brown plumage. After a few minutes, they became agitated and flew away, accompanied by two dark adult birds. As we turned around we noticed a dark morph Variable Goshawk perched in another tree, which is probably what spooked the crows.

At another stop, while watching more female Kumuls, a male endemic Crinkle-collared Manucode came into view, giving us a chance to see this striking Bird-of-Paradise's black feathers glinting with iridescent blues and purples. Then Daniel directed me to look at a tree with panicles of red flowers with a spectacular endemic Western Black-capped Lory feeding on it, and another one nearby that had a Greater-streaked Lory feeding on it. Then, when we reached the junction with Sogeri Road, we paused to admire a Blue-winged Kookaburra perched above the Laloki River.

At the next lookout, Daniel pointed out two endemic Hooded Butcherbirds in a eucalypt and soon spotted a Red-cheeked Parrot and a Blue-collared Parrot perched on top of two tall trees below us. As we admired the parrots, a vocal flock of Rainbow Bee-Eaters flew over, and then an endemic Great Cuckoo Dove flew right past us, which was a great way to end the afternoon.

The drive back to Port Moresby was filled with lively conversation. Our tally for the day was 70 species, 31 of which were New Guinea endemics, which made a total of 117 species seen over two days at all the sites that I visited, 35 of which were endemics. Daniel explained that you can use Port Moresby as a base to visit several other local birdwatching sites, such as Veimauri, Brown River, Vanapa River, Kanosia Lagoon, Hisiu Lagoon and Cape Suckling, and to fly to the central highlands, a region with even more endemic species that he also knows very well. If you plan to visit PNG and want to go birdwatching there outside the fenced grounds of a private lodge, you will need a guide. I can recommend Daniel Wakra, who can be contacted for birdwatching guiding via Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/daniel.wakra.7) or email: danielwakra@yahoo.com

Lars Petersson's bird photography website:
http://www.larsfoto.se/en/

North Island Robin eats fungus

Jacqui Geux observed and photographed an unbanded female North Island Robin feeding on a white fungus (*Pleurotus opuntiae*) growing on a decaying Cabbage Tree in original native forest at Matuku Link, West Auckland, on 6 January 2018 (*photo above left*). The bird was seen pecking small pieces from the edge of the fungus, which was quite serrated. John Sumich observed the same feeding behaviour at the same location the following day. Humans and other mammals consume many fungi species, such as mushrooms and truffles, for their nutritional value. Mushrooms typically have gills and rely on spores being dispersed by wind or water, while the truffle fungi, which have their fruiting bodies just below ground, at ground level, or sometimes with a short stipe, are thought to be dependant mainly on being eaten by vertebrates for their distant spore dispersal via defecated droppings.

On all continents, many terrestrial mammals act as dispersal agents of truffles, but what about in New Zealand, which has 170-200 truffle species, but had no terrestrial mammals prior to the arrival of humans? In an article in the Auckland Botanical Society Journal (Dec. 2014), Ross Beever and Teresa Lebel suggested that the many species among New Zealand's pre-human avifauna were attracted to feed on truffles, the colours of which often match the colours of fallen forest fruits. For example, the yellow of *Cortinarius perauranticus* matches the fruits of native passionfruit, and the red of *Leratiomyces erythrocephalus* matches fruits of Supplejack and Miro. Flightless and volant species included many forest floor omnivores, of which they list nine species of moa, Finch's Duck, Kea, Kakapo, snipe species and Weka. Kokako, Kereru and Tieke also often feed on the ground.

Beever and Lebel also note that observations of New Zealand birds eating fungi are rare and cite Medway (2000) describing a robin feeding on *Armillaria limonii*. Kereru have been seen eating Strawberry Fungus (*Cytarria spp*), and Kakapo are reported as feeding on fungi. On 7 August 2014, Jacqui Geux observed and photographed a North Island Robin extracting a truffle from the ground, beating it on a tree root and possibly eating some of it (*photo above right*). Our observations of a North Island Robin feeding on a tree fungus and a truffle can be added to the small list of recorded avian mycophagy in New Zealand.

JACQUI GEUX & JOHN SUMICH

Black morph Variable Oystercatchers produce pied morph chick

Otago member Janet Ledingham found an unusual Variable Oystercatcher (VOC) family trio on a beach at Aramoana in January and February 2018. The pied morph chick that she photographed with two black morph adults was at least six-weeks-old, as it had gained its juvenile feathers (*see photo above*). Janet wondered how this could occur and how common this was? VOC has black, intermediate and pied colour morphs. Baker et al. (*Notornis* 20: 330- 345(1973)) concluded from their study of inheritance patterns that the colour morphs could be explained by two autosomal genes (black is homozygous recessive; pied is homozygous dominant). If this is so, two black morph parents should always have black morph offspring, and this is what they observed in their field study. So, what has happened in the case of the chick that Janet found?

Similar VOC families have only been reported twice before. Baker et al. (1973) cite one unsubstantiated report by Buller (1888) of two pied morph chicks seen following two black morph adults. He also comments on a report from a Northland OSNZ field trip (1970) of two black morph VOCs with a brood of one black morph chick and one pied morph chick; Baker personally studied this pair and found that the black morph parents had tiny amounts of white near the vent and so were actually very black intermediate morph birds. Janet's observation could be explained if the birds accompanying the chicks were not the chicks' genetic parents. Alternatively, it may be explained by one or both black morph parents actually being very black intermediate morph birds (ie, with some white near the vent, which would be very hard to see in the field).

Nevertheless, it is surprising that the chick Janet saw was very pied, with some degree of the white shoulder tabs that are normally characteristic of South Island Pied Oystercatchers. Rowe (*Notornis* 58: 90-93(2011)) studied the offspring of black morph and intermediate morph parents at Kaikoura; he saw two chicks with very pied colouration that changed towards black/intermediate colour morph over two years. So, it is possible that the chick that Janet saw may change to darker plumage as it gets older. Since pairs of VOCs usually maintain a territory on a stretch of beach for several years, we may be able to follow the breeding of this pair again next year.

MARY THOMPSON & JANET LEDINGHAM

The Great Hihi Sperm Race

In March, University of Otago researcher and Birds New Zealand Council member Dr Helen Taylor set up an innovative way to raise funds for the conservation of the vulnerable Hihi or Stitchbird. She created a website called *The Great Hihi Sperm Race* where people could bet on which male Hihi has the fastest swimming sperm out of 128 males from four different populations. Once widespread, Hihi numbers declined after humans arrived, until they were reduced to a single population on Hauturu (Little Barrier Island) by the 1880s. Since then, the Department of Conservation has established six new populations on predator-free offshore islands and in fenced sanctuaries. Dr Taylor's research looks at small bird populations and the effects of mating between relatives, including on male fertility.

One of the problems facing Hihi is a lack of genetic diversity, which is why she wanted to research the quality of Hihi sperm, including how fast they swim. Her research also looks at abnormalities that may affect the sperm's ability to fertilise. After collecting Hihi semen, she looks at sperm under a microscope using a mobile lab created for use on-site in remote locations, including measuring sperm swimming speed. Betting was open until 22 April and raised over $11,000 for Hihi conservation, with bets placed from 17 countries. The winning male Hihi was CP11870 from Tiritiri Matangi Island. Eleven people from NZ, Australia, Britain, Netherlands and USA picked the winner, and received prizes donated by sponsors 360 Discovery, Bushy Park Sanctuary, Hihi Wines, Rotokare Scenic Reserve, Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, Tumbleweed Tees, University of Otago Department of Anatomy and Zealandia Ecosanctuary. For more info see: https://www.hihispermrace.nz/

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

FAR NORTH

Birds recorded flocking in autumn included NZ Dotterel at Waitangi Marae, and White-fronted Tern and Banded Dotterel at various local beaches and offshore rocks. A beach patrol in early May counted groups of 50-100 Southern Black-backed Gulls (mostly juveniles), with a day total of 750+ on Ninety Mile Beach, surpassing the previous record count of 550. Of note also was a beach-wrecked Antarctic Prion, one of a number found on our beaches in recent months. Our count of beach-wrecked Little Penguins was also higher, and we are still finding them, though not in the numbers seen earlier in the season. Detlef Davies organised a pelagic trip from Whangaroa and saw Gould's Petrel and Wilson's Storm Petrel, and a knowledgeable observer reported 2 Black Kites west of Kaikohe.

Kevin Matthews was interviewed by RNZ after he and Bill Campbell surveyed parts of Warawara Forest and found considerable wild pig damage. Landcare surveyed there and found very few birds in 2016 (although a second Rifleman colony was found). A new survey is planned this year, so hopefully numbers will increase after all the work that's been done. As yet, I'm not aware of any discussion of pig control there. The *ebird* Global Big Day (5/5) didn't produce resounding numbers in our region, but we had respectable counts from a few observers. As a break from conference planning, I went to Tawharanui for my Big Day, where the Takahe were very obliging. Conference planning has been taking up much of my time. About 150 people have registered to date. David Lawrie will be stepping down after 10 years as President and will be sorely missed. Rebranding is being presented and a stunning amount of research is being conducted around the country. The world of birding is changing with improved technology, social media, the Pest-Free New Zealand by 2050 initiative, and a rising level of interest in birds. 'May you live in interesting times', as the saying goes!

LES FEASEY

NORTHLAND

We recorded 19 Australasian Shoveler, 33 Pateke/Brown Teal, 31 Pied Stilt, 4 Spur-Winged Plover and numerous Mallard, Paradise Shelduck and White-faced Heron during our visit to Ngunguru WTP (2/4). Earlier that day, several Fernbirds were heard at the Ward's Ngunguru wetland, with one bird posing for photos. The April 5MBCs on Bream Head were completed in sunny conditions. On the lines at Te Whara/Peach Cove, there were more Bellbirds than in previous surveys, indicating a resident population seems to have established. Six Kaka and flocks of Silvereye were seen along the lines. North Island Robin and NZ Tomtit also made appearances, but no Whiteheads. On the Mt Lion Lines, Bellbird and Tui were in large numbers, but fewer Common Mynas were recorded than previously.

ANNE McCRACKEN

AUCKLAND

Cyclone Gita brought in a juvenile frigatebird that was found exhausted on Muriwai Beach in late February and taken into care for over a month by Bird Rescue at Green Bay. There was much discussion about which species it was and some concern whether it would survive in captivity. It was eventually identified as a juvenile Lesser Frigatebird and it looked to be in good health when it was released at Muriwai gannet colony (3/4).

Little Penguins suffered high mortality this summer with many found dead on east and west coast beaches. Starvation was the common cause of death. Our Pakiri Beach Patrol (6/5) recorded 79 birds of 11 species, including 36 Little Penguins, 7 Antarctic Prions, 6 Fairy Prions, 5 Cook's Petrels, 4 Fluttering Shearwaters and a White-capped Albatross. Live birds included 32 Variable Oystercatchers, 52 Northern NZ Dotterels and 14 NZ Pipits. The Anzac Day South Kaipara Lakes Census and NZ Dabchick Survey in association with South Kaipara Landcare was very well attended with 46 volunteers plus 7 children from Waioneke School. Highlights included 32 NZ Dabchick, 1 Australasian Little Grebe, 3 Australasian Bittern, 21 Australasian Shoveller, 80 Grey Teal, 7 NZ Scaup and 1 Brown Teal. Thanks to Denise Poyner for her excellent organisation.

Birds New Zealand and Auckland Council Biodiversity hosted the NZ Dotterel Forum at Orewa (5/4), which was a great opportunity for dotterel minders to share knowledge. During March, Northern NZ Dotterel post-breeding flock counts were: 105/Papakanui Spit, 91/Big Sand Island, 185/Omaha, 198/Mangawhai. The Mangawhai total was 33% less than the 300 birds found there in 2016. This is cause for concern with factors possibly including loss of breeding habitat to encroaching vegetation, predation by Red-billed Gulls (there is a breeding colony of 350 gulls on the spit compared to 30 in 2008), and supermoon high tides reducing productivity at low lying sites such as Te Arai and Poutawa Stream, which contribute to the Mangawhai flock.

Auckland members helped with our Goodbye to the Godwits event at Ambury Park (3/3) and a guided walk (18/3). Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots were in breeding plumage for both events, with guided walk highlights including circa 500 Wrybill, 109 Royal Spoonbills and 2 Whimbrels. Other records have included Spotless Crakes at Tuff Crater in Northcote (3/4), Spotless Crakes (heard) at Waiatarua Reserve in Remuera (31/3), a NZ Dabchick at Western Springs (30/3), the first there since 2004, and 2 NZ Dabchicks on Lake Pupuke (2/5), also the first there since 2004. These sightings may signify an expansion in the range of NZ Dabchick.

IAN McLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

It's been a quiet few months with a few highlights, but not for the dedicated beach patrollers with very light tallies. In a bigger haul on 19/4 after one of the many storms were 4 Little Penguins, a species seldom seen in recent years. Weka at Kawakawa Bay were surveyed again but are still in low numbers and restricted to the coastal strip, especially near the houses. A poor fruiting season in the Hunua Ranges means there were few sightings of Kokako this year, the birds usually being heard well down in the valleys away from the track. An internet report of a NZ Falcon seen at Pukekohe High School was a surprise, but a pair has recently been reported as being regular in the protected Kokako area in the Hunua Ranges, so we hope they will become more conspicuous in future.

Tony Habraken has been working on White-fronted Terns in the Firth of Thames that he banded as chicks many years ago by haunting local flocks and reading the metal bands through a 'scope. He reports finding a number of banded birds and a bonus Common Tern in breeding plumage. Summer birding at Miranda has been good with a large flock of 129 Pacific Golden Plover, mainly first year birds; 14 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers was also a good tally. Rarities included a Grey Plover, an Eastern Curlew and a Little Whimbrel. While catching up on gossip at the centre on 28/4, Keith Woodley, Gillian Vaughan and Ian Southey saw two White Herons and then two Australasian Bitterns fly past, so the place is living up to its reputation while Kidd's has been quieter.

IAN SOUTHEY

WAIKATO

Our first presenter was Gillian Vaughan, who spoke about the Moult Scheme. Changes in how this scheme is managed will hopefully breathe new life into this useful guide to the biology of species. At our March AGM, Bruce Postill was re-elected RR. The AGM reviewed Beach Patrols for 2017. Only 134 birds were found, which was the lowest total recorded since 2008. Taitua Arboretum is also patrolled on a monthly basis, with 43 species now recorded over 5 years. Ray Buckmaster spoke on 5MBCs. Unfortunately, Hamilton has little native forest left, so a 60-hectare area is being planted at Waiwhakereke Natural Heritage Park, which was the subject of our April meeting. A large number attended a talk by Kiri Wallace from University of Waikato. Kiri gave an overview of native forests and how to re-establish them. And in early April, 3 young Waikato members were privileged to attend the recent Youth Camp held on Stewart Island.

Notable sightings around coastal west Waikato included Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Arctic Skua, Grey Ternlet, Grey-tailed Tattler, Whimbrel and a White-capped Mollymawk off Awakino. It is hoped that Maungatautari Sanctuary Mountain will become a stronghold of Northern Brown Kiwi, with the planned release of 500 birds into the enclosure there over the next 5 years. Grey-faced Petrels have returned to Karioi Maunga to find their mates and locate a nesting site for when they return in July to lay eggs. The Coromandel population of NZ Dotterels increased by 116 birds this past season, slightly down on the previous 2 seasons, despite atrocious weather conditions over the whole season. Some members remarked that groups of Long-tailed Cuckoos were heard making different calls than those usually heard during the breeding season.

KEN WEDGWOOD

TARANAKI

At our first indoor meeting, it was reported

that Kaka had been seen at Te Henui cemetery in New Plymouth, Hawera, and Mokau, and juvenile Hihi and Shining Cuckoo seen at Rotokare. At the Cockerams', both cuckoo species have gone quiet, but 2 Moreporks were heard calling frequently. At Waiongana, 4 NZ Dotterel were reported, but big seas wiped out the first Pied Stilt nest there in many years and Banded Dotterel numbers have plummeted.

Exploring the new Mahood-Lowe Reserve, Tony Green saw Whitehead, NZ Tomtit, Sacred Kingfisher and Eastern Rosella, and Taranaki Regional Council recorded Rifleman and North Island Robin. The Messengers saw 3 Kereru drinking from their bird bath. Barry Hartley saw 4 NZ Dabchick at Inglewood and Opunake oxi-ponds, 8 Pied Shag at Awakino, a White Heron at Lake Ratapiko, 9 Royal Spoonbill and 3 Caspian Tern at Mokau, and 2 Crimson Rosella on upper Carrington Road. Ten Royal Spoonbill were briefly at Waiongana, and our field trip to Rerekapa Track recorded mainly Tui and North Island Robin.

There was a record turnout for April's indoor meeting where Ron Lambert informed us that David Medway's archive has been donated to Puke Ariki Museum. This contains his observations dating back to the 1950s, including bird bone recoveries from caving expeditions in the 1960s, and his correspondence with Dick Sibson, Brian Bell, Ron Scarlett and others. Once catalogued, this will be publicly available. A warm April day had a group of us wandering the tracks at Pukeiti where Tui and Bellbird were numerous and flocks of Silvereye flitted around.

PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

Five of us visited Kaweka Lakes, off the Hastings-Taihape Road, in February, which is a pleasant area with two lakes fringed by waterside vegetation. Birdlife on the lakes themselves was limited to a few ducks and a shag. The surrounding plantation was more productive with Tui, Bellbird, Whitehead and 3 Long-tailed Cuckoos, giving good overflight views.

A walk around Ahuriri Estuary in March turned-up few Bar-tailed Godwits and 14 Pacific Golden Plovers, which we observed in a range of plumages, from non-breeding to nearly full breeding. Up to 16 have been recorded at various times this summer, the highest count for several years. A breeding-plumage Common Tern found at the 'Waitangi' river mouth area caused a stir in April, as this species is uncommon in Hawke's Bay. Attempts to re-find this bird turned-up a second individual in different plumage.

Maybe this species occurs more often than we think, within flocks of the superficially similar White-fronted Tern. Two or three Australasian Bittern were seen regularly at the adjacent Horseshoe wetland.

IAN SMITH

WAIRARAPA

An overnight visit to Matiu/Somes Island in Wellington Harbour was an opportunity to explore this interesting site. Highlights were Red-crowned Parakeet seen at close-quarters, Long-tailed Cuckoo, Reef Heron and Southern Black-backed Gulls feeding on Taupata berries. Some members joined the Lake Wairarapa Wader Survey where the first Glossy Ibis in our region since 1992 was recorded. There were good numbers of Banded Dotterels along the eastern exposed shoreline, along with Pacific Golden Plovers and Bar-tailed Godwits. Absent, however, were the Sharp-tailed and Pectoral Sandpipers often recorded by this survey, probably due to unusually high lake levels that inundated their feeding grounds. Our group returned to the lake the next week, hoping to see the Glossy Ibis but we were not able to find it. We were rewarded by seeing an Australasian Bittern flush from the reeds. A White Heron was also seen at the lake edge in March and NZ Falcon frequently sighted in Pigeon Bush.

Our speaker was Todd Jenkinson, Captive Breeding and Restoration Manager for Pukaha-Mt Bruce, who gave an interesting talk on his work with Kokako, Kiwi, Rifleman, Takahe, Pateke, Whio and Shore Plover.
Our April trip to Pounui Lagoons and Paul's Bank (between the lagoons and Lake Onoke) produced a good number and variety of birds, including NZ Dabchick, shags (Little, Black, Pied and Little Black), Black-fronted Tern, Royal Spoonbill, Caspian Tern, Black-fronted Dotterel and Australasian Bittern. This trip was our first chance to put our excellent new scopes into practice (from the estate of Ian Sutherland/Whanganui Branch) and all agreed that they made a wonderful difference to our birding experience.

JOANNA McVEAGH

WHANGANUI AND MANAWATŪ

Like many other places in NZ, summer here was marked by substantially higher than normal temperatures and long dry spells broken only intermittently by periods of intense rainfall. Average daily temperatures locally for the first 3 months of 2018 were around 2.5 °C higher than the average for the past 30 years. For Hihi at Bushy Park, the only species for which we have detailed information on breeding success, this may have adversely affected breeding success. Only 36% of nests produced fledglings, around half the average for the previous 4 years.

Given the prediction that present extreme weather events are likely to become the future norm, we need a better understanding of how a changing climate might impact native species and ecosystems. Some monitoring is underway. Lindsay Davies and Pam Slack, birding stalwarts in the Manawatū, carry out fortnightly bird counts on the Manawatū Estuary at high tide, while Sue McIntosh does monthly bird counts on the Waitohu Estuary and, along with friends, also surveys Kuku Beach, a wetland at Pukehou Hill, and sewage ponds and the Otaki River outlet. Results are posted on . Over time, these data sets will provide valuable evidence of any changes that might be occurring on estuaries and wetlands along this coast.

A joint Whanganui-Manawatū field trip to the Manawatū Estuary in early March attracted 3 participants, although a further 40 attended the annual Farewell to the Birds event the following day (the date was announced after the field trip was arranged). That group saw 18 Bar-tailed Godwits depart for the northern hemisphere, unlike the previous day when the wind was unfavourable. Our trio saw a Red-necked Stint, 2 juvenile Black-fronted Tern and good numbers of other species, including 26 Pied Shag, a species expanding its range northwards along this coast.

Paul Gibson continues monitoring the movements of AJD, a male Bar-tailed Godwit banded on Manawatū Estuary in October 2008 when he was at least 3-years-old. Paul saw AJD depart Whanganui River Estuary on 25/3, the bird's usual departure date, starting a 10th known migration circuit. Bill Fleury (DOC Whanganui) reports that DOC field staff still encounter Rifleman in the Waitotara Conservation Area and south-western Whanganui National Park. The species seems to have increased since the days of the Atlas survey.

PETER FROST

WELLINGTON

Wellington members have played an important role in the MIRO-led study on Banded Dotterels nesting on the Eastbourne and Pencarrow Lakes beaches. The second breeding season of the study has recently been completed with Banded Dotterels first leaving the Eastbourne site and were last seen at Lake Kohangapiripiri on the 23/2/18. Metal banding and flagging of Banded Dotterels commenced in the 2016-17 breeding season under the direction of Mike Bell from Wildlife Management International Ltd. The flags have a unique 3-letter code which can - with difficulty - be read with binoculars, but they are more readily identified from photographs.

On the 22/11/16, a pre-fledged chick (DVT) was banded/flagged on Eastbourne beach and an adult male (DVU) was banded/flagged at the Lake Kohangapiripiri site. There was concern that the bands/flags used in the 2016-17 season were slightly too large and no further birds were banded that season. DVU was seen regularly throughout the 2016-17 breeding season and it returned to the same area for the following 2017-18 season. In contrast, DVT was not seen again after it fledged until March 2018 where it was found on the beach at Lake Kohangatera, the second Pencarrow Lake. In the 2017-18 breeding season 22 birds were banded and flagged and an additional 9 chicks were only given a metal band as they were too small to be flagged. Nest sites have been mapped under the direction of Parker Jones, MIRO using software from New Zealand GIS in Conservation.

Tracking flagged Banded Dotterels has revealed birds flagged on Eastbourne beach moving to Pencarrow Lakes. Adults banded at both study sites were present at the end of the breeding season at Lake Kohangatera. The study will continue for a few more years with the focus on: what is the breeding success? what predators are of most concern? are steps to mitigate predators and disturbance from the public successful? and, where do the birds go in winter? Please look out for banded/flagged Banded Dotterels this winter and, if possible, record the 3-letter identifier.

GEOFF DE LISLE

MARLBOROUGH

We returned to Jack and Lachie Taylor's property to carry out a day of passerine banding, banding 22 birds from 11 species, including Dunnock, Yellowhammer, Chaffinch, NZ Fantail, Grey Warbler, Blackbird, Sacred Kingfisher, Bellbird, Song Thrush and Australasian Harrier. What a great day it was, with a lot of involvement from younger birders. Even though we have had good rainfall and plentiful growth this summer and autumn, the birds were generally fairly light with low fat scores.

Some members were treated to the sight of a Pectoral Sandpiper at Lake Grassmere during the February wader counts. There were good numbers of Pied Stilt, Banded Dotterel, Caspian Tern, and Variable and South Island Pied oystercatchers around the region, along with small numbers of Wrybill and Bar-tailed Godwit. There have been regular sightings of Black-billed Gulls, and there are now over 8,000 recorded sightings of banded birds. Please keep them coming in.

On a trip to the Grovetown Lagoons we saw Pied, Little and Little Black shags, Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler, Mallard, Black Swan and Pukeko. There have been large numbers of Paradise Shelduck around the district, NZ Dabchick at both Taylor Dam and Lake Elterwater, and NZ Scaup also at Taylor Dam. NZ Fantail, Welcome Swallow and Grey Warbler are also usually encountered there. On a trip over private land to view a Pied Shag colony, we saw good numbers of Cirl Bunting. There was a Gull-billed Tern at Havelock Marina during the late summer, which was a real treat. This is also a good place to see Royal Spoonbill.

HEATHER DAVIES

NELSON

Bar-tailed Godwits and Pacific Golden Plovers left on cue this year. A field trip to identify migratory waders on Bells Island shellbank before their departure was run successfully by Willie Cook. A Whimbrel that frequented the estuary over summer was seen into early May. Counts of 68 Banded Dotterels and 80 Wrybills were made at Bells Island shellbank in early May. Both species were probably on migration, moving north, although it is usual for a small group of Wrybill to overwinter there at the estuary.

During the summer wader census circa 59,500 birds were counted (54% migratory species, 46% endemic). A total of 14 species were recorded, including Wrybill, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-necked Stint, Whimbrel, Pectoral Sandpiper (Marlborough) and Lesser Sand Plover. Farewell Spit had 56% of all the waders counted. In Tasman Bay, all migratory shors were recorded at Motueka Sandspit. Though assessment is not definite, it appears that with the extreme high tides the migratory species from Waimea may use Motueka Sandspit as a last resort. A White Heron was seen on the Motueka River in early in April.

Terns were again a feature at both Waimea and Motueka estuaries, with Caspian Terns and White-fronted Terns now in smaller numbers than during the breeding months. Gull-billed Terns are often reported, and a Little Tern was seen on the Waimea Estuary in early May, as was a Common Tern (unconfirmed). Black-fronted Terns have moved to the coast for winter and a banded bird was sighted in early May, a first for a chick banded on the Clarence River in 2016. Cirl Buntings were reported from Aniseed Valley, including a pair suspected of breeding there last November that were seen in the area over summer/early autumn.

GAIL D. QUAYLE

CANTERBURY

Our first field trip this year assisted the annual all-bird survey organised by the Waihora Ellesmere Trust. A week later, we returned to Lake Ellesmere to meet up with members from the Otago Branch. Highlights were a Sanderling, a Red-necked Stint and 4 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at Embankment Road with Wrybill and Banded Dotterel. It provided a great opportunity to compare the Sanderling to the other, more common, wader species.

One of Canterbury's most surprising birds of late was an Australasian Grebe, first found at St. Anne's Lagoon in late April. While looking for the grebe, one birder also observed 2 Cape Barren Geese. Another surprising sighting was of a Common Myna first seen on land by Pratt and Hawke Street, New Brighton, on 9/4, which has been seen regularly since then. Rarer terns continue to be found in Canterbury, including a Common Tern at Taumutu, Lake Ellesmere, in February, a White-winged Black Tern seen twice at Bromley Oxidation Ponds in mid-March, and a Gull-billed Tern found at the Lower LII pools at Lake Ellesmere in April.

Albatross Encounter pelagic trips off Kaikoura continue to turn-up plenty of interesting seabirds, including a Pink-footed Shearwater in mid-February. The same month, Cirl Buntings were seen at 3 different locations around Kaikoura, including one at Victoria Park in late April. At the Ashburton River Mouth, the Spotted Shag roost numbered over 7,000 birds in March and April, making it possibly the largest such roost in the county. An Otago Shag was seen with them in late March, and then 3 in late April.

ELEANOR GUNBY

OTAGO

We had a very successful joint field trip to Lake Ellesmere. A group of 17 members from Otago joined with 5 from Canterbury and, under their excellent guidance, we explored wader hotspots around the lake. With 8 'scopes between us, everyone had great views of Wrybill, Red-necked Stint, Banded Dotterel and Pied Stilt. Eleanor, our youngest birder from Canterbury, spotted a rarity – a Sanderling – and Richard, our regional recorder, spotted several Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. On the trip home via Ashburton River Mouth we saw Black-fronted Dotterel and the usual shags and terns, and, at Lake Hood, a White Heron. Another joint field trip, this time with the local Forest and Bird Branch, visited the large Otago Shag colony at Oamaru in March, where numbers are in the thousands at certain times of the year. We travelled via the coast and spotted a Black Stilt at All Day Bay. Other recent rarities in our region included 4 Red Knot and a Ruddy Turnstone in the Otago harbours.

Our long-term project to survey the birds of the Sinclair Wetlands has nearly completed 3 years of seasonal counts to provide a robust baseline for future comparisons as restoration of the wetland continues. This project has engaged more than 25 people and attracted members of the public to participate, highlighting the importance of such projects. A nationwide project would be a huge attraction to potential members who want to provide data for conservation efforts.

Otago Branch participated in the April Wild Dunedin Festival, with guided birdwatching at Tomahawk Lagoon. Over 40 people came to see birds with spotting scopes and were rewarded with excellent views of Australasian Shoveler, a hybrid Black Stilt and 2 White Herons (17 species in all). Several people were keen to learn more about Birds New Zealand activities, so this was also a worthwhile event. Over 30 people participated in the Global Big Day, some individually and others in a group trip through the Catlins. We tallied 79 species, topping all of the regions. The number of checklists from our region was a whopping 111. Otago member, Lei Zhu, single-handedly saw 68 species, first equal for the whole country.

MARY THOMPSON

SOUTHLAND

We were visited again by a couple of Gull-billed Terns at the Invercargill Tip Lagoon, fishing near the weir with White-fronted Terns and a Caspian Tern. A Black-fronted Dotterel was reported from Mataura River in Gore, along with a hybrid Black Stilt. One of the transferred South Island Robins released on Bluff Hill was see in Invercargill at Sandy Point, quite a distance for a small bird. Matt Jones reported a Snares Crested Penguin from Halfmoon Bay on Stewart Island, and possibly the same bird was seen by the Youth Camp group on Bench Island during their pelagic trip in early April. Two adult female Chestnut-breasted Shelducks showed up at the New River Estuary opposite the Tip Lagoon, and another was spotted at Borland Lodge during the Youth Camp group's visit.

Apart from some inclement weather, the Youth Camp group made the most of their time in Southland and visited a number of birding hotspots, including Ulva Island and a pelagic trip to Wreck Reef. They had good views of Blue Duck at Monkey Creek on the way to Milford Sound and were entertained by the resident White Heron. A favourite 'trick' of this heron is to stand on top of a camper van and stay there as the van pulls away. The Youth Camp group thought this was hilarious when they saw it happen. On day one of the duck shooting season, a Mute Swan appeared on New River Estuary looking a little lost – a rare visitor to Southland.

PHIL RHODES

South Island Takahe. Photo by Mike Ashbee.

New Zealand Falcon or Karearea (male) on Matagouri. Photo by Mike Ashbee.