



No. 17 March 2018


# *Birds New Zealand*



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



# Birds New Zealand

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## PUBLISHERS

Published on behalf of the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc), P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040, New Zealand.

**Email:** [secretary@osnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@osnz.org.nz) **Website:** [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)

**Editor:** Michael Szabo, 6/238 The Esplanade, Island Bay, Wellington 6023.

**Email:** [editorbirds@osnz.org.nz](mailto:editorbirds@osnz.org.nz) **Tel:** (04) 383 5784

ISSN 2357-1586 (Print) ISSN 2357-1594 (Online)

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.

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India's diversity of habitat types and altitudes give it a rich bird life. It has over 1200 bird species including 70 raptors, 30 duck and geese species, and 8 stork varieties.

We visit 5 magnificent National Parks: in the Himalayas, the Ganges Plains and on the Deccan Plateau. In this season we will also see masses of migratory birds from north Asia. And wildlife, including tigers, is a bonus.



## Colour India

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## COVER IMAGE

Front cover: **Kea**, juvenile bird in Otrira Valley. Photo by Mike Ashbee.



■ Southern New Zealand Dotterel. Photo by Glenda Rees.

## Feathers & Wings Exhibition

A new photographic exhibition by award-winning bird photographer and Birds New Zealand member Glenda Rees, entitled "Feathers & Wings", has opened in the gallery at Croydon Aviation Heritage Centre in Mandeville (17 km west of Gore on SH 94). It runs until late April and admission is free. All photos are of New Zealand birds and are printed large format (framed or printed on canvas).



▲ Farewell to the Godwits, Ambury Park. Photo by Ian McLean.



▲ Birds New Zealand President David Lawrie. Photo by Les Feasey.

# President's Report

As I sit down to write this report we have just had to put down our constant companion for the past 13 years, our Black Labrador, Peat. This is a timely reminder that good things do not last forever and the same applies to my reign as President of the Society. My retirement as President is not because of any dissatisfaction with either the Society or the people running it, but is merely a reflection that I believe that it is time for a new person to build on the momentum which we have achieved. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time leading such a positive group of Councillors and I believe that the Society is in a far better position than when I assumed the office. I believe that the platform has been set for a very bright future and I wish my successor every success.

## Access Issues

With more people using *eBird* as the bird recording system there are some issues arising regarding access to birding locations. When people submit records into *eBird* the location of those sites is easily identified and that is giving rise to some issues. Many sites where observations take place are located either on or through private property, and the fact that one member has access does not necessarily mean that other observers have the same rights of access. Where private property is involved it is essential that visitors obtain the appropriate consent from the landowner. While most do not mind authorised birdwatchers having access to their property, unauthorised access can lead to difficulties for all others in the future. There are some sites where access has been denied in the past and we should all be mindful that the rights of landowners are paramount.

## Banding Liaison

David Melville has been the Society's Banding Liaison person for many years. In that role he has acted as a conduit between the Department of Conservation Banding Office and the Society. With his vast experience overseas, he has also helped the Banding Office prepare the banding manual and has been heavily involved in the preparation of the banding permit scheme. However, with those systems now in place David has decided to retire from the position. Obviously, with all his experience we will still be calling on him from time-to-time. The Council has recently appointed John Stewart to fill the position and we look forward to working with John in the future. He has also had considerable experience at banding and is keen to establish a training system.

## Notornis Editor

The current *Notornis* Editor, Dr Leigh Bull, has advised the Council that she wishes to resign from the position as soon as possible. Since taking over the role her paid employment situation has altered and she is currently managing the ecological components of the Kaikoura Earthquake recovery works. This means that she is often based away from home and is currently working 60-70 hours per week. The editor's role on top of that work load is unsustainable for maintaining her health. In view of recommendations from her the Council is currently investigating options to have the layouts of the journal prepared by a professional designer which would considerably reduce the work load. This is disappointing news on another front

because Clarivate has just advised that *Notornis* has met all the requirements and that it has been accepted for inclusion in the science citation index expanded (SCIE). This is a testament to the work of Leigh and her long-serving predecessor Jim Briskie in maintaining the high standards and the timeliness of the journal. Hopefully this will encourage more people to submit articles in the future. Elsewhere in this edition there are details relating to a call for a new editor. If anyone has any interest or knows of someone that could fulfil this role, do not hesitate to contact me and I can provide any details.

## Health and Safety

The Council is currently developing a health and safety policy, a draft of which has been circulated to regional representatives. However, this is still under consideration and the Council is seeking external advice. In the meantime, it is essential that trip leaders and all members associated with field activities consider hazards likely to be encountered on field trips. It is essential that all participants are briefed on the activities involved in the trip and an assessment made on the ability of all members to undertake that activity. It should also be checked that everyone has appropriate clothing and weather protection and the leader should be aware of any specific medical issues with any of the participants. While all that advice seems to be good common sense, and it is, not everyone is as well prepared as they could be. While Birds New Zealand has a good safety record we certainly want to maintain this into the future so that everyone can enjoy their birding activities and obtain the most from their experience.

## National Monitoring Scheme

As you will be aware from earlier reports the Council is considering options for a new national bird monitoring scheme. The Council has decided that the data collection for this scheme will be *eBird*, which will allow for its permanent storage and allow it to be utilised by researchers in the future. The Council has recently entered into a contract with Wildlife Management International Ltd to design this scheme and to discuss with Cornell University any modifications to the New Zealand *eBird* portal to enable the monitoring scheme to be more easily managed. They will be reporting back early in 2019 and the scheme is intended to be launched at the AGM in June 2019.

## Rakiura Youth Camp

The Southland Region have organised a Youth Camp to be held on Rakiura/Stewart Island in April 2018. Details are available via the Society's website and from Regional Representatives. I would urge South Island members in particular to consider sending young people to the training camp to encourage them for the future.

## Annual General Meeting Weekend

The AGM and Conference weekend to be held at Waitangi in early June is organised and registration papers are on the website. For those members who do not have access to computers, please contact the Regional Representative and they will be able to download hard copies for you. The submission of topics for the presentation of talks at the scientific days is now invited. This is

an opportunity for not only research students but also ordinary members to present on their activities. Submissions close at the end of March, so act quickly.

### David Medway Scholarship

Due to the generous support of The George Mason Charitable Trust, this scholarship is currently open for applications. The procedure for applying for this scholarship and the terms and conditions are set out on the website but it should be noted that applications close on 30th March. This is an opportunity for PhD and Masters student researchers to obtain some much-needed funding, especially if your bird study is located in the Taranaki region.

### Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Due to the very generous sponsorship of the T/Gear Charitable Trust, applications will be called in April 2018 for smaller research projects. As you will have seen in the magazine there has been a considerable amount of research undertaken using this source of funding. This is adding considerably to our knowledge of New Zealand birds. Applications close on 15th June 2018.

### Heritage Expeditions donations

Heritage Expeditions have sent us donations amounting to \$2,300 derived from Society members participating in their 'Birding Expeditions' special offers to our members, which were advertised on the back cover of the magazine. I would like to thank Heritage Expeditions and all participating members for their generosity. These donations will be used to fund the activities of the Society, including bird research.

### Branding

As advised in previous newsletters and at the 2017 AGM, the Society is entering a rebranding process. This is currently under way and the Council has invited a number of agencies and designers to share their ideas for how to rebrand and reposition Birds New Zealand in a way that is exciting and relevant to potential new members. A critical part of this advice to these agencies is to ensure that any rebranding stays true to the long and wonderful history of the Society. The Council at its meeting in April will then select one agency or designer to move forward and we should have a new brand to showcase to members at the AGM in Waitangi in June. While there is still some resistance to the need to rebrand, the Council considers that it is essential to revitalise the Society if we wish to remain relevant in the future.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

## Membership renewal

Members who have not yet paid their 2018 subscription are invited to renew before 30th April 2018. This can be done online at [www.osnz.org.nz/join-society/existing-members](http://www.osnz.org.nz/join-society/existing-members)

If you do not renew by that date, this will be the last issue of the magazine that you will be sent. If you are not sure if your 2018 subscription has been paid you can log-in to check your membership account via [www.osnz.org.nz](mailto:membership@osnz.org.nz) or contact our Membership Secretary: [membership@osnz.org.nz](mailto:membership@osnz.org.nz)

## Benefits of membership

You can join Birds New Zealand today for just over a dollar a week. Our subscription fee of \$70 per year is very reasonable; for students it's just \$35 per year (see [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz) for more details). You will receive Birds New Zealand magazine, our quarterly colour magazine, and *Notornis*, our acclaimed quarterly colour scientific journal. To join us, please visit our website and fill out the online membership form: [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz) Or contact our Membership Secretary: [membership@osnz.org.nz](mailto:membership@osnz.org.nz) Or contact your nearest Regional Representative via: [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)



▲ The Copthorne Hotel, Waitangi. Photo by Les Feasey.

## NZ Bird Conference and AGM 2018

The 2018 New Zealand Bird Conference and 79th AGM will be held in Waitangi, Bay of Islands, 2nd – 4th June, Queen's Birthday weekend. We look forward to welcoming you to the sunny Far North for what should be a fantastic weekend of birds and birding. The conference will comprise two days of scientific papers and workshops, with field trips to local birding highlights on the third day. The AGM will be held on the Saturday afternoon. The conference again aims to continue the fine work of previous conferences in making this the premier New Zealand event for the communication of new research findings on New Zealand birds while providing opportunity for discussion, networking and workshops for bird researchers and birders in New Zealand.

The format of the conference will be similar to the most recent conferences, with the first two days largely being devoted to scientific presentations. A variety of workshops are planned for the Sunday morning. As in previous years, we look forward to having a number of local speakers sharing some of the latest research knowledge with you. Alongside this, we look forward to bringing together researchers and Society members from across the country to share their knowledge and findings to make for a dynamic and informative event.

The 2018 conference will again use online registration as the main method of registration (see [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)). A printed registration form is not included in this magazine. Early Bird registration for Society members is now open until 31st March 2018. An invitation to present either a talk or a poster is included in this notice. For those without internet access, a registration form and information pack can be obtained from the Society's website or by contacting your Regional Representative or by writing to Birds NZ Conference, Les Feasey, 54 Oromahoe Road, Opua 0200, for online registration. All events and meals will be at Copthorne Hotel, 1 Tau Henare Drive, Waitangi, Bay of Islands. The field trips are: Ninety Mile Beach/Cape Reinga; Urupukapuka Island; Tutukaka (pelagic); Waitangi Estuary (kayaking); Orongo Bay (mist-netting); and Puketi Forest.

### 1st June 2018 (Friday)

6-7pm Registration

### 2nd June 2018 (Saturday)

8am Registration  
9am Scientific Day One  
5pm Birds NZ AGM  
7pm Refreshments  
7:30pm Informal Dinner

### 3rd June 2018 (Sunday)

8am Registration  
8am-5:30pm Workshops & Scientific Day Two  
6pm-7pm Happy Hour  
7:30pm Conference Dinner

### 4th June 2018 (Monday)

Field Trips Departing from Copthorne Hotel

### 5th June 2018 (Tuesday)

Mist Netting Russell, Orongo Bay

## Notice of Motion for four amendments to the Constitution of The Ornithological Society of NZ Inc.

1. At its meeting in Wellington on 7 October 2017 Council endorsed recommendations for four amendments to the society's Constitution. Two Regional Representatives subsequently endorsed these recommendations; in the absence of any further comments it is assumed that other Regional Representatives do not object.
2. The Constitution requires that amendments can be made at a General Meeting of the society after "due notice of motion has been given in the notice convening such General Meeting". Refer to Clause 17.1 of the Constitution.
3. The following Notice of Motion is proposed to enable four recommendations to be debated and voted on at the Annual General Meeting to be held in the Bay of Islands in 2018. This matter needs to be included on the AGM Agenda as "Amendments to the Constitution".
4. A full background paper has been published on the Society's website.

### Notice of Motion

In terms of Rule 17.1 of the Constitution **Notice of Motion** is given to members that the Constitution of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. be amended at the General Meeting of the Society in 2018, as follows:

#### Amendment to Rule 16.1.1:

Delete: At every Annual General Meeting the Council shall submit an annual report and the audited statement of accounts of the Society for the previous year.

New amendment: At every Annual General Meeting the Council shall submit an annual report and a statement of accounts of the Society for the previous year. The Council may elect to have the statement of annual accounts audited, or reviewed, by an independent reviewer in accordance with the requirements of relevant legislation.

#### Amendment to Rule 14.16:

Delete: All monies or other property held by the regions are to be held on behalf of the Society according to such conditions and procedures as the Council shall determine and the annual financial accounts for a region are to be audited by the Treasurer of the Society.

New amendment: All monies or other property held by the regions are to be held on behalf of the Society according to such conditions and procedures as the Council shall determine. The annual financial accounts for a region shall be incorporated within the annual accounts of the Society as a whole and may be reviewed by an independent reviewer in accordance with the provisions of Rule 16.1.1.

#### New Rule 14.17:

Where a position of regional Treasurer for any specific region cannot be appointed Council may appoint a Treasurer from another region as Acting Treasurer in the region not having an appointed Treasurer for a period not exceeding one year. If a regional Treasurer position continues to remain vacant for more than one year, Council shall assume all financial responsibilities for that region, including the keeping of accounts, the management of bank accounts and the control of cheque books. Regional management of accounts may be delegated by Council to the region once a new regional Treasurer is appointed.

#### Amendment to Rule 3.7:

Delete: To maintain a library of ornithological literature for the use of Members and to promote a wider knowledge of birds.  
New amendment: To maintain a library of ornithological literature and other media for the use of Members and to promote a wider knowledge of birds.

## Call for applications to the 2018 Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Applications to the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018 open in April 2018 and must be received by 15th June 2018. Applications will be accepted from individuals, students, researchers within universities, or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of New Zealand birds or their environment. The applicant has to be a current member of Birds New Zealand, living in New Zealand, and the project carried out in New Zealand or its outlying islands (e.g. Kermadecs).

Funding ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 may be awarded. This fund provides financial assistance for logistics and purchase of equipment and consumables - it does not fund salaries or wages. For smaller projects refer to the Society's **Projects Assistance Fund**. Payments will be funded retrospective (either after submission of the interim or final project report) and are for a 12-month period only. In the event of financial hardship, exemptions may be made after prior consultation. Preference will be given to applications that will:

- involve research into native species;
- involve research with a measurable outcome and a commitment to have results published;
- involve people learning as well as being involved;
- demonstrate intent to publish at least part of the funded work in the Society's journal, *Notornis*
- lead to results that will clearly be of benefit to the conservation of New Zealand birds;
- involve research on "**Preferred Student Research Topics**" (for student research projects).

Applications must be received by 15th June 2018 on the official **application form** provided on the Society's website ([www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)) and submitted as a single PDF file. For queries, please contact: [eo@osnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@osnz.org.nz)

## Tukituki River mouth Black-billed Gull colony success

As the Birds New Zealand Regional Representative for Hawke's Bay, I became aware of a colony of Nationally Critical Black-billed Gulls that had established itself at the mouth of the Tukituki River in late November 2017, which was found during our summer census. In mid-December, I met Hawke's Bay Regional Council (HBRC) and Department of Conservation (DOC) staff at the site, and we put together an action plan to monitor the nesting gulls and nesting White-fronted Terns. I took on the role of regularly checking the colony and the 15 'DOC 200' traps set up nearby.

Our first count was circa 320 active nests. We set up three trail cameras to help look at nesting behaviour and locate predators. Within a short time, we found that a feral cat was visiting the colony every night and evidence of a stash of dead White-fronted Tern chicks. At that point we set up two live capture traps which took two weeks to catch the cat. During that time, the river mouth became blocked, causing a flood into the nesting site. Quick work by HBRC staff saved the nesting gulls. Then, on 5th January, a storm came through and washed all the gulls off the site and took out the trail cameras. We thought that we had lost all of the chicks, but a day later I discovered that circa 100 juveniles had survived. As our weekly checks continued, the count increased to 150. Given the difficulties they faced, we were very happy to see so many chicks survive. A big thank you goes to Keiko Hashiba of HBRC, Denise Fastier and Matt Brady of DOC, and everyone who contributed valuable information along the way.

BERNIE KELLY

## Vacancy - Editor of *Notornis*

Due to a change in personal circumstances, *Notornis* Editor Dr Leigh Bull has notified the Council of the need to stand down from this role. Expressions of interest from suitably qualified people are invited for the role of Editor of the premier scientific journal of the Society. The *Notornis* Editor is an officer of the Society who is responsible for the timely publication of *Notornis* and any agreed supplements, and for advising Council on editorial needs and other matters. The Editor is the contact point for authors to send draft manuscripts to and has the role of assessing and giving feedback to authors. The Editor also undertakes the production of *Notornis* by organising the layout and proofreading associated with the production of the journal, and by maintaining a close working relationship with the printer. An Editorial Board is available to support the Editor.

The Society wishes to support members to write-up their observations and scientific studies, and it is a role of the Editor of *Notornis* to stimulate and support authors and prospective authors to effect the submission and publication of appropriate reports and papers on ornithology. Requirements for the role include general word-processing and computer skills, broadband access to the internet, the ability to work to deadlines, some knowledge of birds, and a reasonable grasp of English grammar.

The deadline for expressions of interest is 1st May. For more details see: <http://osnz.org.nz/Vacancy-Editor-Birds-New-Zealand>

## Bird Banding Database under construction

The Department of Conservation (DOC) has devised a road map for developing a replacement Bird Banding Database using current technology. This will be done in a phased rollout, with a combination of internal and external expertise. Phase I (Database Design and Setup) is currently underway, and resources have been confirmed for Phase II (Data Migration, >2 million records).

The resources for Phase III (Front-end Development) will take longer to secure and will take place in the next financial year. The aim is for the project to be completed by the end of 2018. The ultimate system, hosted in the Amazon Web Services cloud environment, will hold the entire national dataset of bird banding data (historic, current, future). An online interface will enable direct data upload and reporting functionality for banders, while also allowing members of the public to report band sightings and receive automated responses. Reports of banding and recovery data per species, region or project will be available subject to login privileges and data sharing agreements or moratoria.

Of course, this system will only work if the database holds all the relevant records. All banders are requested to ensure that their records are up to date, and anyone that has unused bird bands will need to submit a stock take. All banders will be sent a new data template where banding, resighting and recovery data are entered onto the same spreadsheet (detailed instructions supplied). If you have been involved with banding birds and are not currently registered with the Banding Scheme, please contact Michelle Bradshaw: [bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz](mailto:bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz)

A centralised, accessible repository of all banding data will mitigate the risk of data loss, facilitate the use of the data, and increase the bird conservation contributions by the banding and birding community. Positive feedback on this project has reached the DOC Director General, and the Banding Office would like to thank everyone who has committed to providing datasets and support.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW

## *Notornis* special issue – call for submissions

Birds New Zealand has commissioned a special issue of *Notornis* focussed on Auckland Islands birds and ornithological research. Any ornithological research undertaken on the Auckland Islands, or with a primary focus on Auckland Islands breeding species or bird communities will be considered, including archives-based research. Contributing authors are invited to submit their intended manuscript titles by 31st August 2018, with a deadline for submissions of completed manuscripts of 31st July 2019. In addition to manuscripts, we also welcome any unusual records (e.g. vagrant birds, new breeding records) that anyone who has visited the Auckland Islands may have in their notebooks, for acknowledged inclusion in a manuscript of general bird observations. If you are interested in contributing, please contact Colin Miskelly: [colin.miskelly@tepapa.govt.nz](mailto:colin.miskelly@tepapa.govt.nz)

## New Members

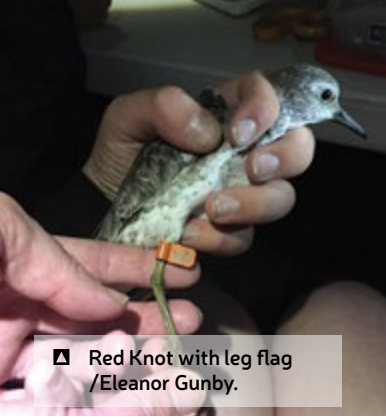
Birds New Zealand warmly welcomes the following new members: Craig Symes, Tyler Berry (Bay of Plenty); Anne-Marie, Lena Booth (Far North); Roger Marshall (Manawatu); Stephen Bridgman (Nelson); Scott Brooks (Northland); Ursula Ellenberg (Otago); Ciaran O'Brien (Overseas); Wiewa van der Zwan (Waikato); Paul Curry (Wairarapa); Emma Salmon (Whanganui), Robin Long (West Coast).

## Donations

Birds New Zealand warmly thanks the following members for their generous donations: Heather Smithers, Richard Stocker, G I Hunt, D & B Stracy, G Norman, Stan Emmens, E R Kirk, J L Hanna, P & V Palmer, Joy Sagar, Betty Seddon, Bernard Card, Stuart Nicholson, Sandy Winterton, Chris Forman, William Abbott, Marianne Power, C J Ralph, Kevin Parker, Gillian Vaughan, G Halloran, Anthony Carey, Ted Kirk, Gwyneth Norman, D M Stracy, P M & J L Sagar, Graham Hunt, Betty Seddon, Bernard Card, Stan Emmens, Jillian Hanna, Philip Palmer, William Cook, Niall Muga, F Beggs, Enviro Research, Bruce McKinlay, Noel Knight, Francie Beggs, Colin Lunt, Phillip Munns, Michael Lee, James Hunter, Neil Andrews, Susan Steadman, Peggy Mallalieu and Rosemary Messenger.

## Request for sound recordings

For some years I have been recording the sounds of New Zealand and South Pacific birds, and preserving these in an archive. During a recent audit, it was found that fifteen species or subspecies are not represented in it. I write this hoping that some members could either forward recordings of these species/subspecies, or point me to those who may be able to assist: New Zealand Quail *Coturnix novaeseelandiae*; NZ Dabchick *Poliiocephalus rufopectus*; Tasmanian Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta cauta*; Greater Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea* major; White-faced Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma marina dulciae*; Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanites exasperates*; Kermadec Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma albiclunus*; NZ Storm Petrel *Pealeornis maoriana* Little Stint *Calidris minuta*; Southern NZ Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus obscurus*; Grey-headed Blackbird *Turdus poliocephalus poliocephalus*; White-chested White Eye *Zosterops albogularis*; Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis xanthoprocta*; Norfolk Boobook Owl *Ninox novaeseelandiae undulate* (nominat & hybrid); Red-crowned Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus regina*. I can be contacted via [archivebirds@hotmail.com](mailto:archivebirds@hotmail.com) or: Les McPherson, P.O. Box 33, Ashburton 7740, Canterbury, NZ.



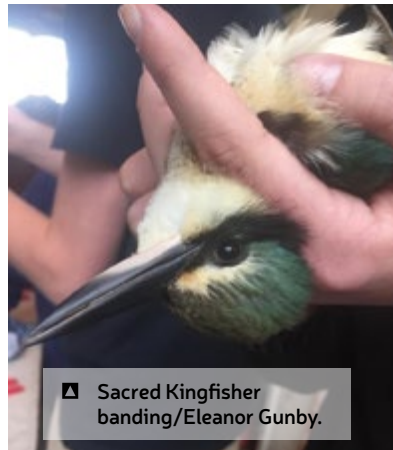
▲ Red Knot with leg flag /Eleanor Gunby.



▲ Red Knot upper wing /Eleanor Gunby



▲ Starling banding /Eleanor Gunby.



▲ Sacred Kingfisher banding/Eleanor Gunby.



▲ Photo by Maddie Van de Wetering.

## Miranda Youth Camp

A Birds New Zealand bird-banding Youth Camp was held at Miranda Shorebird Centre held over Labour Weekend in October. I was one of eleven teens lucky enough to attend. We set up our mist-nets in the orchard ready on Friday afternoon and did the banding there through Saturday and Sunday. We also took measurements of weight, wing length, bill length or combined head and bill length, and tarsus length, and recorded details such as the age, sex, moult and fat score of each bird. Extracting birds from the net is an art in itself, so we all took turns with Adrian Riegen to extract the birds. We caught a total of 106 birds of ten species at the orchard: Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, House Sparrow, Silvereye, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, NZ Fantail, and Sacred Kingfisher. I got to band my first ever NZ Fantail, which was exciting since they are notoriously hard to catch. Silvereyes were by far the most numerous species. At one point, a flock struck the net together and we were kept really busy as we extracted and processed them.

On the Sunday night, we went mist-netting at the Stilt Ponds. This can't be done during daylight as the birds can see the nets, so we set up the nets in daylight, but the banding was done in the dark with the aid of headlamps. We checked the nets with Adrian Riegen, watching him extract the birds and then transported them to be banded. In total, we caught 20 birds of four species: Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied Stilt and Wrybill. We took mostly the same measurements as for the passerines, but we attached a flag as well as the metal band to some of them. I banded a Bar-tailed Godwit and my first Wrybill. By the time we finished banding and packed up it was gone midnight.

While banding birds is definitely fun, the reason you do it is to gather information – and you only get that if people report sightings of banded birds. So, on Saturday afternoon, we all went down to the Hide with scopes and binoculars to look for flagged or banded waders. Late in the day, George Hobson spotted a Shore Plover there! This was a very welcome surprise, and definitely not a bird that I had expected to see. Unfortunately, our last banding session on Monday morning was cancelled due to rain. Still, it gave us a chance to get our banding logs signed-off before heading home. Thanks heaps to everyone who made the camp possible, especially to the Level Three banders who were patient enough to supervise us, and to Ian Southey for organising it!

ELEANOR GUNBY

## Homer Tunnel Kea gym

Kea that have been filmed moving traffic cones at Homer Tunnel in Fiordland have been given a “roadside gym” to keep them occupied and out of mischief. The gym contains multiple objects and devices to help maintain the birds’ curiosity but also distract them from the dangers of traffic. Video footage of the gym will also be monitored by researchers at the University of Canterbury studying Kea behaviour. Three Kea gyms have previously been built in Nelson, Arthur’s Pass and Lake Manapouri, where Kea had been seen damaging cars in the car park. Moving traffic cones may have a more serious purpose according to Kea Conservation Trust chair, Tamsin Orr-Walker. They may do it to slow down passing cars, so they can then beg for food. The gym is the result of a partnership between the Department of Conservation, University of Canterbury, Kea Conservation Trust and Downers NZ.



## New Minister of Conservation

Green Party MP Eugenie Sage has been appointed as Minister for Conservation, Minister for Land Information and Associate Minister for the Environment. After studying law and history at Auckland University and journalism at Canterbury University, she worked in environmental forestry, as a political and media adviser at Parliament, a freelance journalist, and then spent thirteen years campaigning with Forest and Bird, including to protect West Coast beech and rimu forests and the South Island high country. She is a Distinguished Life Member of Forest and Bird, and says that she especially values the huge amount of practical conservation work that volunteers do around the country. She was elected to the Canterbury Regional Council in 2007 and stood successfully for Parliament in 2011, 2014 and 2017.



▲ AOC 2017 participants at Deakin University.



▲ Natalie Forsdick (left), 'Orbell' and friends at AOC 2017.

# Australasian Ornithological Conference 2017 – Cats and Kookaburras

The 2017 Australasian Ornithological Conference was held at Deakin University in Geelong, Australia. I was very lucky to receive a travel grant from Birds New Zealand that enabled me to participate in this exciting conference. The conference itself attracted researchers and bird enthusiasts mostly from Australia, but also some other countries. Importantly, a small group of New Zealand-based ornithologists migrated across the ditch to represent Birds New Zealand and New Zealand avian research.

The conference talks were an exciting mix of research with current topics from various fields in avian biology. It was interesting to see how state-of-the-art bioacoustic monitoring techniques can be used as conservation tools. I find it an intriguing field, certainly challenging due to the vast amount of data involved, but also rewarding as new analyses enable us to study animal behaviour and assess biodiversity from remotely collected bioacoustic data. For me, among the most exciting groups of talks were those held by the 'Kaki Team', with speakers from Canterbury and Otago universities. It was inspiring to see how molecular techniques can be applied to improve conservation of endangered species that are on the brink of extinction, such as Kaki. Keep up the good work, 'Team Kaki'!

There was a pleasing amount of seabird research presented at the AOC and I was honoured to be given a talking slot within the seabird symposium, which was a very interesting mix of seabird research from Australia and New Zealand. The symposium covered current topics in seabird conservation such as the impacts of plastic ingestion and pest species on seabird populations.

The conference featured five plenary talks, one of which was given by Tammy Steeves of Canterbury University. Tammy gave a great talk about 'Conservation genomics of threatened austral birds'. I was delighted to hear her advocating the importance of kindness in science – I totally agree with you Tammy! I think kindness and collegiality should always be on the very top of the list. Apart from symposia and talks, there was a lot more on offer at the AOC, including a writing workshop, a photo competition, and some delicious snacks during the coffee breaks. These breaks were an excellent opportunity to meet and talk to other conference attendees. It was so nice to personally meet Lisa O'Neill and Nicholas Carlile from the Australasian Seabird Group during our annual meeting at AOC. Thank you for the lovely chat during the conference dinner – I hope we will be able to catch up more in future.

At the end of the conference, various field-trips were offered including a boat trip exploring parts of Port Phillip Bay with the chance to see Australasian Gannets and dolphins, and a trip to the famous wetlands at Werribee WTP to see migratory waders, waterfowl and coastal seabirds. Thank you so much for all the support I have received from Birds New Zealand. I look forward to the next gathering.

HENDRIK SCHULTZ, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

The 2017 Australasian Ornithological Conference in Geelong, Australia, and was three days jam-packed with bird research. The New Zealand contingent was stood out among the crowd of around 270 attendees, including volunteers, students, and researchers. Hosted by Deakin University, the conference ran like a well-oiled machine.

With two concurrent sessions, 120 talks were spread over the three days, spanning a range of topics including bird habitat, behaviour, ecology, evolution, and a strong conservation focus throughout. As a New Zealand researcher, it was fascinating to hear about management challenges specific to Australia, such as the management of their bush fires. The plenary talks from research leaders set up key themes for each day, including conservation management, the use of genetic tools for conservation, and impacts of cats on birds in Australia (severe being an understatement!). Speakers were kept to time with bird song, and when their time was up, they were laughed off the stage by a Laughing Kookaburra. Keeping to time is always hard, but especially so for those presenting five-minute speed talks!

In addition to talks, there were more than twenty research posters on display, and plenty of opportunities to talk with those researchers. Some amazing talent was showcased in the photo competition with separate student and non-student categories. With around ten prizes awarded to student presenters, AOC made for a great supportive environment for emerging researchers.

Along with the celebration of research, we also enjoyed making new connections and re-establishing networks thanks to the excellent social events. The ornithological trivia quiz on the first evening made for a great icebreaker, followed by the conference dinner held on the second evening at the Geelong Cats stadium. This was a real chance for everyone to let their hair down, as the meal was accompanied by a bush band who were very good at encouraging people onto the dance floor (including our own President, David Lawrie!).

I'm very grateful to Birds New Zealand for giving me the opportunity to attend and present my research (my current project is using genetic and genomic tools to improve conservation management outcomes for Kaki/Black Stilt). For a first visit to Australia, it left a very positive impression, and I'll look forward to the next conference.

NATALIE FORSDICK UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

## IUCN Red List revisions

The latest update of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species was released in December and included changes in the threat status of Antipodean Albatross, Westland Petrel and Kea from Vulnerable to Endangered. Other New Zealand species affected by changes are Northern Brown Kiwi and Okarito Kiwi, which have been revised down from Endangered to Vulnerable, and Red-crowned Parakeet and Black-browed Albatross, which have been revised down from Near Threatened to Least Concern.





## Making identification of Grey Ducks more certain

In a presentation to the 2016 Birds New Zealand Conference (see abstract: *Notornis* 63 (3-4):190) I highlighted the current uncertainty which surrounds identification of the native Grey Duck in New Zealand, and suggested that many birds identified as such might not be so.

There is clear evidence, for example, that present-day duck hunters find native Grey Ducks hard to distinguish from female introduced Mallards, and many extraneous sightings recorded in the OSNZ Atlas and in *eBird* suggest that difficulty may be encountered by some OSNZ members as well.

It is my intention to re-define plumage and soft-

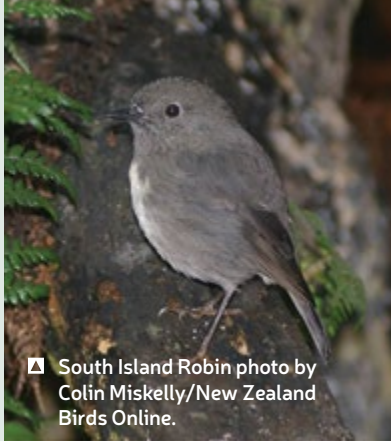
part characters, readily visible in the field, that unequivocally distinguish a Grey Duck from a Mallard (especially females) and from first- or second-generation hybrids between the two species. I seek to do this by reviewing the plumages, and stored information, of hybrids bred in captivity 1967-1972, and by establishing the extent of natural variability (including that related to sex and age) in face pattern, upper wing feather patterns and colours, and bill and leg colour shown by both Grey Ducks and Mallards.

Funding provided by the Birds New Zealand Research Fund will be used to visit museum collections of *Anas superciliosa* in Australia where specimens will not be contaminated by possible past (or hidden) hybridisation with Mallard, and later to evaluate historic Grey Duck specimens in the main New Zealand museum collections.

MURRAY WILLIAMS murraywilliamsnz@outlook.com

## Ecology of Moa and Kakapo

Coprolites are a source of detailed information about the ecology of prehistoric species that can help understand the effects of species declines and extinctions on ecosystems, and help guide ecosystem restoration efforts. New research published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (February 2018: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1712337115>) by Alexander Boast, Laura Weyrich and Alan Cooper of University of Adelaide, Jamie Wood of Landcare Research, Jessica Metcalf of Colorado State University and Rob Night of University of California has used sequencing of ancient DNA from coprolites to reconstruct aspects of the biology and ecology of Kakapo and four species of extinct Moa. The new study found evidence that prehistoric Moa and Kakapo consumed ectomycorrhizal fungi, suggesting they played a role in dispersing fungi that are key to New Zealand's natural forest ecosystems. It has also provided the first DNA-based evidence that Moa frequently supplemented their broad diets with ferns and mosses, found parasite taxa that provide insight into Moa behaviour, and data supporting the hypothesis of coextinction between Moa and some parasite species. The study demonstrates that DNA sequencing of coprolites is a powerful tool for resolving key aspects of ancient ecosystems and may rapidly provide information not obtainable by conventional paleoecological techniques, such as fossil analyses.



▲ South Island Robin photo by Colin Miskelly/New Zealand Birds Online.

## South Island Robin genetics

Many of New Zealand's endemic bird species have passed through severe population bottlenecks as a result of introduced predators, habitat

loss, and human intervention. Even if a population recovers, a bottleneck can lead to loss of genetic variation and a reduction in the fitness of the post-bottleneck population. Unfortunately, for many endangered species in New Zealand, few non-bottlenecked populations survive to supply the donors needed to rescue bottlenecked populations. As a consequence, Heber et al (2012) used a reciprocal translocation to rescue two bottlenecked populations of the South Island Robin on Motuara and Allports islands in 2008. The young that resulted from the cross between the two populations showed an increase in genetic diversity and a recovery of fitness traits, indicating that rescue with bottlenecked donors can be an alternative when non-bottlenecked populations are unavailable. However, a key element missing from all genetic rescue tests is what are the long-term effects (10+ years), how the cognitive processes are affected by the loss of genetic variation, and whether these deleterious effects are reversed through genetic rescue.

To address this question, I will examine the effect of levels of genetic variation 10 years after the initial genetic rescue and genetic rescue on two key cognitive aspects in the South Island Robin: song complexity and problem-solving ability. To achieve this goal, I will first collect DNA from blood samples from South Island Robins in the two populations subject to genetic rescue in 2008 by Heber et al. This will allow me to estimate levels of genetic variation using microsatellites, and toll-like receptors in bottlenecked individuals as well as hybrids between the two populations. I will then measure, (1) complexity of the dawn chorus songs; song structure is strongly linked to cognitive capability in birds. Song in South Island Robins is composed of many learned features, some of which are likely constrained by genetic or environmental aspects of male quality. Therefore, birdsong can be an excellent indicator of male memory and cognitive ability, as it is expected to be compromised by the loss of genetic variation; (2) problem-solving will be measured as the ability of South Island Robins to complete a series of complex tasks using experimentally created food caches. Cognitive ability will be tested using three experiments that measure a set of cognitive processes, including attentional control, inhibitory control, and memory.

ARCHIE MACFARLANE, UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY



▲ Australasian Crested Grebe with chicks riding on its back, Lake Te Anau. Photo by Anja Kohler.



View from Mt Austen. Photo by Rod Hay.

## Solomon Islands – Kingfishers and Cuckoo-doves

Article and Photographs by Rod Hay

I've had some great opportunities to see and study birds in different parts of the South Pacific, but until recently the Solomon Islands had remained out of reach to me. In 2017, I had the opportunity to visit and leapt at the chance. The main focus of the visit would be the islands of Gizo, Ranongga, Vella Lavella and Kolombangara in the New Georgia Group.

Fiona Teama from the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) met me at Honiara International Airport when I arrived in early December and we soon boarded a domestic flight to Gizo, the administrative centre of the Western Province. Gizo Airport occupies a small island, so the airport bus has an outboard motor, and I was soon able to spot Beach Kingfishers, Bridled Terns and Black Noddies on the way to the comfort of Gizo Hotel. The next day was a full day of boat travel and island visits, courtesy of the nice people from Dive Gizo, but not before I had a wander along the waterfront where I saw Long-tailed Mynas, Metallic Starlings, Pacific Swallows, White-rumped Swiftlets and Yellow-bellied Sunbirds. Calls indicated the presence of Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons, but my eye wasn't yet connecting so well with my ear.

The 30 km crossing of Wilson Strait to Ranongga went quickly thanks to the fast boat and calm sea. I kept an eye out for the rare Heinroth's Shearwater but we only saw Black Noddies and Bridled Terns. On Ranongga we were greeted, in turn, by a pod of Spinner

Dolphins, a flotilla of children in dugout canoes and, on the beach, our guide Chari. During a short walk on tracks near her village, Chari showed us Eclectus Parrot, Coconut Lorikeet, Cardinal Lory, Red-knobbed and Island Imperial pigeons, and we chased the calls of the endemic Ranongga White-eye that was being pursued by a White-capped Monarch. Back in the village, Chari showed us a captive endemic Yellow-bibbed Lory. There has been significant export of wild parrots from the Solomon Islands for the pet trade, so it is all the more important to foster nature tourism there as a sustainable way for local people to benefit from protecting their wild birds.

Our next trip across Wilson Strait took us to the larger island of Vella Lavella, about 10 km from Ranongga, which also has its own island endemic white-eye. Our guide at Hambere was Tony Kanapitu, who took us on a short walk where we added to our list the endemic Pied Goshawk (*gilvus* subspecies), Solomons Cockatoo and Buff-headed Coucal (*ssp albidiventris*). Claret-breasted Fruit Doves were calling everywhere, but did not reveal themselves. The Vella Lavella White-eye also eluded us. Tony has built a splendid guest house called Jajama Homestay, which is a great base for exploring the local area.

Later, a one-hour boat journey across Vella Gulf brought us to the centrepiece of our visit, the island of Kolombangara, which



▲ Solomons Cockatoo photo by Lars Petersson.



▲ Beach Kingfisher photo by Lars Petersson.



▲ Island Imperial Pigeon photo by Michael Szabo.



▲ Midget Flowerpecker photo by Lars Petersson.

rises out of the sea and up into the clouds like an extra-large tropical version of Hauturu/Little Barrier Island in the Hauraki Gulf. Hambere Homestay sits over the lagoon. Only a few years ago, our hosts Venti and Nedi Maena and their village were closely involved with ensuring that their part of the island was not logged. Before dinner, Venti showed us around the village, where I was excited to see my first Blyth's Hornbills lumbering across the treetops, sounding as though their wings needed oiling!

Venti's keen senses and knowledge are extraordinary. We soon saw Pacific Golden Plover, Barred Cuckooshrike (*ssp ambriosa*), White-bellied Cuckooshrike, Willie Wagtail, White-rumped Swiftlet, Pacific Swallow, Singing Starling and the endemic Brown-winged Starling (*ssp grandis*). That evening our quarry was the flightless Roviana Rail. Although we could hear one calling, it remained elusive. A brief glimpse of an Australasian Barn Owl was some compensation.

The next morning I failed to see or identify the kingfisher that Venti tried to show me (probably Melanesian Kingfisher), but we

saw plenty of other birds, including the Melanesian endemics: Bronze Ground Dove (*ssp intermedia*), Song Parrot, MacKinlay's Cuckoo-dove (*spp arossi*) and Melanesian Scrubfowl; the New Georgia endemic species White-capped Monarch, Kolombangara Monarch (*ssp browni*) and Crimson-rumped Myzomela; and the New Georgia endemic subspecies of Steel-blue Flycatcher (*feminina*) and Rufous Fantail (*granti*).

Highlights included a quiet vigil in the headmaster's garden, where I saw a Roviana Rail fossicking away like a small and somewhat shy Weka, and the endemic Kolombangara subspecies of Solomons White-eye (*kulumbangrae*). We did not expect to see the endemic Kolombangara White-eye. That, and a number of other species such as Kolombangara Leafbird and Pale Mountain Pigeon live higher up the mountain - so I'll have to wait for another trip to see them!

An afternoon walk yielded great views of Beach Kingfisher, Reef Heron, Striated Heron, Cicadabird (*ssp saturator*) and the endemic Oriole Whistler (*spp centralis*). Afterwards, a trip in Venti's boat



▲ Yellow-bibbed Lory photo by Rod Hay.

provided splendid views of Eastern Osprey and Moustached Treeswifts. We also looked for Solomons Sea Eagle, which we heard but did not see.

The landscape, birds and warm hospitality of Venti and Nedi will surely draw me back again. There's also Imbu Rano Lodge further up the mountain, or you one can do the nine-hour hike from Hambere and camp up on the mountain as Archie MacFarlane did in 2015 (see March 2016 issue). That's an adventure to plan for another day, but who knows - maybe there are Heinroth's Shearwater breeding somewhere higher up the mountain?

An early boat trip to Gizo the next morning was required to avoid a threatened squall and get us back in time for a walk up the hill on Gizo to look for the endemic Gizo White-eye. Being a birder, Venti wanted to show us one himself, and he did, but only after making me work for it in the hot sun. Good views of Lesser Frigatebirds floating overhead added to the delight of the walk.

Our scheduled departure for Honiara next morning was delayed for eight hours, but this was an opportunity to wander around looking at Eastern Osprey, Metallic Starlings and Beach Kingfishers perched in the nearby trees, Ruddy Turnstones, Pacific Golden Plovers and Whimbrels on the runway, and Black Noddy and

Black-naped, Crested and Little terns over the coast.

Back in Honiara, Brenden Mautoa from SIVB drove me up Mt Austen to meet local birding guide Samson Hasi, who is also someone that has worked to help ensure the local area is a refuge for birds. Like Venti, Samson's senses and knowledge were exceptional. After the excitement of seeing a Brahminy Kite in a tree, he helped me get my eyes onto a Claret-breasted Fruit Dove. The ubiquitous imperial pigeons were joined by MacKinlay's Cuckoo-dove, Cardinal Lory, Coconut Lorikeet and the endemic Yellow-bibbed Lory and Solomons Cockatoo. I was delighted to see the *nilo* subspecies of Buff-headed Coucals running through the branches, and to hear Blyth's Hornbills flying overhead. We heard but did not see a White-billed Crow, but made up for this with good views of the Guadalcanal endemic Black-headed Myzomela, the Solomons endemic Midget Flowerpecker, the Melanesian endemic Moustached Treeswift, and the island endemic subspecies of Oriole Whistler (*cinnamomea*). Samson saved the best until last. "I want to show you my favourite bird," he said. At the end of our walk he excitedly pointed out a tree where an endemic Ultramarine Kingfisher was perched.

I saw a total of 70 bird species over six days, but this was just a taste of what the Solomon Islands has to offer. An impressive list



▲ Moustached Treeswift photo by Michael Szabo.



▲ Roviana Rail photo by Rod Hay.



▲ McKinlay's Cuckoo-dove photo by Rod Hay.



▲ Barred Cuckooshrike photo by Rod Hay.



▲ Cardinal Lory pair photo by Rod Hay.



▲ Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon photo by Rod Hay.

of 289 bird species occur regularly in the Solomon Islands, 73 of which are endemic species. Many of the other Solomon Islands have their own endemic species and are becoming more accessible. The SIVB is supporting and providing training to a network of birding guides, including Chari, Tony, Venti and Samson, to ensure that visiting birders are well looked after. It's not just about the birds, though. The marine environment and the island landscapes are also spectacular, and the cultural diversity and languages are fascinating. There is so much to see and learn, so why not see what SIVB has to offer and visit the Solomons yourself. I know I'm going to return - I've to get up that mountain!

This visit was organised by the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau. I am hugely grateful to Fiona Teama, Brenden Mautoa and Mike Parker-Brown. For more information please visit <http://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/> or email Brenden Mautoa: [brenden.mautoa@sivb.com.sb](mailto:brenden.mautoa@sivb.com.sb)



▲ (L-R) Rod Hay, Fiona Teama (SIVB), and Nedi and Venti Maena, Hambere Homestay, Kolombangara.



Common Diving Petrel photo by Les Feasey/NZ Birds Online.

## Common Diving Petrels in the Hauraki Gulf

Common Diving Petrels are an important local seabird species that was once found throughout New Zealand. Colonies within the Hauraki Gulf breed through the winter months and forage on zooplankton (e.g. krill and copepods). However, higher densities of krill are found in the outer Gulf areas (i.e. near the Mokohinau Islands), with low densities occurring in the inner Gulf areas (i.e. near Tiritiri Matangi Island). Whether this results in inner Gulf colonies having greater levels of stress (and lower breeding success) as they work harder to obtain sufficient food for themselves and their chicks is unknown. Accordingly, we set out to test whether inner Gulf colonies are more stressed compared to outer Gulf colonies.

To do this our study aimed to compare foraging effort, levels of stress physiology and hormone (CORT) levels, and chick rearing success among the Tiritiri and Mokohinau island colonies. Furthermore, we aimed to undertake an interannual comparison by utilising existing physiology samples. We did this by attaching GPS devices to birds and taking blood samples to get stress hormone and stable isotope samples.

Our results showed that, despite predictions, birds located at an inner Gulf island site and tracked every five minute fixes via GPS devices, did not travel to prime feeding grounds i.e. near shelf break areas, but instead foraged in the near shore waters around their colony. The number of foraging events undertaken by adult birds did not differ among islands; however, distinct differences in foraging effort were observed with Tiritiri Matangi birds undertaking feeding trips of 80 km and flying at an average speed of 8 km/h, compared to Mokohinau birds with trips of 40 km and 4 km/h average flying speed.

Interestingly, despite these differences in effort there was no difference in stress hormones among islands but among seasons. For example, compared to the 'prelaying' and 'incubating' phases, diving petrels during the 'chick rearing' phase had a significantly higher level of the stress hormone corticosterone circulating in the blood regardless of which island they came from.

Stable isotopes showed differences in prey targeted between colonies. Birds from Tiritiri Matangi targeted a richer diet consisting of fish and squid compared to Mokohinau Island which preyed on lower trophic level zooplankton. Due to poor weather preventing access, we are unable to report chick rearing success comparisons.

Taken together it seems that diving petrels on Tiritiri Matangi work harder when foraging, potentially as they reside in a zooplankton poor location. To offset this, they have switched to target a richer prey and thus we do not see any increase in stress profiles as they are able to offset the energetic costs of flying further and faster to provision their chick from this richer prey.

We are hugely grateful for funding provided by Birds New Zealand, Ngāti Rehua for access to Mokohinau Islands and all iwi holding mana whenua status over Tiritiri Matangi Island. The University of Auckland's FRDF, IMS PBRF, funds for providing contributing funding. We wish to acknowledge Shae Vickers, Chris Gaskin, Todd Landers, Jingjing Zhang, Rachael Sagar and John Stewart for assistance with field work and Sarah Bury at NIWA Wellington for Stable Isotope analyses.

BRENDON DUNPHY (UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND) & MATT RAYNER (AUCKLAND MUSEUM)



Sheila at Lake Ellesmere, World Wetlands Day 2009. Photo by ECan.

## Sheila Petch (1927 – 2017)

Sheila was amazing. She wouldn't have thought that though. She was from Sheffield and had no particular career, and worked as a cleaner at the University of Canterbury. But her drive and determination put people like me to shame. She never stopped; always gardening, crafting things, thinking about others – not herself, cycling everywhere, dancing, loving swing music, cooking and, most of all, finding out about and watching her beloved birds. In her 90 years, she lived through a world war during which she and her five sisters were evacuated to the country. This was after her Mum had died when they were young, and her Dad had to cope by himself. Sheila had two husbands [the first died soon after they were married], and Tom, her remaining partner, plus four children (one dying in infancy).

In 1966, Sheila, Dennis and three school-aged children came by ship as 'Ten Pound Poms' to settle in Christchurch. She joined Forest and Bird and went on a course about birds run through Extension Studies by Peter Harper in the early 1980s. She was already on the Committee of the Native Forest Action Council, which eventually stopped native forest logging on the West Coast. After joining OSNZ, Sheila set about getting proficient in finding and counting birds and became an excellent observer, having a number of first records for New Zealand to her name: Little Stint, Long-toed Stint, Stilt Sandpiper are some of hers. She had a good eye for detail which she used for bird identification above all else. She also contributed data to many schemes, projects, field trips and other activities during the 1980s.

In 1991, with tutoring from Canterbury RR Peter Reese, Sheila ran the banding project in Landsdowne Valley. Banding projects were also happening with Black-billed Gulls, oystercatchers and Pied Stilts, led by Sheila, who was keen to investigate the ongoing populations of these birds. The oystercatcher project at the Ashley Estuary was particularly interesting as interbreeding between SIPO and VOC seemed to be occurring. Birds were caught and banded and the chicks banded when old enough. Later, it was shown that the chicks were fertile and breeding with either species in the next generation. The results of this study were published in *Notornis* 57 (1) 2010.

In 1993, Sheila became Canterbury RR for three years. She cycled around posting newsletters by hand, organising local conferences and the IOC meeting. She gave talks at WEA courses and at local meetings, cleaned oiled ducks, and had her phone number listed under OSNZ.

Birders have paid tribute to Sheila's endless patience, sharing her knowledge and experience with new birders and especially children and young people. Andrew Crossland, Scott Butcher, Peter Langlands, and Bruce Kirkman all worked with Sheila during their teens. Sheila's unflinching support of other birders was quite extraordinary, but she was like that – selfless, caring, and enthusiastic, and now so very much missed.

JAN WALKER



## First NZ breeding of Leach's Storm Petrel

A breeding Leach's Storm Petrel was found on Rangatira Island in the Chatham Islands on 10th February while DOC staff were checking Black-winged Petrel nests near the summit. This is the first record of Leach's Storm Petrel breeding in New Zealand.

Gemma Green found a small black petrel in one of the marked Black-winged Petrel burrows, which she showed to Graeme Taylor who identified it as Leach's Storm Petrel. It was found to be sitting on an egg in the burrow. Measurements of the bird were taken along with photos and it was returned to the nest. The next day, DOC staff returned to band the bird and then the partner bird was caught and banded on 13th February. Mike Imber first located this species ashore on Rabbit Island on the other side of Pitt Island in 1980. The two birds caught that year were banded, but neither were nesting.

GRAEME TAYLOR

## Hoary-headed Grebes breed at Lake Elterwater

In January, Matthias Dehling photographed three adult Hoary-headed Grebes at Lake Elterwater, together with two juveniles that were already approaching the size of the adults but which were still showing a juvenile head pattern. In February, he photographed four adult Hoary-headed Grebes in breeding plumage and reported that two adults now had two small juveniles with them that were still being fed by the adults and sometimes carried on the back. This Australian endemic species has only previously bred in New Zealand when two pairs bred in Southland in 1977-78.



Hoary-headed Grebe with two juveniles, Lake Elterwater. Photo by Matthias Dehling.

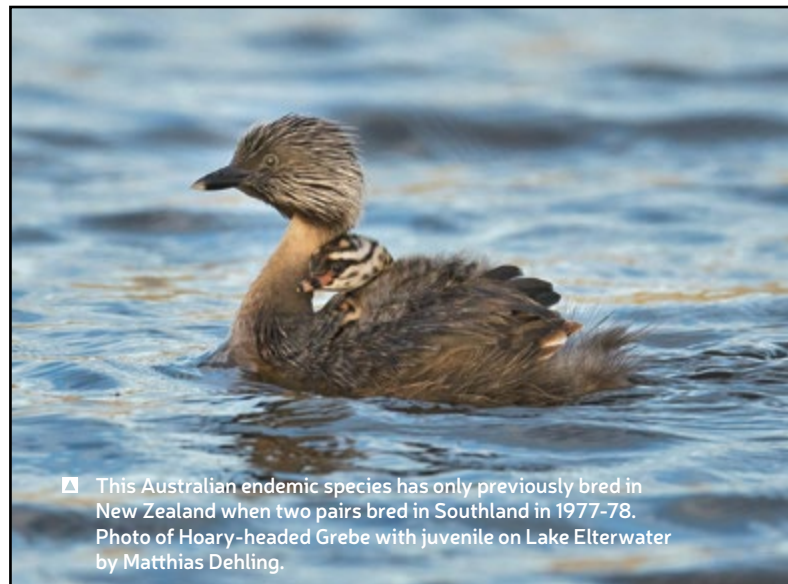
## New extinct rails described

A new study of the fossil rails of the early Miocene of St Bathans in Otago has described two new extinct rail species: *Priscaweke parvales*, which is extremely common, and *Litorallus livezeyi*, a distinctly larger, uncommon species.

The study, entitled "Flightless rails from the early Miocene St Bathans Fauna, Otago, New Zealand", was published in the *Journal of Systematic Palaeontology* in February by Ellen Mather, Warren Handley and Trevor Worthy of Flinders University; Alan Tennyson of Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand; Paul Scofield and Vanesa De Pietri of Canterbury Museum; and Suzanne Hand and Michael Archer of the University of NSW.

The fossil remains came from deposits estimated to be between 16 and 19 million-years-old and are thought to be the most ancient flightless rail species known globally. *Priscaweke parvales* was tiny, being about the size of a House Sparrow. Both newly described species exhibit features that indicate they were flightless.

The findings show that flightless rails have been present in New Zealand for millions of years. At the time that these two rail species roamed New Zealand, the South Island was dominated by a 5,600 square kilometre "mega-lake" - Lake Manuherikia - surrounded by subtropical rainforest containing gum trees, she-oaks, palms and cycads. Fossil remains of other ancient species previously found at St Bathans include crocodiles, terrestrial turtles, flamingo-like birds, and several pigeon, parrot and shorebird lineages. The new discovery reinforces the view that New Zealand has long been one of the world's most extraordinary 'engines' driving bird evolution.



This Australian endemic species has only previously bred in New Zealand when two pairs bred in Southland in 1977-78. Photo of Hoary-headed Grebe with juvenile on Lake Elterwater by Matthias Dehling.

## FAR NORTH

David Lawrie came to our branch meeting to give a presentation about the Manukau Harbour. Then our own Kevin Matthews gave a talk about Australasian Barn Owls. This didn't leave much time for a meeting but nobody seemed to mind. After the meeting David, Detlef and Bill reported hearing 3 Northern Brown Kiwi calling in my backyard.

December saw us doing the wader censuses at Parengarenga, Rangaunu and Kowhai, and helping out at Big Sand Island and Mangawhai. I also did some birding, after which my North Island list had a dozen more species on it. Scott Brooks organised a pelagic trip from Tutukaka out past the Poor Knights Islands (13/1), so the photographers onboard had a great day getting close flight views of NZ Storm Petrels, Grey Noddies and Fairy Prions, some within a few metres.

At our January meeting Darren Markin showed us photos from his recent travels, CJ Ralph presented his census results from over 30 years of observations recorded in the Bay of Islands, and Kevin Matthews spoke about "30 Years of Far North Birding". Epic stuff!

The real work of tidying up the loose ends for the 2018 Birds New Zealand AGM and Conference happened the next day. So, if you haven't registered yet and have made your Field Trip choices, now is a good time to book. Spaces are filling up fast! – *LES FEASEY*

## NORTHLAND

In January, our count of beach-wrecked seabirds exceeded the total number counted on all of our 2017 East Coast beach patrols. Over a 19-day period from Ruakaka to Mangawhai, and on Kauri Mountain and Ocean Beach, we counted 7 Flesh-footed Shearwater; 13 Buller's Shearwater; 3 Sooty Shearwater; 5 Short-tailed Shearwater; 357 Fluttering Shearwater; 8 Little Shearwater; 3 Wedge-tailed Shearwater; 20 Common Diving Petrel; 113 Fairy Prion; 4 Thin-billed Prion; 12 Prion spp; 2 Blue Petrel; 2 Pycroft's Petrel; 84 Grey-faced Petrel; 2 White-faced storm Petrel; 64 Little Penguin and 1 NZ Dotterel. The Ngunguru Beach/Sandspit counters on 11/11 were thrilled to see the Whimbrel that spent the summer there.

Four of us did the Te Wharo/Peach Cove 5MBC on 20/1 in foggy conditions. The overall count was low, but the highlight was seeing 3 Whiteheads at the translocation release site, including a juvenile. Mike and Jenny Butcher on the Mt Lion lines saw another 2 adult Whiteheads with a juvenile the next day, and 8 Whitehead nests have been reported by BHCT Rangers this season.

Last October, Young Birder Dayna discovered a Little Penguin nest at the Taurawhata Grey-faced Petrel colony. Sadly, the chick was subsequently lost when a large tide in December washed out the nest. A pelagic trip from Tutukaka out past the Poor Knights Islands on 13/1 produced a list of 21 seabird species, including: 1 Northern Royal Albatross; 1 Mottled Petrel; 1 White-naped Petrel; 3 Flesh-footed Shearwater; 1 Sooty Shearwater; 20 White-faced Storm Petrel; 38

NZ Storm Petrel; 1 Pomarine Skua and 18 Grey Noddies. – *ANNE McCracken*

## AUCKLAND

Notable recent records included a Sooty Tern seen at Muriwai Gannet Colony by Bard Nyberg and Terje Kolaas on 1/12, a Lesser Frigatebird seen off Tiritiri Matangi by Matthew Crawford and Qin Huang on 7/1, and a dead Red-tailed Tropicbird found on Ponui Island on 21/1.

The November Muriwai beach patrol yielded just 3 birds, the December patrol just 1, and the February patrol just 2 (Australasian Gannet, Short-tailed Shearwater). In contrast, a patrol of Pakiri Beach by Tony Habraken on 21/1 found 200 birds on 6 km of beach including 76 Fluttering Shearwaters, 55 Fairy Prions, 21 Grey-faced Petrels and 2 White-faced Storm Petrels. The Te Arai Beach patrol on 28/1 found a total of 133 birds of 12 species including a Slender-billed Prion.

NZ Fairy Tern records included 5 pairs at Mangawhai which fledged 4 chicks, while 1 pair at Pakiri River mouth hopefully fledged a late chick after king tides and bad weather. The 2 and a half pairs at Papakanui Spit did not fledge any checks yet again as king tides and bad weather took their toll; 1 female laid eggs with 1 of the male birds, then late in the season she switched her allegiance to another (previously unpartnered) male bird and laid eggs with him. Thanks to DOC and local helpers for this information.

The 11/11 Mangawhai wader census recorded 8 species including 341 Bar-tailed Godwit, 267 Red Knot, 26 Ruddy Turnstone, 179 NZ Dotterel and 17 NZ Fairy Tern. The 18/11 South Kaipara Harbour wader census recorded 13,691 Bar-tailed Godwit, 8,942 Red Knot, 291 Ruddy Turnstone, 37 Pacific Golden Plover, 2 Sanderling, 8 Asiatic Whimbrel, 3 Far Eastern Curlew, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, 6 Little Terns, 2 Australasian Bittern, 127 Black-billed Gulls and 9 NZ Fairy Terns.

Other interesting sightings included 5 Red-necked Stint and 2 Great Knot at Papakanui Spit on 1/1 and 2 Great Knot were also seen at Big Sand Island on 28/1 along with 2 Greater Sand Plover. Northern NZ Dotterel appear to have weathered well various storms and king tides at some breeding sites. A total of 23 chicks fledged from 17 pairs at Tawharanui, a minimum of 6 chicks fledged from 5 pairs at Shakespear Regional Park, while 11 chicks fledged from 10 pairs at Pakiri River mouth. Other sites sustained repeated wash-outs, although dotterel minders facilitated amazing nest rescues at Karekare and Omaha and some chicks are likely to fledge at Piha Beach.

Public events and guided walks are planned by Auckland Branch this year, the first being at Matuku Link Open Day on 3/2. Despite bad weather lowering attendance, our display was popular and helped locally raise awareness of Birds New Zealand. – *IAN McLEAN*

## BAY OF PLENTY

Summer storms have provided us with beaches littered with penguins, petrels, prions,

shearwaters and gannets. Sustained easterly winds have driven this surge. Thirty chicks were banded as part of the 25-year Grey-faced Petrel Project on Mount Maunganui/Mauao. This is considered a reasonable number for the effort, as it is always tricky getting help between Christmas and New Year and the hours of 9-11pm. Unsociable animals! Our 'Bird of the Summer' is likely going to be the Laughing Gull that was seen around the Opotiki area by several birders. – *PAUL CUMING*

## TARANAKI

At our October meeting, David Cockeram reported that the North Taranaki Forest and Bird branch were readily agreeable to sharing field trips with us, and our South Taranaki member will look into the same arrangement. Our field trip to Lake Rotokare was as successful as ever with Fernbird, Tieke, Hihi, North Island Robin and NZ Tomtit seen, but no Whitehead. Some fortunate people saw a Kiwi that had been caught the night before being readied for release into Taranaki/Egmont National Park.

The Little Shag colony in Pukekura Park around the fountain lake is going well despite the Christmas lights and hordes of people. Shining Cuckoo are calling all around and the Cockerams have heard Long-tail Cuckoo close to their home. There were 3 Pied Shag at Awakino, 3 Bar-tailed Godwit at Waiwhakaihō, and a Ruddy Turnstone at Waiongana, the start of the migratory waders.

The trip around Waiwhakaihō and Lake Rotomanu turned up 26 species including a Paradise Shelduck with 10 ducklings, and a Tui. At Sandy Bay, a pair of VOC had a two-egg nest, but I am unsure of the result. The resident pair at Waiongana fledged 2 successfully. Tony Green has been monitoring nesting Hihi at Lake Rotokare, where by early December 20 young from 6 nests were reported and North Island Robin fledglings were seen; he also had nice photos of a pair of Whio with 4 ducklings close to York Road Loop track in the national park.

After an absence of many years, Pacific Golden Plover have returned to Waiongana where there were 3 juveniles with 2 Ruddy Turnstone and a NZ Dotterel in early December. Beach patrols have turned up little of interest over recent months.

The long, mainly dry summer has been good for California Quail with many juveniles around. A juvenile Wild Turkey has been seen at Lake Rotokare having a safe and happy Christmas. The annual beach, birds and BBQ at Waiongana was the 11th, and those who trekked to the beach saw the 4 handsome juvenile Pacific Golden Plovers along with NZ and Banded dotterels, and the resident VOC with their pied offspring. The plovers were still here in early February. – *PETER FRYER*

## HAWKE'S BAY

Branch activity was limited to the wader census in November, with other planned events cancelled mainly due to people being



away over the holiday season. Our members have continued to find interesting birds over the summer, and a number of uncommon species have been observed. Up to 4 Shore Plovers at a time have been seen at Ahuriri Estuary, although 1 dead bird was also found. These birds are commuters from the breeding programme on Waikawa (Portland) Island, off the tip of Mahia Peninsula. Up to 3 Marsh Crakes and 1 Spotless Crake have also been seen in the same Southern Marsh area of Ahuriri where these normally secretive birds were recorded last summer. A pair of Brown Teal have taken up residence at a beachside pond in Te Awanga, again most likely from a nearby reintroduction, this time at Cape Kidnappers. Thanks to Wayne and Margaret Twydale for these observations.

Our Regional Representative, Bernie Kelly, submitted some Beach Patrol cards online and is trying to encourage others to do the same. Bernie was also involved with monitoring and protecting a breeding colony of Black-billed Gulls at the Tukituki River mouth over summer.

There is good news from the seabird breeding site at Boundary Stream, as reported by Kelly Eaton of DOC in a message to volunteers: "We are very pleased to tell you that the Poutiri Ao o Tane project have had a great end to 2017 and start to 2018 with confirmation that both Cook's Petrel/Titi and Mottled Petrel/koure have returned to the seabird site on the Maungaharuru Range! This is highly significant and very exciting. Motion activated cameras have collected images of both, with a Cook's Petrel climbing a sound system tree in November and a Mottled Petrel walking about on the 14th and 16th of January. Burrow checks have shown some sign of digging but no nesting at this stage." – IAN SMITH

## WHANGANUI

The weather shifted sharply from a wet spring to a hot, extremely dry summer during which the temperature was 1.5 °C higher and rainfall was only 24% of the averages for November and December in the preceding 30 years. At Bushy Park, the parents abandoned their brood midway through the nestling period at four out of 6 Hihi nests. Although Hihi are adapted as nectar-feeders, nectar forms only part of their diet and does not supply the protein needed for growth. That comes from small insects, which the birds glean from leaves and other tree surfaces. We don't have data on insect numbers this season, but a decline could compromise bird breeding success.

Ormond Torr noted something similar. On each of 7 occasions between mid-October and mid-December, when he would normally expect to be approached by an umbrella of alarmed Southern Black-backed Gulls from the large colony that usually breeds in the dunes of the Whitiua Scientific Reserve, the few gulls in the vicinity took no more than a passing interest in his presence. This led him to wonder if the gulls had bred this season. Given the weather extremes across the country

this summer, have other regions experienced anything similar?

The marked male Bar-tailed Godwit (AJD), which Paul Gibson has been keeping tabs on for the past 9 years, finally returned to the Whanganui Estuary in early January, about a month later than usual. Paul had seen him on the Manawatū Estuary in December, where AJD normally goes first on return from the northern hemisphere. Phil Battley says there is no special reason for AJD to come over to Whanganui each summer, where he stays until his departure northwards in late March, other than habit. Anyone who has worked closely with marked birds recognises their individual characters.

Among other notable sightings, Brad Mosen reported seeing two Rifleman, possibly an adult and a fledgling, at Waitahinga, a district reserve comprising a mix of native forest and pine plantations, 38 km NNW of Whanganui. The nearest known site for the species is in the forests around Rotorangi, in the upper Patea River catchment, about 45 km further northwest. The forests here connect with those of the Waitotara Game Management Area and the Whanganui National Park, neither of which have been well explored ornithologically because of the ruggedness of the country. Despite limited pest control, Waitahinga also has good populations of Whiteheads, Tomtits and North Island Robins. – PETER FROST

## WAIRARAPA

Two recent successes for members of the Wairarapa Branch are worth reporting. Firstly, a member of the Regional Council staff noticed 2 NZ Dotterels while clearing traps south of Riversdale Beach. Two of our members followed up and, sure enough, there were 2 hitherto unknown NZ Dotterels occupying the beach. Unfortunately, they didn't appear to be nesting, possibly because of some exceptionally high seas. Our members followed up about a month later and 1 bird was still in residence. This will be a new site for our NZ Dotterel programme next spring. Were it not for this well-informed and observant GWRC staff member who had a connection to one of our members, we wouldn't know about this new potential nesting site.

Secondly, while conducting helicopter surveys for Rooks, another GWRC staff member reported sighting a shag colony on a private lake inland from Lake Ferry on the southern Wairarapa coast. Three members followed up and found Black, Pied and Little shags nesting. We estimate the lake is about 4 km from Lake Onoke and 6 km from the sea, which makes this Pied Shag colony one of the furthest inland we have so far located. Once again, a good relationship with the Regional Council led us to a significant find. – PAUL SHORTIS, JOANNA MCVEAGH & COLIN SHORE

## WELLINGTON

A recent major event in the Wellington region was the nesting of NZ Dotterel on the

Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve. While New Zealand Dotterel have in previous years occasionally visited the Reserve here, this is the first time that they have been documented attempting to breed there. This is the furthest south on the West Coast of the North Island that NZ Dotterels have attempted to breed. Up to 8 birds and a single nest with 6 eggs were recorded on the Reserve this spring/summer.

The large number of eggs is usually assumed to be as a result of a female-female pair using the same nest and the eggs would be expected to be infertile. However, a single chick was observed over a few days and then disappeared. Also nesting in the same area as the NZ Dotterels were Banded Dotterels and VOCs. The Scientific Reserve is close to a housing area and is extensively used by the general public, dog walkers, whitebaiters and a range of vehicles. Unless the nesting area is better protected against human interference and introduced predators, it is difficult to envisage that NZ Dotterel will successfully breed on the Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve.

Finally, R.I.P. Nigel "no mates", January 2018, Mana Island. Died of unknown causes next to his mate of many years, a concrete gannet. – GEOFF DE LISLE

## NELSON

Australian Wood Ducks and Whio were notable sightings around the region. Three broods (6, 5, 2) of wood ducks were reported from the same pond system in Tasman (3/1), 8 were seen at Hoddy's Park (1/1) and 8 at Bells Is oxidation pond (28/1). A drive up to the Cobb Power House proved worthwhile for Don C and Willie C in December, where they spotted 2 adult Whio and 4 juveniles under the powerhouse. Another 2 adults were reported there a week later. Ingrid H also spotted a couple along the Pupu Hydro Walk (31/12) and 1 was photographed at Lake Rotoiti in February.

Solitary Gull-Billed Terns continue to be seen, mostly from Waimea and Motueka estuaries. Full breeding dress has been noted since October, with 1 bird closely associating with the Caspian Tern colony on Bells Island shell bank during January.

The capricious Black-fronted Terns weren't seen this season on a previously used local river but downstream from the Tapawera Bridge over the Motueka River, 4 pairs with a couple of chicks were reported in late December. The Caspian Terns at Bells Island had a successful season with 40-50 nests counted in December and a banding session led by Willie C early January saw 85 young ones banded.

Rabbit Island was roughed-up a bit by the storm surge of Cyclone Fihi, but beforehand, Willie C and Don C with some valuable assistance from Holly T tagged and banded 13 juvenile VOCs from c10 nests plus 2 adults previously uncaught. Early in January, a Broad-billed Prion was taken into care at Natureland Wildlife Trust in Tahunanui, and several weeks later the

local newspaper reported that wrecked Fairy Prions were also being looked after there. Large wrecks of these delightful seabirds were reported from around the region, especially Delaware and Tasman Bays. One or 2 individuals made it inland onto city streets.

There were regular summer sightings of a Whimbrel with roosting waders at Waimea Estuary. A Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was also seen there in January, and 3 Whimbrels on 12/2. Lastly, a New Zealand Falcon was seen attacking a Kereru near Pupu hydro walk, Golden Bay (1/1). – **GAIL D. QUAYLE**

### MARLBOROUGH

We are fortunate in Marlborough to have a number of motivated young people and so have reinvigorated the Maud Island Fluttering Shearwater project to really involve them. In July, we spent a week with Hinewai, Ruben, Joseph, Hunter, Tui, Jess, Heeni and Piripi replacing the 60 nest boxes, some of which were over 30-years-old. This also included DOC quarantine inspections, boat trips, carrying new boxes to the colony, digging out and replacing old boxes and tunnel entrances, and seeing some King Shags. We followed up with a day trip in December and banded 6 chicks. It is great to see them becoming familiar with the island and have a feeling of pride in their contribution.

A coastal survey was organised on 2/12 for the area from Waima/Ure River mouth north to Marfells Beach. Many of our members were involved, walking 1 of the 4 sections, dropping and picking up people, and sharing knowledge on the area, its history and species. The 36 species we recorded included Banded Dotterels, Ruddy Turnstones, and several species tern and albatross. It was a great effort by everyone, and a good opportunity to see the changes that have occurred along the coast since the last big earthquake.

The annual banding of Black-billed Gulls happened in late November. The weather had been in the gulls' favour and the Wairau colony had a good breeding season with circa 590 chicks banded with white bands, so if you see any, please note the band number and colour and let Mike Bell know.

In the Wairau Lagoons area, Will Parsons has had good sightings of Pacific Golden Plover on the Lower Opawa, along with Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns on the sandbar. The Glossy Ibis have again breed among the Royal Spoonbills on the settling ponds, with 4 chicks fledged. Will also spotted Fernbird on the new MDC walkway.

A really interesting note from Bill Cash: "One of my birding beats is the Quail Stream Track up the Wither Hills, it's a 1km walk up to the seat from the Carpark. The other day I arrived at the seat, sat down for a rest and there immediately above me were 3 Brown Creeper they were even singing. The last time I recorded Brown Creeper would be a few winters ago at the Taylor Dam and that was a big surprise, this was even bigger because they were right on Blenheim's doorstep and in exotic bush that I think years ago local school children planted.

Just beyond the seat further up the gully is a good patch of (exotic) bush which could support a small population of Brown Creeper."

– **HEATHER DAVIES**

### CANTERBURY

With mostly fine, hot weather over the summer so far, conditions have been ideal for birders to be out and about in Canterbury. As well as the usual sandpipers, knots and stints, several other interesting waders were spotted in the area. A Grey-tailed Tattler was first seen at the Ashley Estuary in November and has been seen a number of times since then, although it has yet to be reported this year. At Lake Ellesmere, two Hudsonian Godwits were seen between Selwyn Huts and the L11 during our Summer Wader Count. Later that day, a Marsh Sandpiper and one Hudsonian Godwit were seen at Yarrs Bay.

A New Zealand Dotterel was found at Point Kean, Kaikoura, in mid-November. Also at Kaikoura, a White-naped Petrel, among other seabirds, was seen off the Peninsula during an Albatross Encounter pelagic trip in January.

A pair of Southern Crested Grebe has been nesting in Taranaki Stream, Waikuku, and now have young. The local residents have taken an interest in the birds, which is nice to see. Another interesting sighting was that of a South Island Robin at Kawhaka Creek, which was reported twice in January. These sightings indicate a possible range expansion of the species. Finally, a White-winged Black Tern was seen at the Cass River Delta in early December. Another was found at the Waimakariri River in January. Interestingly, both birds were seen carrying food.

– **ELEANOR GUNBY**

### OTAGO

We have been out and about making interesting new observations. The pair of Marsh Crakes we observed at the Sinclair Wetlands, indeed did have a nest, as 4 chicks were first seen by Glen Riley, manager at the wetlands, on 26th October, making incubation  $17 \pm 1$  days. We have been able to accurately age-document the various stages of development with photographs at 4 days, 2, 3 and 5 weeks of age. As far as we know two of the chicks survived.

Nick Beckwith, photographed colour-banded Bar-tailed Godwits on Warrington Beach over the summer; 6 were from the group originally banded at Warrington Beach in February 2006, so were at least 12 years old; another was banded in Victoria and another in Japan.

A banded Royal Spoonbill spotted by Tom Waterhouse at the Kakanui River Bridge, North Otago, turned out to have been banded at Wairau in 1993, so this bird now holds the record for the oldest documented Royal Spoonbill at 25 years of age.

Rachel Hufton was involved in surveying the Makarora River in October. She found nesting colonies of Black-billed Gull and Black-fronted Tern and evidence of breeding Wrybill, Banded Dotterel and South Island Pied Oystercatcher. The area is now being trapped

but nearby colonies of Southern Black-backed Gull, and flash flooding also take their toll.

Since April a small mixed group of NZ Scaup has become resident at Tomahawk Lagoon for the first time. This culminated in December with another first for this area: two families of scaup ducklings. Andrew Austin has kept a good eye on them and carefully recorded their behaviours and duckling development.

Alan Baker discovered a Morepork family in the Town Belt, Dunedin. They were seen or heard almost every evening from 18th November to 12th December; the young bird being fed by parents was first seen on 7th December and was already well-developed. This is the first evidence of breeding in the Town Belt.

The final field trip of the year was to Taieri Mouth, where we surveyed birds in a nearby private wetland and bush reserve; the wetland proved a popular feeding ground for Royal Spoonbill, Pied Stilts, Pukeko, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal and Paradise Shelduck. Nine native species were seen in the bush reserve and the presence of Fernbirds was also a plus. A good group gathered for a shared picnic lunch to finish off a great birding year.

– **MARY THOMPSON**

### SOUTHLAND

A Marsh Sandpiper visited the Invercargill Tip Lagoon in December and was seen again in January. Some visiting birders reported 7 Australian Shelduck, but they didn't stay around for local birders.

On New Year's Day, Glenda Rees spotted 3 Gull-billed Terns at Awarua Bay, this is the third sighting of this species in this location in the past year. Lloyd Esler was looking for kingfishers at Waikawa near the wharf, normally a guaranteed place to see them on the telephone lines, when he noticed a NZ Falcon sitting on a wooden post and realised why there were none.

Daniel Cocker was watching a flock of Black-fronted Terns hawking over the sand dunes at Oreti Beach when he noticed a White-winged Black Tern among them.

A very rare vagrant in November was a Black-tailed Native Hen. This was the first time that this species has been seen in Southland since the 1920s. It had been seen on a farm near Invercargill by the share-milkers who realised it was something different. Neil Robertson and Matt Jones headed there as soon as news got out about the bird and Matt managed to get a photo. Unfortunately, for the many birders around NZ and myself, the bird disappeared soon after.

Some of the other interesting sightings in Southland in the past 2 months were: Spotless Crake (Mirror Lakes, Fiordland), Grey-backed Storm Petrel; Pomarine Skua and Black-bellied Storm Petrel (Wreck Reef, Stewart Island). We now look forward to the February wader count and entertaining young birders for the planned Youth Camp on Stewart Island and other great birding locations around Southland.

– **PHIL RHODES**



1. Leach's Storm Petrel, Rangatira Island/Graeme Taylor; 2. Hoary-headed Grebe, Lake Elterwater/Matthias Dehling; 3. Lesser Frigatebird, Auckland/Qin Huang; 4. Sooty Tern, Muriwai/Terje Kolaas; 5. Pink-footed Shearwater, Kaikoura/ Matt Anderson; 6. Black-tailed Native Hen, Southland/Matt Jones; 7. Little Whimbrel, Miranda/Oscar Thomas; Laughing Gull, Opotoki/Les Feasey (NZ Birds Online).

## Bird News

*Some of these sightings have not received official acceptance by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee (1st November 2017 to 1st March 2017).*

Four adult **Hoary-headed Grebes** seen at Lake Elterwater near Blenheim between 12/1 and 1/3 produced 7 juveniles between them.

Up to 4 **Chestnut-breasted Shelducks** were reported at the Pleasure Bay Tip Lagoon, Invercargill, from 1/11 to 19/2. Counts of 6, 5 and 2 **Australian Wood Duck** were reported at the Playhouse Café ponds near Mapua (3/1), 8 at Hoddy's Park (1/1) and 8 at Bells Island oxidation pond (28/1). The resident **Plumed Whistling Duck** duo was reported at Anderson Park in Taradale (Hawke's Bay) on 31/12. A **Northern Shoveler** was reported at Pleasure Bay Tip Lagoon, Invercargill, on 2/11, 5/11 and 29/11, and a possible **Pink-eared Duck** was reported at Piha on 15/1.

The Renwick **Black Kite** was reported on 14/2 and 18/2. A less predictable sighting was a **Black Falcon** reported at Lake Diamond near Wanaka on 22/1, a record of which has been submitted to the Rarities Appraisal Committee (RAC).

An unusual bird for Miranda was an **Antipodean Albatross** found grounded on 26/2, and swiftly taken into care. Further south, **Grey-headed Mollmawk**, **Campbell Mollmawk** and **Broad-billed Prion** were seen off Stewart Island on 4/11. A rare sight off Kaikoura was a **Pink-footed Shearwater** on the water on 12/1. Inland, a **Black Petrel** was seen on Lake Taupo near the Tongariro River Delta on 7/1. Then a **Grey-faced Petrel** was photographed resting on the water in the middle of Lake Taupo on 21/1, and another was seen in flight off Hot Water Beach on the Taupo lakefront on 24/1. A southerly sighting of **White-naped Petrel** was one photographed off Kaikoura on 5/1. Another was seen just east of the Poor Knights Islands on 13/1, as was a **Mottled Petrel**. A **Leach's Storm Petrel** was found sitting on an egg in its burrow on Rangatira Island in the Chathams on 10/2, with a second bird located in the same burrow on 13/2. This is the first NZ breeding record of this species. An unexpected sighting of **Wilson's Storm Petrel** was a bird seen in Queen Charlotte Sound on 23/2. A **King Penguin** was reported at Taieri River Mouth on 30/12, and an **Erect Crested Penguin** was reported ashore near Akaroa on 15/2. A rare sighting of **Lesser Frigatebird** was one seen from the Tiritiri Matangi ferry on 7/1, and a **Cape Gannet** was also a long way from home at the Farewell Spit gannet colony on 4/11.

A possible **Yellow-billed Spoonbill** was reported near Tokaanu wharf on 12/1. **Glossy Ibis** were reported breeding again at the Royal Spoonbill colony at Blenheim oxidation ponds on Hardings Road through November, with 9 birds and 4 nests seen there on 3/11.

A very rare record was the **Black-tailed Native Hen** that stayed briefly at Waimatua, Southland, 10-11/11.

A **Black Stilt** was reported at Te Awaaiti Road, Sandy Bay, South Wairarapa, on 2/12. A **Little Whimbrel** was seen intermittently at Miranda from 15/1 to 1/3. Two **Greater Sand Plovers** were photographed at Big Sand Island, Kaipara, on 4/2. A **Red-capped Dotterel** was reported at Miranda on 9/1. **Grey-tailed Tattler** was reported at Waikuku Beach, Bay of Plenty, from 30/10 to 6/12, at Aotea Harbour on 3/2, and at Mangere on 17/2, and a **Wandering Tattler** was seen at Ohiwa Harbour, Bay of Plenty, on 16/12. Two **Sanderlings** were recorded at Farewell Spit on 4/11 and 1 was at Lake Ellesmere on 24/2. A **Shore Plover** was found at Miranda on 22/10, as was a **Grey Plover** that was present there 11-31/1. A **Black-tailed Godwit** was seen at Miranda on 16/1. A **Hudsonian Godwit** and 2 **Marsh Sandpipers** were at Little Waihi, Bay of Plenty, on 16/2. A **Marsh Sandpiper** at Little Waihi on 24/12 was joined by another on 18/1. Another was at Maketu Estuary (Bay of Plenty) on 18/1, and another reported at Pleasure Bay Tip Lagoon, Invercargill, in December was seen there again on 12/1.

A **Laughing Gull** in breeding plumage found near Opotiki, Bay of Plenty, on 14/12 was seen repeatedly until 26/12. A **Gull-billed Tern** was at Waimea Inlet, Bell Island shellbank (Nelson), on 24/11 and 28/1, another at Motueka Sandspit on 31/1 and 5/2, and 2 were at Pleasure Bay Lagoon, Invercargill, on 26/2.

A **Sooty Tern** was photographed at Rosemary Rock in the Three Kings Islands on 23/11 and another was seen at the Muriwai gannet colony on 1/12. An **Arctic Tern** was at Otamarakau, Bay of Plenty, on 15/11. Another was at Bluff on 19/12 and another at Manawatu Estuary, Foxton, on 14/2, as was a **Common Tern** on 11/11. A **Whiskered Tern** was photographed at the Pleasure Bay Tip Lagoon, Invercargill, 1-2/11. Another was seen at Tokaanu wharf on 19/1, and another at the Tongariro River delta by Lake Taupo on 21/1. A **White-winged Black Tern** was seen flying over the Cass River, Tekapo, on 2/12, and again on 11/12, this time in the middle of a nearby Black-fronted Tern colony. Another was seen at Lake Rotoiti from 19/12 to 23/12, another at Tokaanu wharf by Lake Taupo on 13/1, and another at Oreti Beach, Southland, on 23/1.

Finally, a **Rainbow Lorikeet** that was almost certainly an escaped bird, was seen at Pungerehu, Taranaki, on 15/1, and an **Australian King Parrot** was seen at Cornwall Park, Auckland, 7-12/1.

Sources: eBird New Zealand, Unusual Bird Report Database, BirdingNZ Forum, Regional Roundup, *New Zealand Birders* Facebook group.

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