

# BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

*Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa*

No.30 June 2021



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



## 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@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:secretary@birdsNZ.org.nz) Website: [www.birdsNZ.org.nz](http://www.birdsNZ.org.nz)

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

Email: [editor.birdsNZ@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:editor.birdsNZ@birdsNZ.org.nz) Tel: (04) 383 5784

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

We welcome advertising. Free classified ads for members are at the editor's discretion. Articles or photographs of birds in NZ or the South Pacific are welcome such as news about birds, members' activities, birding sites, identification, letters. 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. When you are finished with your magazine please consider passing it on to others who are interested in birds.

## 2020 Beach Patrol Scheme

2020 produced no significant beach wrecks, nor any particularly unusual species. There were single specimens of Pitt Island Shag (on Chatham Island), Kerguelen Petrel, white morph Giant Petrel, Arctic Skua, and Reef Heron. There were no mass mortalities but there was evidence of Canada Goose and Southern Black-backed Gull control programmes, and high mortality in a Red-billed Gull colony on Mana Island. No wreck of juvenile Sooty Shearwaters was noted from Southland beaches. No banded birds were noted on cards. The returns show a continued decline and represent a drop to about a third of the number of kilometres covered and the number of patrols being undertaken a decade ago. I've been contacting people who post records of beach-wrecked birds on iNaturalist. Some of these results come from them. This is the first year we've recorded Chatham Island beach patrols (CI) separately. Only five regions – Wellington West, BoP, Auckland West, Auckland East, Southland – were averaging more than one beach patrol per month. There were no records from Otago, Canterbury South, North Coast South Island, and Taranaki. The figures as at 1 April 2021 were: Cards/forms returned: 145 (161 in 2019, 270 in 2018, 230 in 2017, 253 in 2016, 210 in 2015, 231 in 2014, 262 in 2013, 324 in 2012 and 352 in 2011). Birds: 931 (1,071 in 2020, 3,069 in 2018, 1,315 in 2017, 1,483 in 2016, 1,325 in 2015, 1,388 in 2014, 4,851 in 2013, 1,924 in 2012, 57,920 in 2011). Kilometres: 688 (710 in 2019, 1,013 in 2018, 885.3 in 2017, 1,189 in 2016, 1,014 in 2015, 1,069 in 2014, 1,388 in 2013, 1,625 in 2012, 1,846 in 2011).

LLOYD ESLER, BEACH PATROL SCHEME CONVENOR

||||||| NO.30 JUNE 2021 |||||

- 4 From the President's Desk
- 5 Birds New Zealand in the Royal Society
- 6 OSNZ Revised Strategy 2015-2025
- 7 National Wader Census 2020
- 8 Hawke's Bay Youth Camp
- 9 NZ Bird Atlas two-year landmark
- 10 Hauturu Magic
- 14 Regional Roundup
- 18 Binoculars Review
- 19 Bird News

## COVER IMAGE

Buller's Albatross or Toroa off Kaikoura Peninsula.

Photo by Mike Ashbee: <https://www.mikeashbeephoto.com/>

19 June is World Albatross Day – Te Rā O Ngā Toroa 2021

## Benefits of membership

You can join Birds New Zealand today for just over a dollar a week. The subscription rate of \$70 per year is very reasonable and for students its just \$35 per year:

<https://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/membership/join-today/>

Members receive our quarterly magazine, *Birds New Zealand*, and our quarterly scientific journal, *Notornis*.

Just visit our website and fill in the online form:

<https://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/membership/membership-form-nz/#join>

Or contact our Membership Secretary: [membership@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:membership@birdsNZ.org.nz)

Or contact your nearest Regional Representative:

[www.birdsNZ.org.nz/contact](http://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/contact)

## New Banding Office team member

Tēnā koutou katoa! I have been lucky to join the Banding Office team, as Imogen Foote has left to start her journey to become Dr. Foote (PhD pending). We wish her all the very best and hope that it goes successfully!

So, who am I? My name is Annemieke Hendriks. I was born and raised in Whangārei, but came to Wellington to study a BSc, followed by a Masters of Science. I have enjoyed being involved with several conservation projects around Aotearoa, including Sooty Shearwater banding, gecko monitoring, the Kākāpō Recovery Programme on Whenua Hou, Chatham Island Black Robin monitoring on Rangitira and Mangere islands in the Chathams, Archey's Frog monitoring, working with the Kākāriki Karaka in South Branch Hurunui, and creating some of last year's Critter of the Week content for Nicola Toki and Jesse Mulligan. I am also a Wellington Branch member of Birds New Zealand.

As Technical Administrator in the Banding Office, my focus will be on banding equipment sales and processing bander certification applications, as well as facilitating bander training opportunities. I am looking forward to meeting or interacting with you in the coming months.

ANNEMIEKE HENDRIKS



MORE



BY APPOINTMENT TO  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II  
SWAROVSKI OPTIK  
SUPPLIER OF BINOCULARS



NL PURE  
ONE WITH  
NATURE

SEE THE UNSEEN



SWAROVSKI  
OPTIK

SWAROVSKI INTERNATIONAL (NZ) LTD.  
3/45 Queen Street, Auckland 1010, New Zealand  
Tel. 04-5954286, [optik.sia@swarovski.com](mailto:optik.sia@swarovski.com), [www.swarovskioptik.com](http://www.swarovskioptik.com)



# From the President's Desk

By the time this edition reaches you, the 2021 New Zealand Bird Conference and Society Annual General Meeting at Thames will be completed. In the lead up to Queens Birthday weekend whenever I met members they were excited about their planned trip to Thames and the opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues. I especially want to thank the 2021 Conference organising team who worked very hard with considerable uncertainty over the last year to bring us a great weekend with lots of variety.

## Council Meeting

Council met by video conference in March. We are getting used to this style of meeting but I think we all miss the informal conversations that accompany a face-to-face meeting. Council was joined by Imogen Warren, the Society's Membership Secretary. Imogen discussed with us the amount of work involved in bedding in the new membership system and improvements in how we welcome new members. We are looking to develop a new member's pack to support Regional Representatives in welcoming new members.

In terms of new systems that support the Society's work, the next project is to move the *Notornis* website onto the same platform as all the other Society web presence. Council also signed off on the revisions of the Society Strategy which we hope will guide our work for the next five years. I'm very grateful to our Vice President, Ian Armitage, for his leadership on this work. The Strategy is explained on page six, and posted here online:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Strategy-Birds-NZ-2015-2025-revised-2021.pdf>

Council also discussed and endorsed a Collaborative Research Agreement between the Society and the Department of Conservation for supporting studies on South Island Pied Oystercatchers.

Council was pleased to note a recent increase in members. This pleasing result was probably a result of the impending NZ Bird Conference but also follow-up letters to members who have not renewed their membership from last year. There is a continuing problem of members not renewing their membership when the reminders are sent out. The membership database now has the facility for you to set up an automatic renewal. I encourage you all to check your membership details and set up automatic renewals. Taking this step will significantly reduce the work load for our Membership Secretary.

Council also considered the work that Ian Armitage has undertaken to investigate the merits of our Society becoming a Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand. On behalf of our Society, Ian has undertaken an extensive investigation into the merit of this move and Council has agreed that we should be a Constituent Organisation. A more detailed statement of the background and the expected benefits of doing so is found in this edition on page five.

Applications for the 2021 round of applications to the Bids New Zealand Research Fund (BNZRF) close in mid-June and I'm looking forward to a strong field of applications to consider. As you can read in editions of *Birds New Zealand* magazine, the BNZRF is making a real difference to research on birds in New Zealand. All researchers should keep in mind this fund for future applications.

## Regional Representatives

There has been a bit of change within the Regional Representative's network. As a result of Les Feasey standing down as RR in the Far North, Ilse Corkery has agreed to step in and to support and liaise with members in the Far North to ensure that their voice is heard in Society matters. Similarly, Peter Frost has stood down as RR in Whanganui and Phil Battley

has agreed to liaise with members in Whanganui to ensure that they are heard in Society matters. I'm grateful to both Phil and Ilse for helping out in this way.

At the same time Gayle D. Quayle and Sandra Wallace have advised me of their intentions to stand down from their respective RR roles in Nelson and Canterbury. Both Gayle and Sandra have been highly effective RRs and will leave their regions in good heart with a range of local projects. I'm grateful for the time they have committed to leading the Society in the Nelson and Canterbury regions.

## The end of cheques for the Society

For most of us cheques have been replaced in our lives with credit cards and internet banking. Banks are withdrawing cheques as a service and consequently the Society has to move on as well. It will help our Membership Secretary Imogen Warren immensely if Society members who still use cheques can review their banking practices and be proactive in adopting a new method of paying their subscriptions.

## Advertisements in *Birds New Zealand*

Readers of *Birds New Zealand* will have noticed a number of full page and quarter page advertisements. These are appreciated by the Society as they offset our costs for publishing a full colour magazine that is a pleasure to read. Members are encouraged to make sure they consider using our advertisers' products or services when making purchases, both large and small.

## Scholarship and Conservation awards

One of the pleasures of being President is being able to write to worthy researchers and advise them that their application for research funds has been successful. I've recently been able to do this for the successful candidate of the David Medway Scholarship, which the Society administers on behalf of the George Mason Charitable Trust. This year the successful applicant is Alberto Del Rosa for his project on improved utilisation of kiwi call data. Secondly, we have had a very good application to the Pacific Island Bird Conservation and Research Fund which is administered jointly by *Birds New Zealand* and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. The successful application is to complete a survey of the seabirds on offshore islands in Samoa.

## Oamaru Penguin Symposium

At the beginning of May, I was fortunate to attend the 12th Oamaru Penguin Symposium. It was an enjoyable two days catching up on recent science from around New Zealand, and with Society members. A significant number of presentations acknowledged the Society and the *Birds New Zealand* Research Fund. These examples reinforce for me the importance of the Fund and shows the importance of the work of the Society's Scientific Committee, who review and rank all the submitted projects.

## Global Big Day

Finally, 8th May was the 2021 Global Big Day. The GBD is a great excuse to get out and enjoy birdwatching with friends and colleagues, and to contribute records to *eBird*. Here in Otago we had about 30 people assemble at Hawkesbury Lagoon where, after an initial survey, we dispersed into cars and set out across North Otago. Our day total in Otago was 67 species, which was a lot of fun to gather. At the same time I was able to complete some checklists in squares that did not have any Autumn Atlas data, so it was both a great opportunity to be with friends and to add to the Atlas.

BRUCE MCKINLAY  
PRESIDENT

## OSNZ becomes a Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society Te Apārangi

I am very happy to advise members that the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Te Kōwhiri Māori o Aotearoa has become a Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi. In taking this step we are at a point in the history of our Society when we hope that the scientific significance of ornithology will become more fully recognised and understood by the science community in New Zealand. Decisions by the councils of both organisations that OSNZ will become a Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society follows a period of review and consultations that commenced in 2020.

Participation as a Constituent Organisation will enable us to give a strong voice to ornithology by actively contributing to discussion at meetings with other scientific societies where meaningful contributions can be made concerning birds and their habitats on contemporary earth science and environmental topics. We will have the opportunity to become more involved and engaged with the NZ science community and look forward to new occasions when we can elevate both the science of ornithology and our Society to a wider audience. Our Society is expected to benefit from collaboration with research-based organisations in other disciplines across science, technology, and the humanities.

Our participation as a Constituent Organisation is consistent with the fifth aim of our Society: *"To effect co-operation and exchange of information with other organisations with similar aims and objectives"*. It is also an activity set out in the OSNZ Strategy for 2015 to 2024. Our Council has nominated our Vice-President, Ian Armitage, as the OSNZ representative at meetings of the Constituent Organisations of the Royal Society.

BRUCE McKINLAY, PRESIDENT

## New members

The Society warmly welcomes the following new members who joined during the past quarter: Annabel Whibley, Stephen Collins, Stephanie Tong (Northland); Laura Duntsch, Sarah Bailey, Anna Santure, Maira Fessardi, Wendy Pettersen, Elizabeth Somervell, Colleen McMurchy, Robert Jones, Angela Moon-Jones, Mary Hancock, Avroneel Ghosh, Lesley Gardner, Richard Gardner, Kim Frakes, Lynn Miller, Iryll Findlay, Cindy Sullivan, Michaela Scarrott, Sara Dean, Glen Carbines, Chris Thomas, Sian Luckie, Marina Ander, Natalie Gauld, John Allen, Donna Allen (Auckland); Stef Steunenber (South Auckland); Sandra Flooks, Ray Buckmaster, Ann Buckmaster, Jeanette Brooker (Waikato); Melissa Horwood, Nola Dyson, Harry S Taylor, John Gibbs (Bay Of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau); Sandra Morris (Whanganui); Tara Swan, Tania Mutiara, Jo-Anne Mae (Manawatu); William Hardman (Hawkes Bay); Val Jolly, Nikki Glasson (Wairarapa); Retha Brandt, Anne Goodman, Stephanie Anderson, Gregory Clewley, Wendy Baker, Oliver Aughton, Lorelee Hyde, Miguel Braga, Imogen Foote, Lyn Clark, Marshall Clark, Vanessa James, Eddie Bright (Wellington); Stefanie Kuenstle, Robert Schadewinkel, Polina Stucke, Valerie Pollard, Paul Fisher (Nelson); Simon Lamb, Keegan Miskimmin, D McDonald, Cathie Bell (Marlborough); Stephen Rowe, John Astall, Carol L. Bedoya, Ursula Cable, Georgie Archibald, Jane Meiforth, Terry Dolby, Sharon Lake, Paul Leighton, Nicky Churton (Canterbury); Taylor Davies-Colley, Lewis Briscall, Scott Jarvie, Cheryl Pullar (Otago); Arnim Dirksen-Schwanenland (Rest of the World).

## Donations

The Society warmly thanks the following members for their generous donations: Pua Westhead, John Staniland, Philip Crutchley, Chris Foreman, Sid Lovell, Oliver Aughton, Chris Thomas, Sian Luckie, and Eddie Bright.

## National Waterbird Census 2020

When the two annual wader censuses are conducted each year most participants also count all waterbirds or water-related birds seen at the wader sites. While this does not give any sense of the populations of these species, the following numbers recorded may be of interest.

The number of Red-billed Gulls recorded in winter 2020 was 6,818 and in summer 2020 was 10,571. This compares with the numbers recorded in winter 2019 (10,412) and summer 2019 (15,266). The number of Black-billed Gulls recorded in winter 2020 was 1,227 and summer 2020 was 2,971. This was higher than in winter 2019 (995) and summer 2019 (2,698).

The number of Black-fronted Terns recorded in winter 2020 was 227 and in summer 2020 was 17. This compares with 360 in winter 2019 and 14 in summer 2019. The number of White-fronted Terns recorded in winter 2020 (1,121) and summer 2020 (4,563) was in contrast to winter 2019 (821) and summer 2019 (7,557).

I wish to acknowledge the hundreds of people who take part in the wader censuses on a voluntary basis and the regional coordinators who ensure so many sites are covered, and the count data is sent to the national coordinator.

ADRIAN RIEGEN,  
NATIONAL WADER CENSUS COORDINATOR

## 2020 Records Appraisal Committee report

RAC Secretary Elizabeth (Biz) Bell continues to provide timely and efficient administrative support to the committee and submitters. Paul Sagar, who is a co-opted committee member, provides independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. This occurred 18 times in 2020.

The online UBR reporting system continues to be the main source of UBRs received. There have been problems with the reporting form as the Society's website was migrated between servers and service providers. This has yet to be resolved, and may have resulted in some UBRs not being received, as well as photographs not being attached to submitted UBRs, despite the best efforts of submitters.

Receipt of UBRs is acknowledged promptly by the Secretary. Batches of UBRs are sent to the committee members every two months, and they then have two months to provide comment. All RAC members reliably kept within deadlines during 2020. Response letters were typically sent out three to five months after UBRs were received.

A total of 116 UBRs was received in 2020, and assessed between March 2020 and February 2021. This is the second largest number of submissions received by the committee in a single year. Ninety-eight (84%) of these UBRs were accepted by the committee. No new species were added to the New Zealand list.

An online database of Unusual Bird Reports (<http://rare.birds.org.nz/>) was launched in 2016. The database and the systems supporting it continue to work well. The database provides almost immediate feedback on UBR submissions and decisions, as well as a searchable database of all submissions and decisions dating back to the 1960s. It includes hyperlinks to publications referring to individual UBRs, and to New Zealand Birds Online species pages. A paper reporting on the 210 RAC decisions from 2019-20 is in preparation for *Notornis*.

I thank Biz, Paul, and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2020. Current RAC membership is Colin Miskelly (Convenor), Andrew Crossland, Ian Saville, Ian Southey, and Alan Tennyson.

COLIN MISKELLY, CONVENOR



■ Alan Tennyson with Bice Tennyson, Antarctica, January 2008.

## Bice Tennyson

(5 March 1927 – 26 April 2020)

Bice Tennyson (née Young) was a long-time member of the Wellington Branch of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Birds New Zealand). Bice is the Italian contraction of Beatrice. She was born and grew up in Wadestown and later went to Nga Tawa secondary school near Marton.

Her parents allowed her to go to Victoria University at a time when generally only boys did. She enrolled in Zoology, Maths, Physics and Chemistry. The sport at university was great and she thrived on it, and she eventually got her BSc degree. She regarded her main achievement there as the award of a University Blue in hockey.

After university, she taught at Marsden School while living with her parents and saved for her great kiwi OE. She based herself in London, with trips to continental Europe. Returning to NZ, she met and married (December 1954) her English-born husband, James Tennyson, who was on loan to the Royal New Zealand Navy. They settled in Karori where they raised my brother, David, and me.

Our family bought a run-down batch at Paraparaumu, where we began our ongoing association with the Kapiti Coast, spending most weekends and seemingly endless summer holidays there. Once based in Waikanae, Bice joined me as a keen 'beach-patroller', combing the local beaches for dead seabirds. Te Papa holds 34 specimens collected by Bice, mainly from the Waikanae area. In January 1985 she found the second NZ specimen of a Manx Shearwater and in March 1983 she found the skeletal remains of an unusual gull (still unidentified).

After we started school, Bice returned to teaching – initially at Wellington Girls College and then back at Marsden, where she remained until she retired. During teacher training, Bice became a dedicated conservationist. Senior biology gave her the opportunity to expose her pupils to the wonders of the NZ bush and birds. She took many groups away on field trips. She thought the most magical place was Pureora Forest. Everyone got up at 4am to listen to the dawn chorus and wonder at the huge trees. She noted that once you have heard it, you can never forget the song of the Kōkako – organ-like, haunting and sad.

In the holidays, our family went camping and tramping and learned to appreciate the great outdoors, especially our native forests, and particularly sites of key conservation battlegrounds. Bice was also a vocal supporter of Forest & Bird's and Native Forest Action Council's campaigns to save our ancient forests. When she retired, she threw herself into helping to establish Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (Zealandia) and enjoyed birdwatching trips around NZ and to the Australian Outback alongside many other OSNZ members.

Bice retired with James to Parkwood Retirement Village in Waikanae. Her final big overseas adventures took her to Antarctica and, at age 88, the Galapagos Islands. The name of perhaps the world's largest extinct penguin, *Kumimanu biceae*, honours her for fostering my interest in natural history.

ALAN TENNYSON

## Our Society's Revised Strategy for 2015 to 2025

In 2015 we celebrated our Society's 75th anniversary. To help recognise that point in our history it was fitting to set out a 10-year strategy that would advance the purpose, vision, values, aim and objectives to emphasise our primary activities in the short term, and achieve improved public understanding and wider acceptance in the community. The present strategy was adopted in 2015; it builds on an earlier one adopted in 2005.

At the midpoint of the present period, in 2020, Council considered that our strategy needed to be reviewed and where necessary revised in order to recognise factors that have changed since 2015 and to provide a sharper focus in the Society's development for the next five years.

The primary goal of increasing awareness of the purpose, aim and objectives of the Society through inspiring scientific and general interest in birds remains unchanged, as does the goal that the Society will be recognised by the scientific community as the premier independent source of knowledge on ornithology in NZ and the South Pacific, in particular for the reliable identification of birds. The Society's scientific journal, *Notornis*, will not change in name, content, or editorial style; it will continue to apply high standards of scientific rigour, objectivity and independence in editorial matters.

What has changed in this revised strategy is acceptance of a shorter, succinctly expressed vision that recognises our charitable status under NZ law, and revised goals to increase membership of the Society with a focus on gaining younger members, and to invite more Māori participation. Membership numbers have increased, particularly recently, because we are becoming better known, in part through increased use of social media (Facebook, Twitter), and partly through our revised website that enables new members to join online easily and quickly. Since 2015 we have welcomed keen young ornithologists through a new "Young Birders" membership category (adopted 2019) for young people, linked to and supported by the Society through a MoU with Young Birders NZ. A new Society name in te reo Māori has been used since the strategy was adopted in 2015, which from March 2020 has been prominent on the cover of this magazine.

Changes in activities to increase awareness of the purpose, aim and objectives of the Society include:

- \* wider use of social media, notably Facebook and Twitter,
- \* continuing development of the functionality our website and regular use of newspapers, magazines, and radio/TV to promote broader community knowledge of birds and ornithology,
- \* facilitate the delivery of video conferencing/lectures ('Zoom'-type technology) to regions, especially to members living in small regions, in order to strengthen their engagement and participation in learning about the results of new research on birds, and upon request, arrange for experienced members and/or Councillors to assist with or manage specific events, including giving talks, in regions with limited ability to do so,
- \* design and promote a range of field activities for younger members that provide 'hands-on' practical experience and information about ornithology and birdwatching,
- \* design and introduce new programmes on topics of national or regional importance that engage the interest and participation of a wide cross-section of members, especially where the conservation significance of bird species and their habitats are poorly known,
- \* engage with Māori, nationally and regionally, to design and introduce programmes and activities that recognise and document customary knowledge about birds.

Helpful comments received on the revised strategy have been considered in assembling the final text, including extending the term by one year from 2024 to 2025. The revised 11-year strategy for 2015 to 2025 has now been adopted by Council and is posted on the Society's website.

BRUCE McKINLAY, PRESIDENT





▣ Grey-tailed Tattler: Anja Kohler.

## National Wader Census 2020

**Winter Census 2020:** A total of 116,369 waders of 21 species were counted during the June-July 2020 wader census, up from 108,270 waders of 21 species counted in June-July 2019. There was lower than usual national coverage with Parengarenga, Houhora, and Rangaunu harbours in the Far North, Coromandel and Porangahau Estuary, Aotea and Kawhia harbours, and Lake Wairarapa not surveyed, mainly due to bad weather. The number of over-wintering Red Knot was 1,761, some 700 higher than the 2019 count. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were well up from 4,864 in 2019 to 12,813 in 2020. The large increase was expected as unusually high numbers of juveniles had been sighted around NZ in Spring 2019. Ruddy Turnstone numbers of 410 in 2020 were similar to the 462 counted in 2019.

SIPO numbers were up slightly from 67,327 in 2019 to 68,207 in 2020. This number would have been higher if there had been better coverage in the Far North and Waikato. VOC numbers were >4,000 for the second time with 4,326 counted. They continue to benefit in northern NZ from community groups/councils/DOC protecting NZ Dotterel breeding sites. Only 3,571 Wrybill were counted, down almost 1,000 birds on previous years. It is hoped this was due to birds moving within the Auckland region and so being missed on one or more counts. Uncommon winter waders recorded included: 1 Greater Sand Plover, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, 1 Sanderling, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, and 1 Ruff.

**Summer Census 2020:** A total of 137,411 waders of 26 species were counted in the November-December 2020 census. This was almost 4,000 more than the November 2019 count of 133,062. All key sites were surveyed plus most Coromandel sites. Parengarenga and Houhora harbours were not. Red Knot numbers were down again from 33,575 in 2018 and 26,775 in 2019 to 25,698 in November-December 2020, which was the lowest count, but the total may have been closer to 2019's count had Parengarenga and Houhora been counted. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up again to 78,218, in part due to the large number of juveniles seen at almost all NZ sites in 2019. A total of 1,550 were counted in Coromandel in November 2020.

Ruddy Turnstone numbers were down again from 2,468 in 2019 to 1,688 in November 2020. The Far North not being covered accounted for a drop of several hundred, showing the importance of covering those tricky sites. Ruddy Turnstone strongholds are Farewell Spit (515), Southland (340, Kaipara Harbour (326), Manukau Harbour (237) and Tasman Bay (196).

Red-necked Stint numbers were steady at 76 but still well down on historical numbers. In Summer 2020, only 122 Pacific Golden Plover were counted compared to 224 in Summer 2019, although the census does not tell the whole story. The regular 30-50+ seen on the Firth of Thames eluded counters on census day when only seven were seen. Only 47 Whimbrel were counted and no other Arctic waders reached more than 17 individuals. Uncommon summer waders included: 3 Greater Sand Plover, 1 Lesser Sand Plover, 1 Great Knot, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, 1 Common Greenshank, and 1 Marsh Sandpiper.

I wish to acknowledge the hundreds of people who participate in the censuses on a voluntary basis and the regional coordinators who ensure so many sites are covered, and the count data is sent to the national coordinator.

ADRIAN RIEGEN, NATIONAL WADER CENSUS COORDINATOR

▣ Spotted Shags, Tarahiki Island: Jennifer Carol.



## Spotted Shag foraging biology in the Hauraki Gulf

Spotted Shags historically bred widely in the Auckland region, yet experienced massive population declines in the 20th century and are today restricted to one main breeding site in the Firth of Thames with circa 300 breeding pairs. Recent research indicates this isolated northern population is genetically distinct from the rest of New Zealand, adding urgency to understanding the causes of population collapse, likely driven by a combination of human interference (ie, set nets), habitat degradation and/or shifts in prey.

Reversing the declining trend is hampered by a lack of information on foraging behaviour and diet of this population. With funding from the 2019 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, Dr Matt Rayner (Auckland Museum) and Dr Tim Lovegrove and Dr Todd Landers (Auckland Council) sought to use GPS tracking, and stable isotope analyses of historic (museum sourced) and contemporary (field collected) feathers, to understand the movements and long-term diet of Spotted Shags in the Hauraki Gulf to provide better informed management.

Despite the best efforts of COVID-19, in 2020 we were able to deploy solar-powered GPS tags on eight Spotted Shags breeding on Tarahiki Island and collect hi-resolution GPS tracks of between 30-120 days in length. Tracked shags foraged south-east, south, and south-west of Tarahiki Island, in the Tamaki Strait, and western and eastern Firth of Thames, travelling up to 50 kilometres from their colony site.

Tracking data identified the broad range of resting and roosting sites required by this species, frequently at places vulnerable to human disturbance. During the Spring breeding season tracked birds frequently foraged within offshore mussel farms in the Firth of Thames. With the loss of benthic mussel beds in the region through historic dredging and siltation, we hypothesise that this "new" vertical ecosystem promotes a diverse fish life that the birds can exploit. Further research is planned to investigate the ecology of this system.

Analysis of carbon and nitrogen isotopes ratios from 40 Spotted Shag feather samples collected between 1887 and 2020 indicates that Spotted Shags have undergone changes in both diet and foraging habitat over time. Nitrogen isotope ratios declined significantly over time, indicating the dietary trophic level has reduced by half, shifting from a diet dominated by fish, to one encompassing lower trophic-level prey such as squid. Likewise, feather carbon isotope ratios have become significantly less enriched, indicating that today birds are foraging further offshore than they were doing more than a century ago. Together these results suggest a significant change in the birds' ecology that requires further investigation.

In the upcoming breeding season, we hope to continue collating tracking data, deploying more tags, and further investigating the ecological dynamics at play in the Spotted Shags' chosen foraging habitats.

Dr MATT RAYNER, AUCKLAND MUSEUM



Youth Camp 2021 participants and organisers: Lynne Anderson.



Scoping the estuary for waders: Lynne Anderson.

# Hawke's Bay Youth Camp 2021

A group of 13 young birders participated in the 2021 Birds New Zealand Youth Camp organised by the Hawke's Bay Branch between 18th and 24th April. During the camp, students aged 13-18 learned valuable bird identification skills and bird surveying methods, as well as hearing about local conservation efforts.

After an introduction from camp leader Ian Southey on the first afternoon we headed to Anderson Park in Taradale to see the only Plumed Whistling Duck in New Zealand. On the second day we met Brent Stephenson early at an orchard to set up mist nets for bird banding. All of the students had a go at getting a bird out of a net, weighing it, banding it, and taking measurements. After lunch we headed to Ahuriri Estuary with Brent, armed with spotting scopes. We soon saw Pied Stilt/ Poaka, White-faced Heron, Variable Oystercatcher/Tōrea Pango, and Bar-tailed Godwits/Kuaka. As we walked along we began to see more of the smaller wader species such as NZ Dotterel/Tūturiwhatu, Wrybill/Ngutuparore, and Black-fronted Dotterel.

Next day we met Sav Saville and John Berry at Waitangi Regional Park and split into two groups; one group checked out the beach and the other the wetlands. We spotted many good birds including Black-fronted Dotterel, Banded Dotterel/Pohowera, New Zealand Dotterel/Tūturiwhatu, Black-fronted Tern/Tarapirohe and Royal Spoonbill/Kotuku Ngutupapa. We also had terrific views of an incredible Australasian Bittern/Matuku Hūrepo at Waikahu Wetlands.

Then we drove to the Cape Sanctuary where we were guided by John Berry, a volunteer there. In the absence of most invasive predators, the birds at this sanctuary have a great chance of survival. While there we saw good numbers of Kākā, Red-crowned Kākāriki, NZ Tomtit/Miromiro, and North Island Robin/Toutouwai. We also checked a pond in the sanctuary and were delighted to see Brown Teal/Pateke, NZ Dabchick/Weweia, and NZ Scaup/Papango.

For the last activity of the day we met Rachel Ward who manages a captive breeding facility for critically endangered NZ Shore Plover/Tūturuatu. It was a real treat to be shown the aviaries where this vital conservation work is being done to restore the Shore Plover population.

On the fourth day we started with an early trip to Pekapeka Swamp to meet Brent Stephenson. Splitting up into groups we headed out around the boardwalk where we saw Paradise Shelduck/Putangitangi, Grey Teal/Tētē Moroiti, and Australasian Shoveler/Kuruwhengi. Eventually we found what we had been looking for, the elusive Spotless Crane/Pūweto. It was very exciting to get glimpses of these cryptic birds through the raupō. After lunch we visited some scrapes where the group was delighted to see three Royal Spoonbills feeding at close range. The last activity of the day was a trip to some different scrapes in the hope of finding Marsh Crane, but alas it wasn't meant to be.

On the fifth day we drove to Boundary Stream, stopping en route at Lake Tutira and then Lake Opouahi Kiwi creche where we called in a Fernbird. We arrived before lunch and met Bernie Kelly who works at Boundary Stream and is the Hawke's Bay Branch's Regional Representative. That afternoon was spent

walking around the Tumanako Loop Track learning about forest birds and familiarising ourselves with their different calls. We saw and heard Bellbirds/Korimako, Whitehead/Popokatea, North Island Robin/Toutouwai and NZ Tomtit/Miromiro, and had a brief encounter with a NZ Falcon/Kārearea as it flew swiftly through the canopy above us making its distinct 'kek-kek' call. In the evening Bernie spoke to us about the pest control work in the reserve and the translocation and monitoring of Kokako.

We got up before the sun on the sixth day and returned to the Tumanako loop track, splitting up into two teams that took different routes in search of Kokako. Every 200 metres we stopped to conduct a five minute bird count that was entered into eBird. Then we played Kokako calls, listened for another five minutes, and moved on. Both teams saw a Kokako; one group called a bird in and the other came across one while walking. Everyone was very happy to see these beautiful and notoriously shy birds.

In the afternoon we set off along Bell Rock Loop Track. On the walk up we saw all the bush birds of the previous day plus a new one, a tiny Rifleman/Titipounamu. Bernie met us at the top and took us to an area surrounded by a predator-proof fence. Inside was a seabird colony with artificial nest boxes. Cook's and Mottled petrels were translocated to this site and the Cook's Petrels have successfully returned. We were told that this is the most inland seabird colony in New Zealand. In the evening we went looking for Morepork/Ruru at the Tumanako track where we heard many calling and saw two.

On the last morning a small group of us got up before dawn and walked along the loop track. We sat down and listened as the birds woke up around us. At first we heard Ruru and then a Kākā screeching in the distance, and slowly the bush came alive with the other birds. As we were packing up a Kārearea was spotted being harassed by a pair of Australian Magpies over nearby farmland and this time everyone was able to have a proper look at it. After lunch we drove back to Napier where we said our goodbyes and all headed home. We had recorded 75 bird species during the Youth Camp.

The Youth Camp was an incredible experience that we all thoroughly enjoyed and we are very grateful to everyone who made it happen. We would like to thank Ian Southey, Angie Denby and Lynne Anderson, who initiated this Youth Camp and made it happen, and David and Vicky Melville for driving all the way from Nelson to spend the week with us. Thanks to David we were able to catch and band birds under his watchful eye, and were treated to many incredible stories and laughs. Vicky also played a vital role by being an amazing chef, cooking up a storm each night with Anne Keown, Deborah Ives, Clare Plug and Liz Jackson. A huge thank you also goes to those who came along and shared their knowledge, including Brent Stephenson, Sav Saville, Rachel Ward, John Berry and Bernie Kelly. Last but not least huge thanks to all the students that came to enjoy a great week full of lots of great birds. We really appreciated your enthusiasm, it is very encouraging to see the next generation of Young Birders starting their first eBird checklists.

HUIA WESLING MACGREGOR & BRADLEY SHIELDS





▲ Atlas effort after one year.



▲ Atlas effort after two years.

# New Zealand Bird Atlas project reaches two-year landmark

It is amazing to think that the New Zealand Bird Atlas project has been running for two years now. We've just finished the second autumn season and now enter the third year of data collection.

This autumn season was always going to be interesting as we aimed to increase atlas effort, particularly the spatial coverage of that effort after last year's national Covid lockdowns. We are continuing to see a rise in participation with nearly 1,000 atlasers having contributed over 49,000 hours of their time to date. On top of this we are seeing an increase in the quantity of data with the total tally of checklists tipping over 135,000 checklists. Importantly the quality of this data has rapidly increased with many participants submitting complete checklists with accurate abundances for all species counted and keeping their lists of high spatial and temporal resolution.

This dramatically increases the scientific value of the data for not only the Atlas but other research and conservation that incorporates *eBird* data into their analysis. Coverage across the country has increased with 2,840 (87.87%) of the 3,232 grid squares having data in them. We've seen big birding trips to remote locations such as the Kermadec Islands, as well as regular trips through Heritage Expeditions to the Subantarctic Islands, which all bolster the wider effort across the country and surrounding islands. This is showing well on the effort map with many remote gaps being filled in over the past year.

That said, there are still plenty of grid squares with little or no effort and most of these are in our high- or back-country areas, so we encourage people to continue to target these grid squares. How about making an overnight trip or multi-day tramp into an area with little or no atlas effort next summer?

The New Zealand Bird Atlas *eBird* portal has continued to be updated regularly with a substantial amount of helpful articles, guidance, and supporting material to help all Atlas participants. If there are certain topics you wish the Atlas team to write articles about please do get in touch with us as we're more than happy to help.

By the time of publishing we will have delivered a guest lecture for Dr Kristal Cain's Zoological students at Auckland University. Dr Kristal Cain got in touch asking whether we would be available to be a guest lecture for the Zoology class to which we happily obliged. Additionally, George Hobson has invited the Atlas team to undertake an Atlas workshop at this

year's Restoration Day event in Wellington on 12th June. We're hoping to have a good group of people join us at Zealandia to help discuss and train up on the Atlas and *eBird*. If you are attending the event, we look forward to seeing you there. As always, if you have an event or group that you believe the Atlas team should be delivering workshops/talks at, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

We hope to see many of you at the Birds New Zealand annual conference in Thames. We have a presentation to discuss the Atlas project and will also have a stall set up over the weekend to allow participants to come up and ask questions and/or get assistance with anything Atlas-related. Following the conference we will be running the week-long field trip to Rotorua where we will be filling in gaps for Winter Atlas effort in the surrounding area. We already have a great group of people interested and are really looking forward to getting some valuable data for this region, as well as spending more time with some of the Atlas community.

The Atlas team are always wishing to encourage the ornithological and birding community in New Zealand to adhere to best practice recording skills. This entails not only using *eBird* for past, present, and future bird lists, but also adhering to the best practices that the Atlas team have been communicating from the beginning of the project. This means compiling complete checklists (noting everything you are able to identify by sight and/or sound without intentionally leaving any species off), with accurate abundances for all species detected, adding accurate locations, times and protocols.

The latter three data points are generated automatically by the *eBird* app, freeing up the atlaser to concentrate on birding, hence our preferred data entry method is the app. If you are still not convinced by the app, we can always provide support to help increase your confidence in using it. We know that this will not only benefit the Atlas but many other Birds New Zealand and others' projects over the near and distant future undertaking bird conservation and research.

We always wish to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all Atlas participants, this project is heavily dependent on your time and efforts so we hope you'll continue to enjoy the Atlas project as much as we are.

DAN, PAT, MIKE & SAM – NEW ZEALAND BIRD ATLAS TEAM





North Island Brown Kiwi: Michael Szabo



North Island Kokako: Michael Szabo

## Hauturu Magic

By Michael Szabo

Maori named it Te Hauturu-o-Toi, which has been translated as *"the resting place of lingering breezes"*. In 1769, Lieutenant James Cook gave Little Barrier Island its rather more prosaic English name during his first navigation of Aotearoa aboard *HMS Endeavour*.

Located 80 kilometres north-east of Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland in Te Moana-Nui-o-Toi/Hauraki Gulf, Hauturu has been described as the most intact, unmodified warm temperate rainforest left in Aotearoa. With its wide range of subtropical to subalpine habitats and globally important populations of threatened bird species, the island is both a taonga to Mana Whenua and a 'Jewel in the Crown' of New Zealand's conservation estate.

It is recognised as a globally important area for birds because it has the largest breeding populations of Hihi/Stitchbird and Titi/Cook's Petrel, the only known breeding population of New Zealand Storm Petrel, and important breeding populations of Tāiko/Black Petrel, Kokako, Tieke/Saddleback, and Kakapo.

At 28 square kilometres, the island itself is by no means small. It is the emergent part of the largest dacite stratovolcano in New Zealand, which formed between 1.2 and 3.1 million years ago, rising 45 metres from the sea bed to sea-level, and then another 722 metres into the sky. The highest peak, Hauturu, is 101-metres higher than 621-metre Hira-kimata/Mt Hobson on Aotea/Great

Barrier Island, and all of Hauturu's other six peaks rise higher than Hira-kimata.

The upper slopes are covered in Kauri, Rata, Puriri, Towai, and Tawari forest and, thanks to past pest eradications, there are no introduced mammal predators or herbivores.

Hauturu has had a central role in bird conservation efforts since 1895, initially under the auspices of the Wildlife Service and now Te Papa Atawhai/Department of Conservation (DOC) in conjunction with the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust. It has a very high level of protection and all visitors are required to obtain a permit from Te Papa Atawhai DOC before being allowed to go ashore.

Among the many success stories is the conservation of Hihi, which would be extinct if not for the last remaining wild population that survived on the island, and which has since been the source population for many successful translocations. The Hauturu Hihi population was estimated at 3,100 by Robin Toy et al in 2013, but is known to fluctuate.

In recent years the Hihi Recovery Group (HRG) have been researching the Hihi population structure. Translocations of Hihi from Hauturu have always sourced birds from the south-west corner of the island. Work by Dr Alex Knight and a team from the HRG and University of Auckland have sampled Hihi from across the island and genetic analysis confirms it to be a





▲ Hihi/Stitchbird: Michael Szabo



▲ Titi/Cook's Petrel: Michael Szabo

well-mixed population. The HRG says that periodic harvests of small numbers of Hihi from the south-west corner has a low risk of compromising the population and that the birds harvested contain the available diversity of this most precious of Hihi populations.

Most recently, 40 Hihi were transferred from Tiritiri Matangi to Shakespear Regional Park in June 2020, returning Hihi to the Auckland mainland for the first time in over a century. Hihi Conservation Charitable Trust Conservation Officer Mhairi McCready reports that the Shakespear translocation is still in the early stages and that there are plans for another translocation from Tiritiri Matangi in 2021.

North Island Kokako and Tieke were translocated to Hauturu in the 1980s after the successful eradication of Cats was completed in 1980. Their Hauturu populations have since provided source birds for various translocations, as have Hauturu's populations of North Island Brown Kiwi, Titipounamu/Rifleman, Popokatea/Whitehead and Titi/Cook's Petrel.

The Kokako Recovery Group estimated more than 400 Kokako pairs in 2013, nearly a quarter of the total NZ breeding population of 2,000 pairs. A 2002 survey estimated 240 to 300 pairs of North Island Brown Kiwi. A 2016 study by Elizabeth (Biz) Bell of Wildlife Management International put the Tāiko/Black Petrel population at 620 pairs, and there are currently 12 Kakapo

on Hauturu (5 males and 7 females). The New Zealand Storm Petrel – thought extinct for 150 years until its rediscovery in 2003 – was found to breed under tall forest on Hauturu in 2013. The low rate of resightings of banded birds suggests a population of hundreds, if not thousands of birds.

## Homage to Hauturu

I've aspired to visit Te Hauturu-o-Toi since reading, three years ago, that plans to transfer Huia to the island failed to eventuate after the last pair to be captured in the lower North Island in 1893 was acquired by Walter Buller and apparently sent to Baron Walter Rothschild in England (and subsequently died while en route to London).

I had a memorable encounter with Te Hauturu-o-Toi from the water during a 2004 pelagic trip when I saw NZ Storm Petrels off the island, and the boat anchored nearby for lunch where we heard Kokako calling from ashore. Unfortunately, a planned 2005 trip ashore that I was booked on was cancelled due to stormy weather.

My aspiration was renewed with the publication in 2019 of the excellent book, "Hauturu", edited by Lyn Wade and Dick Veitch of the Hauturu Supporters Trust. After reading it, I contacted Lyn to ask how I might be able to visit the island. She and Dick kindly arranged for me to get a permit and join a trip there in January





■ A plan to translocate Huia to Hauturu in the 1890s did not eventuate after the last known captive pair was sold to Baron Rothschild and sent to England. Painting: “Three Huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*)”, circa 1900, London, by Johannes Keulemans. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (1993-0029-6).

2021 after a spare place came up.

During the calm 35-km journey out from Sandspit we crossed Jellicoe Channel to Hauturu, passing increasing numbers of Toanui/Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Rako/Buller’s Shearwaters, and Titi/Cook’s Petrels, and a few Takahikare-Moana/White-faced Storm Petrels (but no NZ Storm Petrels).

Arriving at Te Maraeroa Spit we found that the seven peaks were shrouded in cloud and there was a 1.5 metre Mangōpare/Hammerhead Shark swimming around near the boat winch-ramp. After transferring ashore safely we were welcomed by Te Papa Atawhai DOC rangers Richard Walle, Leigh Joyce, and Chippy Wood, and found there were abundant Korimako/Bellbirds, Warou/Welcome Swallows, Kereru, and Kaka near the ranger’s house.

Walking up the Valley Track we found the bush was alive with the calls of Korimako, Tieke, and Koekoea/Long-tailed Cuckoo. It wasn’t long before I saw my first Hauturu Hihi – a sub-adult bird peering down from its perch.

Continuing along the Nikau-lined track, which criss-crosses a dry boulder stream bed, I soon reached taller forest of Five Finger, Rimu, and Puriri. Just past a wide section of stream bed I heard and then saw another Hihi, a smart adult male feeding on insects among Nikau seedlings.

The forest here was dense and in shadow, so the bird’s yellow feathers seemed to glow.

As I watched the Hihi shine, Red-crowned Kakariki chattered above and I could hear three Koekoea whistling from trees up the slope. This was interrupted by the shadow of a Kahu drifting over the canopy and the forest fell silent. After a few minutes, a Koekoea flew over the valley and then a second sped through the trees.

In the 2010s, Michael Anderson of Massey University tracked a few Hauturu Koekoea on their annual migration to their Pacific Islands wintering sites. One tracker lasted long enough to record

the bird’s return migration to Hauturu the following breeding season.

The *eBird* database shows that Koekoea reach as far away as Yap and Kwajalein Atoll in Micronesia, Santa Isabel in the Solomon Islands, Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands, and Mangareva in eastern Polynesia.

Michael Anderson reports that he was able to track ten birds in all - from Hauturu, Boundary Stream, and the Remutaka Range - but is yet to publish the full results. He says that there are still many unanswered questions about their migration, such as whether they return to the same breeding sites and wintering sites each year, and adds that no South Island breeding birds have ever been tracked. Ian McLean has published on the breeding status of cuckoos on offshore islands. He has estimated 260 Koekoea pairs on Hauturu, but the species’ population status across the country remains unknown.

Feeling lucky to have seen Hihi and Koekoea so well, I started back to the ranger’s house for lunch. Almost immediately I heard a rustling sound near the track, stopped, and saw a dark brown kiwi with pale brown streaks casually walking towards me next to the track. Containing my excitement, I managed to take a few photos as it probed the ground and crevices between tree roots, audibly snapping its long pale bill between each probing. The ground was dry and I did not see the kiwi pull out any worms, so perhaps the lack of worms accounts for why it was still having to forage so late in the morning, during daylight. Seemingly oblivious to my presence, after ten minutes the kiwi walked up the slope until I lost sight of it.

Back at the ranger’s house I found that the cloud had burned off, revealing the upper slopes and peaks. A few of the day visitors told me they had just watched a Kokako in the bird bath in the garden. I joined them in the shade to watch the constant stream of Korimako, Tui, Popokatea, Toutouwai/North Island Robin, and Tieke come in to drink and bathe, and heard a Kokako





▲ Long-tailed Cuckoo/Koekoea: Duncan Watson/NZ Birds Online.

calling nearby. Monarch Butterflies flitted around and fed on Hebe nectar but there was no sign of the Pepe Pouri/Forest Ringlet butterflies that breed on the upper slopes.

After lunch I was chatting with Chippy Wood while doing some weed control work and glanced over at the ranger's house. I was enthralled to see a pair of Kokako gliding across about 50 metres from a big Pohutukawa to an even larger one by the house. Their trajectory was shallow and then rose up towards the end of the glide to land in the tree, without a single wing beat.

After a short sprint to the tree, I briefly found the birds hopping up its tangled branches into the upper canopy. I lost sight of them just as Dick Veitch appeared with more of the visitors. While we chatted, one of the Kokako jumped out of the tree and glided onto the ground in front of us, giving sublime views for several minutes as it hopped around feeding before bounding-off.

Elated after such a close encounter we walked to the boat. In conversation with Lyn Wade, she told me how the last Kokako on Aotea were transferred to Hauturu in the 1980s and that the plan is to in future return some of their descendants to Aotea.

On our return journey, as we passed rafts of Titi/Cook's Petrels gathering offshore, I was reminded of the incredible migration they make every year. A 2010 tracking study by Matt Rayner of Auckland Museum and others showed that Hauturu's Titi/Cook's Petrels fly to waters offshore from Mexico and California during the non-breeding season.

As we watched the island recede into the distance, Dick Veitch – whose long involvement dates back to the days of the NZ Wildlife Service – told me that the broadleaf forest is now growing down to the coast and that some of the Titi/Cook's Petrels are nesting lower down.

He said the Hauturu Titi/Cook's Petrel breeding population had been estimated at 286,000 breeding pairs with a total population of 1,258,000 birds in a study published in 2007 by Matt Rayner and others. While the precise current population is not known,

after more than 15 years of population growth following rat removal, "there will be more than that now".

Seeing the magic of Hauturu and its birds close-up was an unforgettable experience. If you have the chance to visit "the resting place of lingering breezes" I can highly recommend it. Tiritiri Matangi also has much the same forest bird species, except Kakapo, Koekoea and North Island Brown Kiwi. And if you are interested in the history of bird conservation and ornithology you will relish all the detail contained in the excellent book, "Hauturu" (Massey University Press, 2019).

Michael Szabo is editor of Birds New Zealand magazine.



▲ NZ Storm Petrel: Michael Szabo





▲ Hilton and Melva Ward's 'School Wetland Classroom'.



▲ Australasian Bittern/Matuku Hūrepo: Hilton Ward.



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

### FAR NORTH

Our two April surveys of 90 Mile Beach recorded 912 birds and 832 respectively during the 30 km drive up the beach. We mainly saw Red-billed and Sthn Black-backed gulls and counted circa 80 White-fronted Terns during both surveys, 6 NZ Dotterels, and a few SIPO, VOCs and Caspian Terns. We also had an Atlas outing to Matauri Bay Peninsula where we saw a good variety of birds, especially at Tauranga Bay.

Recently there was an unusual record of Silvereyes from Kerikeri Inlet. A householder was woken up by the sound of a 'heavy shower' and found 40-50 Silvereyes lying stunned at the front of the house. They recovered after a while but another smaller flock arrived later in the day, and again a few more times since then. They say that if the window or door on that side of the house is open, the Silvereyes fly inside. They have lived there for 40 years but have never seen this before.

The Bay of Islands has 9 predator-free islands, several of which have increasing bird life following various bird re-introductions. Forty Red-crowned Kakariki were released onto Moturua Island in 2017. One of our members who regularly visits the island reports that many kakariki can be heard and seen flying there now. They also said they rarely see any of the original banded kakariki. Other species that seem to be doing well there are Banded Rail, NZ Tomtit, NI Robin, NI Saddleback, Whitehead, and Silvereye.

The islands are dry but sufficient ground moisture must be present as, unlike last year, NI Brown Kiwi are not being seen foraging during daylight hours. Forty Red-crowned Kakariki are to be released on Urupukapuka Island next month - we wish them well.

- ISABELLA GODBERT & DARREN MARKIN

### NORTHLAND

Both the Ngunguru and Whangarei Harbour wader counts went ahead in February. At Ngunguru, 17 total species were recorded. Notable was the absence of Banded Dotterels (17 were seen in Feb 2020) and counts for NZ Dotterel, Red-billed Gull, VOC and White-fronted Tern were down. At our February meeting we heard from Nigel Miller about Pateke and the current Recovery Plan.

In March, Wendy Ambury from White Rata Environmental Group updated us on the Kaka and Bellbird surveys being conducting around Whangarei in conjunction with Kiwi Coast Conservation Trust and North Tec. There are now 170 Kiwi Coast Conservation Trust landcare groups carrying

out pest control on 200,000 hectares in Northland. The goal was to use 5MBCs to try to assess whether pest control for NI Brown Kiwi is benefitting other species in the region. A total of 36 locations were surveyed. Kaka were found at Breamhead only. Bellbird were present at Breamhead, Mt Aubery, Mangawahi Cliffs, Kauri Mountain, and Otamere Bay.

In April, we had an Atlas field trip to Whangaruru which was a great success. Six keen birders and families had a great weekend atasing there. A total of 49 eBird checklists were submitted with highlights including NI Brown Kiwi, Little Penguin, Reef Heron, Fernbird, and Banded Rail. About 250 people turned up for the release of 10 NI Brown Kiwi into Taheke Landcare's predator-controlled area on 17/4 - an awesome turnout!

Also in April, 2 of our members - Hilton and Melva Ward - hosted the Ngunguru School years 3 and 4 students at the 'Ngunguru School Wetland Classroom' on their property on Old Mill Lane in Ngunguru (which is also open to the public). A total of 58 students plus teachers and parents attended. The students rotated around 5 stations where they learned all about wetland birds. Amazingly, an Australasian Bittern flew up and perched out in the open during their visit!

In the Far North, a Little Egret was reported from Unahi, Rangaunu Harbour. Numbers of Royal Spoonbill there continued to build as they arrived back from the South Island. A high death rate among ducks in the Kaitaia area has been reported due to avian botulism caused by the very dry weather. Finally, 2 young Reef Herons were seen in Houhora Harbour, indicating a successful breeding of the resident pair.

- ILSE CORKERY

### AUCKLAND

February-March was an intense period for public events. We had both a Birds New Zealand display and a guided bird walk at Matuku Link for World Wetland Day on 13/2. The birding highlights included 2 Pateke and a noisy flock of 40 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos.

Adrian Riegen was our speaker at the 'Farewell to the Kuaka' event at Ambury Park in Mangere on 14/3. More than 80 people attended the talk and guided walk, with the birding highlight being 2 Far Eastern Curlews. The Kuaka Farewell in Te Atatu on 20/3 March was attended by 35 local residents. Unusually, on the day, the 400 Red Knots present outnumbered the Kuaka/Bar-tailed Godwits by 2:1.

With the largely settled weather patterns

our Muriwai Beach Patrols have yielded small numbers of birds. Our patrol on 6/3 found 8 birds of 8 species including 1 Grey-faced Petrel, 1 Cook's Petrel and 1 Black Petrel, while a live Grey-faced Petrel was taken into care at NZ Bird Rescue. A probable Pycroft's Petrel was found among 6 birds of 5 species on our 3/4 patrol, while our 8/5 patrol included 1 White-capped Albatross among 8 birds of 6 species.

The annual South Kaipara Lakes NZ Dabchick Survey took place on Anzac Day in conjunction with South Kaipara Landcare. It was well attended with 37 observers. Birding highlights included 20 NZ Dabchick, 4 Australasian Little Grebe, 116 Pied Shag, 2 Australasian Bittern, 327 Paradise Shelduck, 11 Australasian Shoveler, 94 Grey Teal, 17 pure Grey Duck, and 14 NZ Scaup. The dry weather of the past few years meant many smaller lakes and ponds were completely dry, while Lake Kareta was very low, which though not ideal for grebes provided good foraging and roosting habitat for Pied Stilts. Later that day, 4 Cattle Egrets were seen by Gwenda Pulham and Noel Ward at their regular wintering site at Parakai.

A survey of Cryptic Wetland Species by 6 participants at Orangiwhina in Te Atatu on 27/3 confirmed the presence of Banded Rail, Spotless Crake, and Fernbird in this suburban coastal wetland based on their calls.

There were only a few rare bird sightings in our region. These included a Brown Booby at the Muriwai Gannet colony seen on several occasions in March, a Greater Sand Plover seen by Marie-Louise Ward at Omaha Spit (28/4), an Arctic Skua in brown worn plumage photographed roosting at Shelley Bay in the Kaipara Harbour by Axel Mertens (21/30), and a pale morph Arctic Skua found exhausted at Cockle Bay in Howick (14/4) and taken into care at NZ Bird Rescue. While in care the Arctic Skua was banded by Professor James Russell in what is likely one of the few instances of this species being banded in NZ!

- IAN McLEAN

### SOUTH AUCKLAND

At our February meeting Gwenda Pulham advised sightings of a Pectoral Sandpiper, a Black-fronted Dotterel, and a Curlew Sandpiper from Mangere. There was a report of a Barn Owl in Camerontown Rd near Pukekohe, and Noel Knight reported hearing kiwi calling at night at 3 sites in the Hot Water Beach area.

Terry Hatch reported seeing a kakariki flying over his Jericho Rd property. Wim Houtman saw a Long-tailed Cuckoo being





▲ 'Farewell to the Kuaka'/Ambury Park: Trina Smith.

▲ Wellington Branch pelagic/Salvin's Albatross: Michael Szabo.



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

chased by Tui at Waiau Pa on 18/3. Wendy Goad and Sue Frostick saw a Reef Heron at Kawakawa Bay on 21/3. Noel saw a leucistic VOC at Duder's on 26/3 and Stuart Chambers saw about 300 Wrybill in Pahurehure Estuary on 22/3.

In April, Phil Hammond saw 20 NZ Dabchicks at Ambury, Tony Habraken saw 18 Kereru at Mauku, and a NZ Falcon was seen in the Hunua Ranges. Ian Southey reported recently seeing 10-12 Kokako and heard Kaka around Lilburn Rd in the Hunua Ranges, and Tony Woodroffe reported about 100 pairs of Kokako are now present in the Hunua Ranges area. Noel advised there were at least 3 pairs of Weka nesting in the Te Papa Rd area of Kawakawa Bay this year, and a Little Egret was reported recently seen on Wattle Downs Peninsula.

At our March meeting, Natalie Fosdick spoke about her work on the genomics of Kaki/Black Stilt, which confirmed that captive breeding has minimised hybridisation but the problem of predation remains.

In April, James Roberts spoke about his work with Hannah Clement studying NZ Fairy Terns at Pakiri, Waipu, and Mangawhai over summer. After reporting that only 4 young fledged this year his talk prompted lively discussion, especially on the first report of an apparent male-male pairing.

Our monthly beach patrol at Karioitahi found a White-faced Heron, a Mottled Petrel, and a Fluttering Shearwater in February. After no patrol in March, in April we found 1 White-headed Petrel, 1 Grey-faced Petrel, and 1 Hutton's Shearwater.

It was pleasing to see the big increase in counts on the Coromandel Peninsula submitted to the Atlas by the influx of summer visitors there. Noel Knight and Nigel Milius joined a pelagic trip from Whangamata in mid-March organised by Russell Cannings. They counted a good variety of seabirds around the Alderman Islands, the Sugarloafs, and Slipper Island, including 4 species of albatross (Campbell, Black-browed, White-capped, Salvin's), abundant Black Petrel and Flesh-footed Shearwater, 1 Nth Giant Petrel, 1 Pycroft's Petrel, and 2 Little Shearwater, but surprisingly few Cook's Petrels and no storm petrels.

Our branch looks forward to hosting members from around the country at the annual conference in Thames on Queen's Birthday Weekend.

– SUE FROSTICK

### WAIKATO

RR Bruce Postil spoke at our March meeting about his recent trip to the Subantarctic

Islands. Our branch has also been busy with various census trips; last month we undertook our Raglan, Kawhia, and Aotea Harbour censuses. With perfect weather the West Coast beaches again provided a few surprises. Royal Spoonbills at Kawhia Harbour now number about 250 birds, but breeding has still not been observed at this site. Other sightings were 4 Reef Herons, a Whimbrel, a Far Eastern Curlew, 600 Black Swans, and 55 Wrybill. A good find was an Australasian Bittern at Aotea Harbour.

A lone NZ Dabchick has been at Hamilton Lake for the past 3 months, and Russell Cannings reported 25+ Redpolls in Whangamarino Swamp, more Royal Spoonbills at Tainui bridge and Lake Kimihia, and a juvenile Long-tailed Cuckoo at Matangi, just outside Hamilton.

There was also a sighting of a Brown Booby at Karioitahi. Another rare visitor at Whangamata Harbour was a single Reef Heron, only the second record there in 8 years. The Coromandel recorded over 140 NZ Dotterels this past season despite the increase of 'Kiwis' flocking to the beaches. Not all beaches did well with Whangamata only fledging 7. There are a lot of dogs who cannot read the signage!

– KEN WEDGWOOD

### TARANAKI

Our first 2021 meeting was attended by 16 people. Heartfelt condolences were extended to the RR on the unexpected passing of his wife, who was also our Branch's Treasurer. Helen McGill has stepped up to become our new Treasurer.

Eight of us visited Purangi District to walk part of a large area administered by East Taranaki Environmental Trust, where we saw 4 NI Robin, small flocks of Whitehead, 2 vocal Bellbirds, and some Kereru. The long staying Australasian Little Grebe is still at Lake Mangamahoe along with at least 1 NI Robin and 1 NZ Falcon that is seen occasionally.

Tony Green has been busy atlasing. He saw 4 adult NZ Dabchicks with 2 chicks at the old Bell Block ponds. Barry Hartley recorded 29 Pied Shag at Awakino River Estuary, 46 SIPO at Mokau River, and at Sandy Bay, 26 SIPO with 28 Pied Stilt, and close to the coast at Opunake's Lake Waiaua, 700 Canada Geese.

Our Atlas Co-ordinator, Steve Purdon, gave us an in-depth update on progress in Taranaki. All 90 squares have at least some data. Those with the least are squares that tend to be in the green desert of dairy farming, or the most remote. Even those not Atlasing found it very interesting and agreed that he should repeat it once every season, with a brief summary in

between. Steve is a 'numbers man' and finds it all very exciting.

Three members who braved rough weather for the March field trip to Lake Mangamahoe recorded 22 species including Grey Duck and Eastern Rosella. The Messengers, birdwatching from their lounge window, spotted a Cattle Egret close to their home, the first for winter.

We visited Hollards Gardens under the shadow of Mt Taranaki. Nine of us recorded 18 species before going up to Dawson falls for lunch in the sunshine. Afterwards we drove west around the mountain and did a short walk across farm paddocks and along a track inside the national park, atlasing all the way. Beach patrols have turned up little of interest. Two Pacific Golden Plover were still at Waiongana on 17/4 but have since departed and 2 of us did a Big Bird Day. The lack of daylight shortened our time and our checklist, but it was still a good day.

– PETER FRYER

### HAWKE'S BAY

It has been an uncharacteristically quiet few months for the Hawke's Bay branch, with no regular field trips. Our only meeting was the Branch AGM held on 2 May. That said, the 2021 Youth Camp was held in our region (see page 8).

As usual, there have been some interesting sightings reported by members. A Marsh Sandpiper and 2 Pectoral Sandpipers persisted at the Southern Marsh area of the Ahuriri Estuary into late February, and 4 Pacific Golden Plovers were also seen there. An immature Spotted Shag was seen on the Tukituki River on 24/2. In March, up to 8 Spotless Crakes (including a couple of juveniles) and 2 Marsh Crakes were seen at Pekapeka Wetland. A Marsh Crake and a Spotless Crake were also seen in the East Clive wetland in early April.

Royal Spoonbills were seen nesting at Anderson Park, with at least 3 chicks and 7 adults reported. A White Heron/K tuku has been seen off-and-on for about the last month at Park Island. Seasonally, there often seems to be a bird that divides its time between Park Island and Anderson Park.

– THALIA SACHTLEBEN

### MANAWATU

Autumn has been fairly quiet bird-wise in the Manawatu, the stand-out record being a White-winged Black Tern entering breeding plumage that spent a few days at the Manawatu Estuary in late April. A Common Tern had been present earlier in the month, and the Summer's Little Tern stayed into May.



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

The Little Egret in the vicinity for some years frequently gives great views in front of the viewing platform overlooking the sandspit. Members assisted with wader viewing and identifications at the estuary in March during the 'Farewell to the Godwits' event hosted by the Manawatu Estuary Trust, and at a post-conference field trip after the NZ Coastal Restoration Trust Conference.

Inland, Neil Haggarty found Royal Spoonbills nesting by some ponds near the road in the Pohangina Valley. The local birdlife in the northern Tararua Range was boosted recently by a translocation of NI Robins to the Turitea water catchment area. This area has sustained pest control, which the numbers of Rifleman and Whiteheads just outside the catchment area attest to. If successful, the translocation would mean I would have NI Robins, Whitehead and Rifleman within 5 km of my office! At our April meeting, Abi Quinell gave first-hand insights into Kokako management, and we are looking forward to having Murray Potter talk about the Subantarctic Islands at our next meeting in June.

– PHIL BATTLE

### WAIRARAPA

Our first field trip this year was to Donnelly's Flat Loop Track in the lower Mt Holdsworth area of the Tararua Ranges where we saw Kereru, Tui, and Bellbird, but no sign of the NZ Tomtits, Kaka, or Kakariki known to be in the area.

Our March field trip was to Boggy Pond track on the eastern edge of Wairarapa Moana. The track was in good condition, offering a route right into the heart of the Boggy Pond wetland area where swans, geese and ducks were plentiful. There was a constant aerial traffic of flights of shags, Paradise Shelducks, and Black Swans, and we saw a pair of NZ Dabchicks.

Boggy Pond is HQ for a large number of Royal Spoonbills and is their favoured nesting site in this region. We counted over 120 roosting there. Boggy Pond is a very accessible and interesting walk for any bird enthusiast. In the adjacent Wairio Wetlands, Spotless Crakes and Marsh Crakes have been recorded and photographed recently.

Our April field trip was to Flat Point and Honeycomb Rock on the wild Wairarapa east coast. Seven of us enjoyed a fine day with dramatic scenery. Highlights included a group of c20 VOCs. Behind the foreshore is a wide, raised beach platform that has many small ponds and swamps. We heard and saw a group of Black-fronted Dotterel in one of these wallows. There was also a multitude of White-faced Herons but no Reef Herons were sighted. Caspian Terns, White-fronted Terns and Australasian Gannets passed by at sea, adding to a total of 38 species on our day's list.

One of our members in Featherston nursed a NZ Fantail back to health after it had been caught by a cat. Once it was happily flying around the room catching insects Anna deemed it ready for release in her garden. As she and her two young daughters watched it for a minute flitting about the shrubs, a NZ Falcon swooped in low past the astonished family, snatched the fantail, and took it to

the nearest power pole where it proceeded to pluck its tiny quarry. As Anna said, it was amazing but at the same time shocking. For the two girls it was simply tragic.

– OLIVER DRUCE

### WELLINGTON

The Wellington Branch has for some years been organising pelagic birdwatching trips for members out into Cook Strait aboard Cook Strait Fishing Charters' 15-metre vessel 'Seafarer II', which provides excellent viewing for 20 people of a good range of pelagic seabirds. The half-day trip includes lunch for all aboard. Like any NZ pelagic trip, sea conditions can be challenging. On 14/2 a fully-booked trip set out to Nicholson Canyon, which was enjoyed by all.

The species checklist included White-capped Mollmawk (7), Salvin's Mollmawk (27), Sthn Royal Albatross (4), Nthn Royal Albatross (7), Sthn Giant Petrel (1), Nthn Giant Petrel (3), Cape Petrel (3), Cook's Petrel (2), Fairy Prion (10), White-chinned Petrel (3), Westland Petrel (5), Flesh-footed Shearwater (14), Buller's Shearwater (2), and Sooty Shearwater (5), and there was the bonus of 30 Common Dolphins and a distant breaching Sperm Whale. Inshore sightings included Arctic Skua (2), Spotted Shag (14) and Fluttering Shearwater (72).

Thirteen trip participants signed up to share eBird checklists, with 3 submitted for different legs of the trip. Thanks to Michael Szabo for hosting and organising the trip and Colin Miskelly for sharing his expertise in bird identifications and collating the eBird checklists. Another Cook Strait pelagic trip for members is planned in late July.

– GEOFF DE LISLE

### NELSON

Winter birding in Tasman and Golden bays is dominated by congregations. The seasonal Little Black Shags have started appearing in estuaries. Spotted Shags again roost on Fifeshire Rock in Nelson Harbour and long lines of flying birds, early morning and evening, can be seen plying across Tasman Bay to and from feeding areas and roosting spots. The Bounder Bank, The Glen, and Cable Bay are good vantage points. A small number are resident and breed in Golden Bay. Five species of shag in all can be sighted around the Top of the South during Autumn and Winter. Black Shag, Little Pied Shag, Pied Shag, Spotted Shag and of course the King Shags in Marlborough Sounds.

Several field days in late Summer/Autumn were held catching and banding/markings waders in Waimea Estuary, and recently a successful branch meeting was held with Michelle Bradshaw, DOC's Banding Officer, to further enthuse and instruct members. As it was indoors, no cannon or mist nests were advisable, but plenty of avian legs of differing shapes, sizes, of plastic and otherwise were available to practise on with a range of pliers and bands, with Michelle and several local level 3 banders at the helm.

NZ Dabchick have returned to Wakapuaka wetland ponds. Three were spotted in late April. A flotilla of Black Swan cruise Nelson Haven when the tide is in, and Pied Stilt grace the region, impressive in their winter

flocks, large or small. Godwit numbers are now low but SIPO flocks beg to be counted and groups of VOC need to be checked for bands and tags. Most days at least one White Heron can be seen in an estuary from the road between Motueka and Nelson, but how many individuals are spending the winter in our region this year is unknown. Royal Spoonbill numbers have been augmented since Summer. Additional small groups, including those that have arrived from breeding grounds, are easily seen from highways and byways, roosting or feeding throughout Tasman and Golden bays.

Common Starlings continue to roost in the trees on Haulashore Island, in Nelson Harbour, but at the moment, unfortunately, roadworks along Rocks Road prevent easy parking for viewing their evening winter murmurations.

– GAIL D. QUAYLE

### MARLBOROUGH

Marlborough members have reported some interesting sightings recently. An Australasian Bittern was spotted up the Waihopi River (first bittern record for the atlas in Marlborough), a NZ Dabchick on the irrigation pond at the Yealands Estate, a Black Noddy at Duffers Reef, a Little Tern at the Wairau Lagoon, and a Banded Rail at Ngakuta Bay.

Two members assisted with a translocation of 40 SI Saddleback from Motuara Island to the Brook Sanctuary in Nelson, while on Motuara they saw really good numbers of SI Robins, Bellbirds and Kakariki, plus plenty of Little Spotted Kiwi and Little Penguins at night. Good sightings of Fernbird, King Shag, and a NZ Falcon have also been reported from around D'Urville Island.

Freshwater along Marlborough's south coast is limited with the dry weather, but the birds are still following their seasonal patterns. Some species are more prevalent and others less so. There are flocks of several hundred Pied Stilts and White-fronted Terns along the edges of Lake Grassmere, and a few down at the Waima Lagoon, which is very low on water. A dozen Black-fronted Dotterel have been regulars at Lake Elterwater. There are large flocks of ducks, Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler and Mallard on both lakes. There are flocks of 300 Red-billed Gulls at Marfell's Beach and Cape Campbell, but the Black-billed Gulls haven't been spotted lately. There are hundreds of Sthn Black-backed Gulls, a good third of them are juveniles seen along the coast and heading to the Awatere River mouth each evening.

Young harriers are again out at Cape Campbell, some heading out to sea. There are the usual flocks of both VOC and SIPO with fewer than usual White-faced Herons. The flocks of Banded Dotterel south of Cape Campbell are regularly seen feeding, as is a flock of 50 Ruddy Turnstones and 3 Pacific Golden Plovers. There are fewer Pied and Little shags south of the Lighthouse, although well over 100 Black-fronted Terns are regularly roosting at the point south of the airstrip.

The Fluttering Shearwaters are feeding up and down the coast and into Clifford Bay. Greenfinches and Goldfinches, along with Yellowhammers, Cirl Buntings, Redpolls,





## REGIONAL ROUNDUP



■ Otago Branch/Tomahawk Lagoon: Mary Thompson.



■ Oscar Thomas presents his Subantarctic trip photos to the Otago Branch: Mary Thompson.

Silvereyes, Welcome Swallows and NZ Fantails have returned to the coast since the inland frosts started. NZ Pipits and Sacred Kingfishers are slower to arrive at the coast. Maybe they are still further inland? Does the rain, or lack of it, affect the seasonal patterns of each species?

- DIANNE JOHN

### CANTERBURY

Two interesting recent sightings in Canterbury come from the Bromley Oxidation Ponds. A White-winged Black Tern was first spotted there in late April and has been seen on multiple occasions since. A Northern Shoveler was also found there in early May, although it has not been seen there since. However, a week later a one was spotted at Pegasus Wetlands, in the same spot where one was seen last year. It seems likely that this could be the bird that was first seen at Bromley.

Nearby Pegasus Wetlands, four Black-fronted Dotterels have been spotted at a wetland in Ravenswood. Also in North Canterbury, three Ruddy Turnstones and a Red Knot have been seen at the Ashley Estuary, along with the usual excellent array of waterfowl and waders. The regular Black Stilt continues to be seen there as well.

A Marsh Crake was seen on multiple occasions at Styx Mill throughout April. An Australasian Bittern has also been seen there recently, and it has been reported that both species are new records for Styx Mill. It is excellent to see that these rare wetland birds are utilising this habitat. A bittern has also been spotted lately at Cooper's Lagoon.

Over at Lake Ellesmere, a possible snipe has recently been reported from the Greenpark area by a duck hunter. Unfortunately, no local birders have been able to confirm this sighting so far. However, there is an abundance of suitable snipe habitat in the area, so if there were a snipe present, it would not be easy to locate.

- ELEANOR GUNBY

### OTAGO

It is with sadness that the Otago Branch acknowledges the passing of Lesley Gowans. Lesley was an active member for over 20 years, participating and helping plan several long-term projects. Many Otago members have happy memories of bird watching with Lesley, myself included with fond recollections from my early teenage years.

Atlas field trips in February and March visited Laurence and Toko Mouth. A special trip on 8/5 combined with the Global Big Day visited Hawkesbury Lagoon and Karitane. These trips continue to be successful, covering a variety of habitats and atlas squares. A total of 30 checklists with 52 species from 4 squares were submitted from the Toko Mouth day. The eBird Global Big Day resulted in 203 Otago checklists being submitted with 67 species, 54 (80%) of these were seen by participants of the 'official' Otago Branch atlas trip, the most exciting sighting being a Cattle Egret, which was the first Otago record for 2 years. It was the most popular trip yet, with 22 participants including 4 new members.

The second Atlas summer finished for us with a total of 61.5% of Otago squares having some coverage, and autumn is now underway with 62.4% of squares covered. Richard Scofield, our Regional Recorder, gave some pointers in the regional newsletter highlighting areas with squares still missing any autumn records. Interesting bird sightings included a Kereru in Ranfurly, a Song Thrush at sea 380 km SW of Dunedin, and a Spotted Shag in a freshwater reservoir (Ross Creek, Dunedin).

In late February, 50 Royal Spoonbills were at Catlins Lake and Black-fronted Terns returned to Balclutha. Marsh Crakes delighted observers at Tomahawk Lagoon and Lake Dunstan. Although it is now autumn, breeding observations have included Brown Creeper feeding fledglings, a Grey Teal with young ducklings, and a Black Swan cygnet in a nest. News media have reported a Karearea caught on a fishing line by anglers in

Alexandra and a juvenile godwit, which had spent 440 days in Otago, was the first of the 2019 banded juveniles to start migration.

Our branch organised another well-attended popular event as part of the annual Wild Dunedin nature festival, providing telescopes and guides to help members of the public identify and learn more about birds at Tomahawk Lagoon.

The first half of the year has been filled with varied indoor meetings. Recently Oscar Thomas spoke to us about his Subantarctic Islands and Chatham Islands adventures (courtesy of a Heritage Expeditions 'True Young Explorers Scholarship'), and James Hunter spoke about Takahe.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

### SOUTHLAND

During our February wader count we received exciting news from Sean Jacques and Joe Bliss who were counting on the New River Estuary that they had seen and photographed a Gull-billed Tern adult with a well-grown juvenile that was begging for food. This is the first successful breeding record of this species in New Zealand. In 2019 a pair had attempted to nest in Awarua Bay and 3 eggs were laid. Unfortunately the area they nested in was close to the road and a few days later the nest was abandoned with quad bike tyre tracks found close to the nest. There had been a pair in previous years seen frequently in the Awarua Bay area.

Other interesting sightings have been a Chestnut Teal on 7/2 at the Tip Lagoon and a Little Whimbrel at Jacobs River Estuary in Riverton also on 7/2. This bird stayed for some months as keen birders came down from all parts of the country to spot it. They also had the chance of catching up with a long-staying Common Greenshank and a Grey-tailed Tattler. Our regular visiting Chestnut-breasted Shelducks were showing well at the Tip Lagoon with several seen from 8/2 through to 25/03.

Pete McClelland and I headed out to the head of Awarua Bay on 25/03 and were rewarded with great views of a Terek Sandpiper and 2 Curlew Sandpipers, one of which had coloured up for the breeding season. There were also 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers starting to colour up. To cap off an amazing day we also saw Wrybill, Sthn NZ Dotterel, and a Greater Sand Plover. Another visit on 1/04 saw the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers increase in number to 5.

A Ruddy Turnstone banded in China was photographed at Jacobs River Estuary in Riverton. This bird was also photographed in 2018 showing that some migrant waders are site specific when returning to NZ. After an influx of c6 Cattle Egrets on Stewart Island reported by Matt Jones another 5 were seen in Invercargill on 3/5 by Lloyd Esler in a wet paddock adjacent to Stead St.

We managed to get some Atlas counts done in western Southland and in the Dipton area, but we need to concentrate on tackling some of the more difficult to access squares later in the year where no counts have been done yet.

- PHIL RHODES



## Swarovski NL Pure 8 x 42 Binoculars RRP \$4,690

What instantly stands out about this new Swarovski series is the talon-sharp '3D' feel of the image they produce, the outstanding brightness and clarity of that image, and the expansive field of view. The image also has remarkable depth of field, so with the eye cups set fully down everything in view seems even closer than you'd expect.

The 8 x 42s (above left) measure up at 158mm long by 131mm wide and weigh in at 840g, which didn't feel heavy to me. The light gathering was superb, even in an enclosed forest. It seemed dark to the naked eye but when I put up these binoculars it seemed as if a light had been switched on. I was able to see crystal clear details on a juvenile NZ Falcon about 20 metres away and was very impressed with the colour quality, clearly making out the bird's pale pink gape and pale bluish-grey legs and cere.

A Wellington Branch pelagic trip into Cook Strait was a chance to take them out for a sea trial. The very wide field of view was especially useful. It's just what you need to spot small distant seabirds moving into your field of view. Our first distant Cook's Petrel would have been a tougher call with lesser binoculars. The focus wheel is smooth yet rapid enough to focus on a speeding petrel careening fast towards the boat and still be able to discern which species it was. With such fast and accurate focusing, I never had to search back and forth to find a sharp image.

The eyecups have six positions from fully down to fully up, through four click stops in between. This meant plenty of options to find my ideal position, which was especially useful as I wear spectacles. In conjunction with the new optional extra forehead rest (RRP \$219), I was able to stabilise them very effectively on a moving boat. The forehead rest can easily be set to the position that works best for you. The ability to pivot the binoculars slightly when the boat moved around was quite a revelation because I'm used to jamming the eye cups of my own binoculars right up against my spectacles for maximum field of view, which has the disadvantage of less manoeuvrability.

Another reviewer has commented on these being the best binoculars they've ever used. I have to agree. So, if you are looking at getting new binoculars and these are in your price range, my advice is to visit your nearest retailer that stocks them and try them out for yourself.

Just after I field tested this pair, Swarovski told me about the new and more compact 8 x 32 and 10 x 32 models (above right) in the NL Pure range, which will be available from June at the significantly lower RRP of \$3,690.

Swarovski produce an annual global birding publication called 'Closer'. If you would like a free copy, Swarovski has a limited number to send out within NZ. Just send them a request with your postal address to: [jp.klaus@swarovski.com](mailto:jp.klaus@swarovski.com)

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



1. Adult and dependent juvenile 'Australian' Gull-billed Tern, New River Estuary, Southland 28/02: Joseph Roberts.



2. Juvenile 'Australian' Gull-billed Tern, New River Estuary, Southland 28/02: Joseph Roberts.

## First confirmed successful breeding by Gull-billed Tern in New Zealand

On 24th February 2021 Joe Bliss and I ventured out to the shellbanks in the New River Estuary south of Invercargill for the Birds New Zealand summer wader count. The banks are an important local wader roost site, where breeders include Caspian Tern (c.30 pairs), White-fronted Tern (est. 3-4 pairs), and Southern Black-backed Gull.

After wading across the waist-deep channel separating the banks from the coast we made landfall on the main island, hunkering down to be as unobtrusive as possible. I began to count South Island Pied Oystercatchers, scoping along a dense line c.200m away. White-fronted Terns were loafing on one end of the group, with another tern standing close by. The combination of tall stance on long black legs, full glossy cap, heavy black bill, long wings and powerful build were unmistakable; an adult Gull-billed Tern. Pale upperpart colouration and long bill with decurved upper mandible pointed to the subspecies *macrotarsa*, 'Australian' Gull-billed Tern. As I directed Joe onto the bird it began walking along the shoreline, followed by a previously unnoticed juvenile in a food-begging pose. Once pulse rates had calmed we settled in to closely observe these birds over the next two hours.

All behaviour suggested that the juvenile was very recently fledged. It was reluctant to fly and not for long or far when it did, begged regularly from the adult, and did not forage for itself. The parent encouraged flight by making short trips around the banks, at one stage heading far down the estuary, returning with prey for the dependent which had remained huddled amongst the waders. The adult was defensive and wary. Despite our distance it circled us on two occasions giving a distinctive, rolling alarm call. Begging calls of the juvenile were clearly audible periodically, a mewling cry.

On 28/02 we returned with two more Birds New Zealand members and photographer Joseph Roberts. The birds were still present and the youngster seemed stronger on the wing already. We watched the juvenile take several flights around the banks with the adult describing wide circles above it. Food begging was still frequent, again with no attempts to forage seen from the juvenile.

In my view all behaviour suggested that breeding had occurred at this site, rather than the birds having dispersed from elsewhere. This occurrence represents the second publicised instance of breeding (and the first successful) for this species in New Zealand (and Southland), following an unsuccessful attempt in Summer 2019/20 in the Awarua Bay area of Southland that was documented by Glenda Rees.

SEAN JACQUES





❏ 1. Black Noddy at Spirits Bay (Far North): Sarah Waymouth 2. White-winged Black Tern at Foxton: Imogen Warren 3. Whiskered Tern near Te Anau: Anja Kohler 4. Little Whimbrel at Riverton Estuary (Southland): Lloyd Blakie 5. Great Frigatebird off Raoul Island (Kermadecs): Scott Brooks 6. Brent Stephenson with Great Shearwater, Rangitira Island (Chathams): Alex Wilson 7. 'Magnificent' Collared Petrel (Kermadecs): Brent Stephenson 8. Pallid Cuckoo at Kaupokonui (Taranaki): John Kyngdon

## Bird News

*Some of these sightings have not received official acceptance by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee (1st September 2020 to 1st May 2021).*

There were reports of a **New Zealand Dabchick** at St Annes Lagoon (Canterbury) on 11/11, a trio at Wakapuaka wetland ponds (Nelson) in late April, and another on a pond at Yealands Estate near Seddon (no date). The only reported sighting of **Hoary-headed Grebe** at Lake Elterwater was a trio seen on 6/1.

A **Chestnut-breasted Shelduck** pair was at Ringaringa Golf Course (Stewart Is) on 5/12. One was at Te Anau WTP on 30/1, and at least two were at Tip Lagoon (Invercargill) from 8/2–25/3. The long-staying **Plumed Whistling Duck** was reported at Anderson Park (Napier) from 27/12–26/3. Up to 11 **Australian Wood Ducks** were reported at Hoddy Estuary Park (Nelson) from 10/1–13/2. A **Northern Shoveler** was at Kaiapoi oxidation ponds on 26/11 and another one was at Pegasus Wetland (Christchurch) on 8/5, plus a lone **Chestnut Teal** was at Tip Lagoon on 7/2.

A **Fiordland Crested Penguin** was found ashore at Onuku Taipari Beach in New Plymouth on 12/10, and another one was at Riversdale Beach (Wairarapa) on 23/2. A **Royal Penguin** was released back into the wild on Otago Peninsula on 9/3 after being taken into care from Katikati Point. A **Snares Crested Penguin** found near Kaikoura on 18/5 was also taken into care, and released shortly after, and an **Erect-crested Penguin** was at Claverly Beach, Hundaless (Canterbury), on 19/2.

A "probable" **Antarctic Fulmar** was reported off Muriwai (15/5). Much further east, a **Great Shearwater** and a **Juan Fernandez Petrel** were photographed at Rangitira Island (Chathams) on 1/2. Notable sightings during a Kermadec Islands pelagic expedition (25/3–5/5) included totals of 3 **Campbell Albatross**, 1 **Antarctic Prion**, 1 **Kermadec Storm Petrel**, 2 **Providence Petrels**, 1 **Gould's Petrel**, 1 'Magnificent' **Collared Petrel**, 1 **Brown Booby**, 3 **Red-footed Booby**, 43 **Greater Frigatebirds**, 1 **Long-tailed Skua**, and 1 **South Polar Skua**. An **Antarctic Prion** was also found off New Brighton Beach (Christchurch) on 20/5.

Notable sightings during pelagic day trips from Tutukaka included 2 **Chatham Albatross** and 2 **Wilson's Storm Petrels** (17/10), a **Brown Skua** and 2 **Wilson's Storm Petrels** (24/10), a **Mottled Petrel**, a **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, and a **South Polar Skua** (1/1), and 2 **White-naped Petrels** (20/2). A **Brown Booby** was noted at sea off North Cape in mid-January, and another was from Black Reef (Cape Kidnappers) on 5/2. One was seen flying north near Waiuku on 23/3, and then one was photographed at Muriwai gannet colony on 2/4.

An elusive bird was the **Little Whimbrel** seen intermittently at

Jacobs River Estuary (Southland) from 4–13/2. Two **Sanderlings** were at Papakanui Sandspit (Kaipara) on 1/1, and a singleton was at Mangawhai from 10/1–5/2. The long-staying bird at Ashley River Estuary was seen into at least March. A **Wandering Tattler** was seen at Cape Pattisson (Chatham Islands) on 13/10, another on Karikari Peninsula (Far North) that stayed from 3–25/2, and another at Napier Island (Kermadec Is) on 30/3. A long-staying **Common Greenshank** first reported at Riverton Estuary (Southland) on 3/5/20 was last seen there on 11/3/21. Another one was seen at Okawa Point (Chathams) on 30/10. A **Lesser Sand Plover** was at Miranda from 14/1–21/5, staying long enough to be seen in full breeding plumage, and a possible **Snipe spp.** was reported in the Greenpark area of Lake Ellesmere (1/5).

A **Pomarine Skua** was seen at Heathcote Estuary (Christchurch) on 6/1. A **Black Noddy** was photographed at Spirits Bay on 21/2. Another observer reported 3 there the same day. Further south, one was seen at Duffer's Reef (Marlborough) on 4/3. A **Sooty Tern** was seen on the Karikari Peninsula on 13/11. One found on Waiheke Island on 27/11 was taken into care but succumbed, and another was seen at Rangitira Island (Chathams) on 3/2. A **Gull-billed Tern** was seen at Motueka Sandspit (31/1 to 12/2), and then 2 were at New River Estuary (Southland) 24–28/2 (see page 18).

A **White-winged Black Tern** was on the lower Rangitata River (Canterbury) 15–16/11. Then one was seen further south at the Oreti River (Southland) on 12/2. Two were then seen further north at the Waiau River mouth on 13/2 and 23/2. A singleton was briefly at Foxton Beach on 22/4, and another was at Bromley WTP (Christchurch) that stayed from 26/4 well into May. An unusual record so far south was a **NZ Fairy Tern** (with leg bands) at Foxton Beach (19–21/12). A **Whiskered Tern** was seen at Upukerora River (Te Anau) on 21/1, and a possible Antarctic Tern in non-breeding plumage was at Whanganui River mouth on 27/1.

Two free-flying **Scaly-breasted Lorikeets** were seen in Matapouri (Northland) on 28/12. A **Pallid Cuckoo** proved to be a popular 'twitch' at Otakeho (Taranaki) 7–21/2, and a possible Oriental Cuckoo was reported at Prince of Wales Park (Wellington) on 14/1. Up to 11 **White-throated Needletails** were seen in Motueka (10–14/2), a **Fork-tailed Swift** was seen at Arapawa Island (Marlborough) on 20/10, and a **Tree Martin** was at Wainono Lagoon (25–27/10).

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



# NEW SHIP NEW (ZEALAND) BIRDING ADVENTURES



## Explore the remote, wildlife rich wilderness of New Zealand aboard 18-guest *Heritage Explorer* with pioneering Kiwi expedition cruise company Heritage Expeditions

### Unseen Stewart Island

Discover wildlife-rich Stewart Island/Rakiura, Oban, Ulva Island, Paterson Inlet, Port Adventure, Port Pegasus, Lords River and more on this exclusive 8-day voyage. 19-26 June, 3-10 Oct 2021 [From NZ\\$4,900pp](#)

### Southern Fiords Discovery

Experience the grand scale scenery and unique wildlife of Fiordland's Preservation and Chalky Inlets and Doubtful and Dusky Sounds on this 7-day exploration of the Southern Fiords.

1-7 & 8-14 Jul, 30 Jul - 5 Aug, 5-11 & 20-26 Aug 2021

[From NZ\\$4,500pp](#) Includes scenic helicopter transfer!

### Northern Fiords Explorer

Experience the primordial majesty of Fiordland's Milford, Bligh, George, Caswell, Nancy, Thompson and Doubtful Sounds on this 8-day adventure.

24-30 Jul 2021 [From NZ\\$4,250pp](#)

### Discover Marlborough Sounds

Discover the tranquil waterways, wildlife and rich history of New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds on an unforgettable 7-day Kiwi adventure exploring Queen Charlotte and Pelorus Sounds, French Pass and d'Urville Island. 12-18 & 18-24 Dec 2021

[From NZ\\$4,200pp](#)

### Islands of the Hauraki Gulf *New Voyage!*

Explore the island sanctuaries of Great Barrier, Mokohinau, Tiritiri Matangi, Cavalli and Bay of Islands, and Whangamumu Harbour, 8 days.

7-14 & 14-21 Jan, 12-19 Mar 2022 [From NZ\\$5,775pp](#)

### Antarctica & Subantarctic Adventures

Signature voyages aboard our 50 guest ice-strengthened expedition vessels *Spirit of Enderby*/ *Professor Khromov* and *Akademik Shokalskiy*.

### Birding Down Under

Snares, Auckland, Macquarie, Campbell, Antipodes, Bounty, Stewart, South East, Mangere and Little Mangere Islands including Pyramid Rock.

12-30 Nov 2021

[From US\\$12,050pp](#)

### Galapagos of the Southern Ocean

Macquarie, Auckland, Campbell and the Snares Islands. 21 Nov - 4 Dec, 30 Nov - 12 Dec, & 22 Dec - 3 Jan 2021/2

[From US\\$8,300pp](#)

### Beyond Fiordland: NZ's Wildest Islands

Auckland, Campbell, the Snares, Stewart and Ulva Islands and Fiordland's Doubtful and Dusky Sounds, Acheron Passage and more. 31 Dec 2021 - 10 Jan 2022

[From US\\$6,395pp](#)

### In the Wake of Scott & Shackleton *Final Berths!*

Ross Sea Antarctica and the Subantarctic Macquarie, Auckland, Campbell and the Snares Islands.

10 Feb - 11 Mar 2022 [From US\\$23,880pp](#)

### Chatham Islands: A Land Apart

Antipodes, Bounty, Chatham, Mangere and Little Mangere, Pitt and South East Islands including Pyramid Rock. 12 - 21 Mar 2022 [From US\\$5,350pp](#)



[Ask about our 2022 dates and departures](#)

**With just 18 guests per voyage, spaces fill fast!**

Freephone 0800 262 8873 [info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com)

[WWW.HERITAGE-EXPEDITIONS.COM](http://WWW.HERITAGE-EXPEDITIONS.COM)



**Heritage Expeditions**  
New Zealand