

# **BIRDS NEW ZEALAND**

*Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa*

No.25 March 2020



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

## Letter to the Editor – Conservation

The reluctance of Birds New Zealand to actively engage in the conservation of New Zealand's birds alluded to by Dr Viola Palmer has been raised many times previously, at least since the 1970s when then student members including myself first aired the issue at AGMs. Society President Bruce McKinlay's response suggesting the Society does not prevent members from engaging in conservation; that others do use data collected by the Society; or even the very rare occasions on which Birds New Zealand has issued a statement, fails to acknowledge the responsibility our organisation has to our birds.

I agree with Dr Viola Palmer that Birds New Zealand should not get into radical actions; leave that to others. Instead we need to be proactive in ensuring that evidence-based information is presented, not merely made available, to the appropriate authorities whenever the Society has data relevant to bird conservation matters. That information may be presented as a submission, through the media, in person, or in some other form, usually, but perhaps not always, by Birds New Zealand. Whatever form it may take, it is essential that any information from Bird New Zealand is robust and evidence-based.

As the nation's pre-eminent ornithological organisation, I believe the Society has a responsibility to take a leading role in the conservation of New Zealand's birds. Ours is the organisation generating that knowledge; who better to ensure it is used effectively. One of the objectives of the Society is to "foster and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds", not just for our present membership but for future generations of ornithologists and birdwatchers.

(letter abridged) KERRY-JAYNE WILSON

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## COVER IMAGE

**Brown Booby** at Muriwai gannet colony, January 2020.

Photo by Simon Runting @simonbirdphotography

## Dr Clive Minton 1934-2019

It is with great sadness that I advise that Dr Clive Minton was killed in a car crash on 6th November 2019 at Dunkeld in Victoria, Australia. His wife Pat was travelling with him and is in hospital in a serious but stable condition. They were returning from a short holiday on Kangaroo Island, South Australia.

Clive is best known for his work with waders, and has been described as a father figure in global wader studies. He has been one of the great movers and shakers of shorebird research and colour-flagging in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, and in other flyways over many decades. His work was recognised by a number of awards, including BirdLife Australia's John Hobbs Medal for outstanding contributions to ornithology as an amateur, and the Linnaean Society of New York's Eiesenmann Medal for ornithological excellence and encouragement of amateur efforts in ornithology. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for 'services to ornithology', particularly the study of migratory wading birds in Australia. For those who knew Clive, his larger than life presence will be greatly missed as he was a most warm and wonderful human being. He will be sorely missed.

## 2020 Garden Bird Survey

The 2020 annual Garden Bird Survey will be the fourteenth, and Birds New Zealand members are once again being asked to join in. The survey is open to anyone who can identify the bird species in their garden. Just choose any day between 27th June to 5th July 2020 and spend an hour watching the birds in your garden. For each species, record the highest number you see or hear at any one time. The survey is led by Landcare Research and full survey instructions are available online: <https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/science/plants-animals-fungi/animals/birds/garden-bird-surveys>

# From the President's Desk

Summer is a stop-start affair here in Otago, but I have been out and about in The Catlins finding obscure squares to fill in for the New Zealand Bird Atlas, and I see from the website that many Society members are doing the same in their own regions.

## Council Meeting

Council had a very productive meeting in November and you can see in this edition of *Birds New Zealand* some of the products of that work. We have prepared two Notices of Motion for formal debate at the 2020 Annual General Meeting. As I discussed in the December *Birds New Zealand* the first relates to clarifying how we describe the Society. The second is a proposal to increase Society subscriptions. This is discussed in more detail below. Council also continued to consider the feedback from members on how to refine the Society's Conservation Policy.

## Conservation Policy

Council has refined the Conservation Policy based on feedback from members. The Policy endorsed by Council is:

*To encourage and support the conservation of birds by providing scientifically sound information for making wise management decisions. Where it is appropriate, individuals and Regions can support bird conservation by participating in hearings, meetings or other consultative processes to present and explain scientific evidence and recommend management arrangements and actions based on that evidence. Resourcing of such activities is at the cost of the individuals and Regions involved.*

This Policy is supported by guidelines that have been developed to assist Council/Scientific Committee and Regional Representatives to make submissions or supply information held by the Society. These are posted on the Society's website.

Council has already implemented this work by deciding to write a submission to the Ministry for the Environment-led process for a National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity. The submission is available on the Society's website and concentrates on raising the profile of and emphasising the value of the New Zealand Bird Atlas project.

The National Policy Statement provides the basis for developing coordinated guidance for planning and subsequently managing populations of indigenous species across their natural range. We have made the point in our submission that we are collecting the data through the Atlas scheme to underpin such guidance with robust, nationally based data. At the other end of the scale I'm also aware that some members are engaged in long-term projects with Local Authorities to promote improved bylaws for the control of dogs.

## Membership Database

Work continues on this project. It has been frustrating for some members that things have not gone smoothly when renewing subscriptions and I apologise for any inconvenience. We are working as quickly as we can to get this resolved and to have a new membership database up and running.

## Society Subscriptions

Council has been considering the long-term financial viability of the Society for some years now. Our operating costs which are the services to members include; the quality of our publications with more full-colour; the costs of wages; the increasing need for our digital profile; and expectations of members and Council as to the activities of the Society. These have all increased. Without addressing the state of our subscriptions, Council is failing to ensure the viability of the Society.

Some of this work is a multi-year project as part of our strategic plan, but at the same time there is a clear discrepancy between our subscription income and operating costs, and so Council resolved at its last meeting to progress this matter at the 2020 AGM.

The matter of subscriptions is complex. Council is trying very hard to strike a balance between 'balancing the books' of the Society, maintaining our activities, and being reasonable about the cost to individual members. We do not wish to have a large increase but there does need to be some increase to protect the Society into the future.

A formal Notice of Motion is included in this edition of *Birds New Zealand* and a fuller explanation is posted on the website.

## New Zealand Bird Atlas

Mike Bell has reported that the Atlas has got off to a flying start, with the uptake by members and non-members in the first six months exceeding our expectations. A total of 570 participants have taken part and 35,000 checklists have been submitted to date. The eBird team at Cornell University have told Mike that this is approximately three times the "normal" submission rate for eBird in NZ.

I'm impressed with the engagement by members. I continue to promote the scheme and would encourage more members to become involved and start submitting checklists. If you have not already done so please have a look at the project website to see what's going on: <https://birdatlas.co.nz/>

More importantly, if you have not completed checklists in your local squares or as part of your holiday planning it's never too late to start.

## NZ Bird Conference and Annual General Meeting 2020

Organising of the 2020 annual conference and AGM is going well. Sandra Wallace is bringing together an excellent programme. If you have not already registered please do so as soon as possible so that the organisers can better plan for the numbers. As part of the conference there will also be a photography competition. So, please start choosing your best images. Mike Bell will present an overview of the Atlas Project to date, and will be running Atlas field trips, including a post-conference Atlasing Blitz on the West Coast. I'm looking forward to catching up with you all there.

## Australasian Ornithological Conference 2021

While I'm thinking of conferences, please mark 3rd-5th February 2021 in your diary as this is the date for the biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference which will be held at the University of Auckland. This is a golden opportunity to showcase our Society with our Australian colleagues, so I'm expecting a strong turnout from Society members.

Finally, there was considerable excitement at home when we arrived back from holiday this summer. A Blackbird had taken advantage of the quiet to build a nest in a shrub just outside the kitchen window. The ability to be able to download a Nest Record Card and keep a record which can then be added to the growing knowledge of bird nesting records from the comfort of the kitchen shows that wherever we are we can individually make a contribution to the understanding of birds in New Zealand.

BRUCE MCKINLAY  
PRESIDENT

## 2020 NZ Bird Conference & AGM

The 2020 NZ Bird Conference and 81st Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Birds New Zealand will be held on Queens Birthday weekend at the Commodore Hotel (<https://www.commodorehotel.co.nz/>) in Christchurch (30th May-1st June). The conference will comprise two days of scientific presentations plus five field trip options. The AGM will be on Saturday afternoon, 30th May.

Online registration and full details are available at: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/> or contact your regional representative: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/contact/> or write to NZ Bird Conference 2020, 31 Westmont St, Avonhead, Christchurch 8041.

The conference aims to continue the fine work of previous events in making this the premier New Zealand conference for the communication of new research findings about NZ birds and for providing opportunities for discussion and networking for professional ornithologists, students and others interested in birds and their habitats.

We will be presenting several keynote lectures and shorter talks on a wide range of topics, and look forward to bringing together researchers and all those interested to share their knowledge and findings to make this conference a dynamic, informative and memorable event. We look forward to hosting you in Christchurch on Queen's Birthday weekend 2020.

All events, the AGM and meals will be at the Commodore Hotel, 449 Memorial Avenue, Christchurch: [info@commodorehotel.co.nz](mailto:info@commodorehotel.co.nz)

### 29th May 2020(Friday)

6.00 pm - 7.30 pm Registration

### 30th May 2020(Saturday)

8.00 am - 9.00 am Registration  
9.00 am - 4.15 pm Scientific Day One  
4.30 pm Birds NZ Annual General Meeting  
7.30 pm Informal Dinner

### 31st May 2020 (Sunday)

8 am - 8.30 am Registration  
8.30 am - 5.30 pm Scientific Day Two  
7.30 pm Conference Dinner, awards and prizes

### 1st June 2020(Monday)

All day and part day Field Trips in the Canterbury Region.

### 2nd-6th June 2020(Tuesday/West Coast)

5 Days Post-Conference Atlassing Field Camp

## Welcome to new members

The Society warmly welcomes the following new members: Tom Batchelor (Far North); Kay Anand-Sobti, Kristina Andersen, Lana Austin, Treffery Barnett, Susan Cook, Carl Dowd, Janine Everall, Andrew Ferguson, Susan Heron, Donald Lawrie, Yen Li Loo, Jane Lovell, Sid Lovell, Trevor Lyons, Mandy McMullin, Philip Moll, Rob Morton, Enzo Reyes, Simon Runtig, Ellen Webb, Bridget Winstone, Bartek Wypych, Leeanne O'Brien, Iliel Olive (Auckland); Raven Cretney, Gareth Jones, Jesse Golden, John Neilsen, Paul Robbins, Kenna Stephenson (Waikato); Kurien Yohannan, Elaine Roberts (BoP/Volcanic Plateau); Malcolm Rutherford (Gisborne/Wairoa); Mark Danenhauer, Stephen Purdon (Taranaki); Sandra Hansen, Ron Jackson, Tony Johnson, Robin Shirkey (Hawkes Bay); Adele Bittner, Alberto De Rosa, Adam Gibson, Sean & Tarnia Hodges (Manawatu); Ellen Carlyon, Katelyn Fryer (Wellington); Nicola Reif (Nelson); Tony Cartland, Martin Daly, Winsome Marshall, BJ Patchett, Gretchen Perry, Des Smith (Canterbury); Michael Stuart, Martine Darrou (Otago); Mary-Ann TeWhenua (Southland).

## 2020 Membership Renewals

Subscriptions were due on 1st January 2020. If you have not yet paid yours please do so as soon as possible because *Birds New Zealand* depends on your subscription to continue our work to encourage and support the study and enjoyment of birds. Unpaid subscriptions will expire on 1st May 2020. You can renew online here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/join/>

## Benefits of membership

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

## Banding database upgrade

The final phase of the bird banding database upgrade is underway: building the online component. The system - dubbed "FALCON" - will enable banders to upload, validate, access, export, restrict, and report on data as well as collaborate on projects within the system and manage their banding stock. The public will be able to report sightings and view reports directly online. An Open Source arrangement will ensure that the design of the system will be freely available.

A Reference Group of twelve experts, future users and stakeholder representatives will provide input at key stages of the development of FALCON over the next six months. Birds New Zealand is represented primarily by John Stewart as Banding Liaison Officer; however, several other Reference Group members are also Birds New Zealand members. We look forward to showcasing the functionality of FALCON at the 2020 AGM in Christchurch.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW

## New Year Honours List 2020

The Society congratulates Gillian Vaughan on receiving a Queen's Service Medal for services to wildlife conservation and Dr George Mason on being made an Officer (ONZM) for services to conservation, philanthropy and the community in the New Year Honours 2020.

## Kiwibank NZ Local Hero of the Year Award

The Society congratulates Elizabeth (Biz) Bell on her Kiwibank NZ Local Hero of the Year Award (Blenheim) presented in September 2019. Biz works for Wildlife Management International and is Secretary of Birds New Zealand's Records Appraisal Committee.

## Donations

The Society warmly thanks the following for their generous donations: Bill Campbell, Michaela Crutchley, S & I Kelman, Sid Lovell, V J Nicholson, H G Smithers, Mary McEwen, W G Abbott, C John Ralph, M Galbraith, Sandy Winterton, Anita Spencer, Paul Asquith, P Palmer, Stuart Laurenson, Philip Munns, Bernard Card, Phil Hammond, David & Jan Roxburgh, Dan O'Halloran, Denise Poyner, Kevin Parker, Jillian Hanna, Ted Kirk, Peggy Mallalieu, William Cook, Lance Pickett, Kerry Oates, Gwyneth Norman, Colin Lunt, Stan Emmens, Bethany Gibbs, Geoff Harrow, BM & DM Stracy, Noel Knight, Bruce McKinlay, Sarah Atley, Ewen Fordyce, Jenny Ross, Michael North.



❑ Cover of the March 2020 *Notornis* special issue.

## Where is my *Notornis*?

If you are wondering why this issue of *Birds New Zealand* has been posted out separately from *Notornis*, it is because the March 2020 issue of *Notornis* is being published as a book that is too large for a standard envelope. This special issue on Auckland Islands ornithology is being published by Te Papa Press and distributed to *Birds New Zealand* members at no additional cost. We hope that you will receive your copy soon, if it has not reached you already. Copies of *Lost Gold* will also be available through book retailers.

## Nominations for Regional Representatives 2021

Each Regional Representative (RR) serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, although incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms. Nominations for each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040 or [secretary@osnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@osnz.org.nz)) on 31st July 2020. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a financial member of the Society. If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination from a given region, a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of that region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2021 year.

Lynne Anderson, Secretary, P.O. Box 834, Nelson  
[secretary@osnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@osnz.org.nz)

## Notice of Motion: Change to Society Subscriptions

In terms of Rule 6.1 of the Constitution, Notice of Motion is given to members that on behalf of Council I move a change in the rate of subscription of Society memberships.

Category	Ordinary NZ	Ordinary NZ with family member	Family Member NZ	Student NZ	Group	Corporate NZ	Life NZ
Present Rate	70.00	87.50	17.50	35.00	140.00	350.00	1380.00
Proposed Rate	78.00	97.00	19.50	39.00	200.00	497.00	2000.00
% Change	11	11	11	11	42	42	44

A background paper with an explanation has been published on the Society's website: <https://www.osnz.org.nz/Governance>

Bruce McKinlay, President

## Call for applications to the 2020 Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Applications to the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2020 open on 1st April 2020 and must be received by 15th June 2020. Applications will be accepted from individuals, students, researchers within universities, or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of New Zealand birds or their environment. The applicant has to be a current member of Birds New Zealand, living in New Zealand, and the project carried out in New Zealand or its outlying islands (e.g. Subantarctic Islands).

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

Preference will be given to applications that will:

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

Applications must be received by 15th June 2020 on the official application form provided on the Society's website (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/>) and submitted as a single PDF file. For queries, please contact Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: [eo@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@birdsnz.org.nz)

## Notice of Motion: Change to Constitution

In terms of Rule 17.1 of the Constitution, Notice of Motion is given to members that the Constitution of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. be amended at the Annual General Meeting of the Society to be held in Christchurch in 2020. On behalf of Council, I move the following **Notice of Motion** to change the Constitution of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. This change will update the Constitution in terms of the names of the Society.

### Updated Rule 1

It is moved that Rule 1 relating to the name of the Society be revoked and replaced with an amended Rule 1 that defines the legal name of the Society, recognises the popular name of Birds New Zealand, and defines a Te Reo Māori name of the Society.

### "1. NAME

*The legally registered name of the Society shall be The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Incorporated. The popular operating name for the Society shall be Birds New Zealand. The Te Reo Māori name of the Society shall be Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa."*

A background paper with an explanation has been published on the Society's website: <https://www.osnz.org.nz/Governance>

## Society Guidelines

The Society's guidelines on Conservation Policy have been amended and are available online along with new Banding Operating Procedures, Banding Project Applications, and Using Society Names guidelines at: [www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/manual/guidelines/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/manual/guidelines/)



▣ Tawaki passing through the tracking gate. Photo by Dr Thomas Mattern.



▣ Juvenile Hōiho or Yellow-eyed Penguin photo by Craig McKenzie/ NZ Birds Online.

## Birds NZ Research Fund 2018

The following four pages report on results from research projects that received funding from the 2018 funding round. The Birds New Zealand website has full details: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/>

### Automatic monitoring of Tawaki

Tawaki or Fiordland Crested Penguins breed in south-Westland, Fiordland and the Foveaux Strait region, making them hard to survey and count. For the past four years, the Tawaki Project has been studying Tawaki from Harrison Cove (Milford Sound/ Piopiotahi) where 40 resident penguins have been marked with Passive Integrated Transponders – probably over half the breeding population. As the project continues, the population will continue to be marked. This, combined with the fact that most penguins access the breeding colonies via a single access track, provided a unique opportunity to establish a new monitoring approach that may be more suitable to assess population trends going forward.

In February 2019, using funds from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018, we established an Automated Wildlife Monitoring System in Harrison Cove. This consists of a transponder gate through which the penguins pass on their commute between nest site and ocean. A set of light barriers activate an automatic transponder reader which identifies marked birds and records their movement direction and time in a locally deployed data logger. The system is powered by a solar panel and operates continuously throughout the year. Over time, the recorded data will provide information about survival rates of individual birds as well as recruitment of young birds into the local population. This will allow us to model population trends more accurately than any other ground-based survey.

Dr THOMAS MATTERN, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

### Distribution of *Coccidia* in kiwi

Bringing kiwi chicks into captivity until they are big enough to defend themselves against introduced mammals has played a major role in the success of kiwi population management. However, these captive facilities increase the density of young kiwi, leading to increased transmission of *Coccidia* parasites among them and potentially significant disease and mortality. The current diagnostic technique cannot reliably and definitively distinguish between species of *Coccidia*.

One of the main objectives of my research is to genetically characterise the coccidial parasites in kiwi so we can begin to determine A) which species of *Coccidia* cause acute disease and mortality, B) where they are located in New Zealand, and C) how effective the treatment is. With support from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018, I used a new sequencing technique to target a section of the mitochondrial gene of *Coccidia* in kiwi faecal samples. This technique yielded data that is currently being assembled and analysed to determine if we can use this gene to distinguish among coccidial species found in brown kiwi, Haast Tokoeka, Rowi, and Great Spotted Kiwi. Using this data, we plan to develop a rapid test to identify key species of *Coccidia* that cause severe disease and, thus, are crucial to monitor and manage.

SARAH COKER, MASSEY UNIVERSITY

## Post-fledging dispersal of mainland Hōiho

My aims for this study were to determine the initial dispersal and survival of juvenile Hōiho or Yellow-eyed Penguin after fledging, their spatial distribution in relation to industrial activities at sea, and to determine the performance of low-cost solar satellite tags in New Zealand waters, which could be fit for purpose for other seabird tracking studies. My research has focused on tracking juvenile mainland Hōiho from their natal areas in 2017 and 2018, which has provided critical baseline data for conservation management of this species.

With funds from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018, I purchased six new generation satellite tags (Seatag-tt) to deploy on fledgling Hōiho. Using the Argos satellite system, I tracked the movements of these six juveniles from coastal nesting sites in Otago in 2019. All six birds dispersed to the Canterbury Bight within 3-16 days of fledging. Transmissions were received for 40–106 days; one juvenile returned to Otago Peninsula within 45 days and I was able to retrieve its tag for future use. The data collected over three seasons is being used for marine spatial planning and risk assessments of the marine environment in hotspot foraging areas.

MELANIE J. YOUNG, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

## North Island Brown Kiwi

The mating system of North Island Brown Kiwi has previously been reported to be socially monogamous. However, in some populations several unrelated males and females have been found roosting and incubating together. Genetic studies have shown how most ratite species have variable and rather flexible mating systems that revolve around polygyny. The apparent sex role reversal in North Island Brown Kiwi (incubation by males alone; bigger more aggressive females) begs further investigation of their mating system.

By using the eggshells of hatched chicks from the Operation Nest Egg programme from the Maungataniwha forest from the breeding seasons 2010-2017, we developed a simple and cost-effective method for extracting DNA from eggshells and membrane remains. We used fragment analysis to compare eight different microsatellite markers from chicks hatched in radio-tagged males' nests. This means that we know which birds were incubating the eggs regardless of genetic paternity. By extracting DNA from the eggshells, egg maternity can be assessed as well as relatedness of the chicks.

DNA extraction from eggshells and membranes allowed me to assess the relatedness of the chicks using a kinship model. This determines the probability of two alleles being identical by descent. I calculated the kinship coefficient of the chicks and used the resulting kinship matrices to create dendrograms to depict the degree of genetic similarity based on the microsatellite markers of all the chicks obtained from one male's nest. The chicks showed varying degrees of relatedness, but all nest showed unrelated chicks, meaning that there are several potential parents for each egg, suggesting a non-monogamous mating system. Thanks to Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018 for supporting this research.

DAVID VIECO, MASSEY UNIVERSITY



▲ Erect-crested Penguin colony, Antipodes Island.  
Photo by Mark Fraser/NZ Birds Online.



▲ South Island Takahē photo by Glenda Rees.

## Database of NZ penguin colonies

I have completed a database listing the locations and, where known, the size of all recorded colonies of all six species of penguins breeding in New Zealand. I have searched appropriate publications, unpublished reports, websites, *eBird*, and circulated drafts to researchers and others who are likely to have additional data. The quality of the data available varies from sites with just a location name but no additional information, to sites where multiple counts have been made. At present there are 654 records for Little Penguins, 232 for Fiordland Crested Penguins, 510 for Yellow-eyed Penguins 141 for Eastern Rockhopper Penguins, 43 for Snares Crested Penguins and 90 for Erect-crested Penguins. This project was funded by the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018.

The database is now available on request to any bona fide researcher or anyone else surveying penguins or working in penguin conservation. To protect the penguins, it will not be open access. We ask that anyone using the database please contribute to it if they have any additional information. If you can use the database, you can request a copy from [data@penguin-conservation.nz](mailto:data@penguin-conservation.nz)

KERRY-JAYNE WILSON, WEST COAST PENGUIN TRUST

## Northland seabird surveys of predator-free islands

Between September and December 2018, we conducted surveys of several of Northland's predator-free islands: Tawhiti Rahi (Poor Knights Islands), Taranga (Hen Island), Motu Muka (Lady Alice Island), Marotere (Chickens Islands), and Mauitaha (Bream Islands).

On Tawhiti Rahi very few Fluttering Shearwaters/Pakahō (10) were heard over four nights during nocturnal surveys along the length of the island. Our findings suggest that Taranga and the Marotere/Chickens Islands (including Muriwhenua) are the stronghold for Pakahō in the outer Hauraki Gulf/East Northland. The apparent loss of the large numbers of Pakahō from Tawhiti Rahi is a mystery.

A huge colony of Fairy Prions/Titi Wainui was found on the north face of the ravine at the head of Rock Lily Inlet, and we found Titi Wainui cohabitating with Buller's Shearwaters/Rako and Common Diving Petrels/Kuaka. All these islands, together with the Poor Knights Islands, are also a stronghold for Little Shearwaters. The overall large population was a surprise as this species is not commonly seen foraging in the Hauraki Gulf.

Many Little Penguins/Kororā were observed landing on Lady Alice Island after dusk. Kororā were also seen coming ashore on Muriwhenua Island and Tawhiti Rahi. Mauitaha (Bream Islands) appears to have a large population of Kororā.

Grey-faced Petrels/Oi were recorded on all islands, with substantial populations on Lady Alice Island and Taranga, however, remarkably uncommon on the Poor Knights Islands. A single Sooty Shearwater/Titi was seen over Muriwhenua, with Short-tailed Shearwaters, and a single Black Noddy seen feeding near Tara Rocks and Whatupuke (Marotere/Chickens Islands). Funding from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018 and Department of Conservation allowed us to conduct these surveys.

CHRIS GASKIN, NORTHERN NZ SEABIRD TRUST

## Tracking Takahē in Kahurangi National Park

In March 2018 the first mainland reintroduction of Takahē was carried out in the Gouland Downs, Kahurangi National Park, by the Department of Conservation. My project studies this newly established population from the time and point of release in order to provide the best possible knowledge base for the continued successful management of the species, both in Kahurangi National Park and in future reintroduction sites. Sixteen of the 30 released birds were fitted with PinPoint 120 satellite tags (SirTrack Ltd). An additional 15 PinPoint 240 satellite tags were purchased with the aid of the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018, for rolling deployment, enabling continued monitoring of the reintroduced population.

Data from the first year of GPS monitoring show that the released birds have established into settled home ranges close to their release sites, confirming the suitability of the area for Takahē. In addition, two chicks were fledged in the Gouland Downs in the 2018-19 breeding season, the first wild birds to be fledged on the mainland outside of Fiordland in over a century. Health data collected during the tag retrieval/deployment trips in April and July 2019 also indicate that the birds are in good condition following the tussock mast event last summer, with birds maintaining healthy weights of 2.16–3.25 kg. So, at 15 months following the first release of birds into the Gouland Downs all signs are positive.

JAMES HUNTER, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, PhD



▲ Fairy Prion/Titi Wainui on Tawhiti Rahi. Photo by Edin Whitehead.



▲ Juvenile Tui feeding on flax nectar. Photo by Michael Szabo.

## Tūi pollination of flax

Tūi play a critical role in cross pollination of native Flax, which produces copious amounts of nectar and is widespread in New Zealand. The Tūi-Flax partnership is an ideal system to question the importance of nectar microbes in exacerbating or mitigating the impact of environmental change on the plant-pollinator relationship. First, we identified the microbial signatures of Tūi pollination to Flax in urban and rural sites. We then compared diversity of these microbial signatures and found that bacterial species richness and variability were similar across samples from urban and rural settings. In contrast, we found that fungal species richness and variability were higher in urban compared to rural settings. We are continuing to analyse the data to determine if specific microbial taxa are primarily associated with Tūi and Flax in urban versus rural settings. Overall, our data will ascertain whether the Tūi-Flax relationship has a characteristic microbiome and whether this microbiome is altered due to anthropogenic disturbances such as urbanisation. Together, these outcomes allow for deeper understanding of how nectar microbes and land-use type may jointly affect pollinator foraging behaviour. This project received funds from the 2018 Birds New Zealand Research Fund.

MARION DONALD & MANPREET DHAMI

## New 24-hour NZ birding record

Russell Cannings, Scott Brooks, Dave Howes and Harry Boorman set a new 24-hour non-stop birdwatching record for New Zealand over the weekend of 30th November and 1st December 2019. They started at sea off the Hen and Chickens Islands and Mokohinau Islands, then made landfall at Mangawhai and drove north to Te Arai, Waipu and Ruakaka. From there they drove south to Kawakawa Bay, Whangamarino, Maungatautari and Pureora, before turning back north to Piako, Miranda and Kidd's Shellbank on Manukau Harbour. They recorded a total checklist of 114 species, including a very rare sighting of a South Polar Skua photographed while at sea, and fundraised more than \$1,000 from individual sponsors for the NZ Fairy Tern Trust.



▲ Bellbird feeding on White Rata Vine flowers at Otari-Wilton's Bush Reserve, Wellington. Photo by Michael Szabo.

## The capacity of restored urban forests to support native birds

We monitored birds at 43 sites in Hamilton and New Plymouth. Using qualitative interviews, we explored Hamilton residents' perceptions and experiences of urban nature in parks and gardens. Results of the qualitative study identified a gap between what residents claim to value and their actions affecting native biodiversity, suggesting we cannot currently rely on private gardens to provide adequate resources for native birds. This research highlights, however, the unique contribution that native forest parks make to human wellbeing and sense of place. Ecological restoration in cities therefore has great potential to enrich human lives.

Results of the ecological study demonstrate that urban forest restoration increases native bird species richness and diversity over time and transforms the bird community from being dominated by introduced granivores and generalists, to one dominated by native forest birds. This research indicates, moreover, that lack of habitat is an important factor limiting native forest birds in New Zealand's North Island cities. Current restoration efforts were found to benefit widespread, common native forest birds, but greater investments in predator control or eradication will be needed to re-create forests capable of supporting bird species of conservation concern. I am grateful for the generous support of Birds New Zealand.

ELIZABETH ELLIOT NOE, UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

## Influence of sugar-water feeders on native birds in urban gardens

From November 2018–August 2019 I conducted field work in 16 volunteer gardens with existing sugar-water feeders. Eight were in Auckland and eight in Dunedin. I collected two main blocks of data: (1) the direct observations of feeding and aggressive behaviour; and (2) health and body condition data obtained via mist-netting. For the second set of data I captured Tūi, Bellbirds and Silvereyes and sampled them for *Chlamydia*, *Salmonella*, Avian Pox, ecto- and endoparasites.

In Dunedin, the proportion of birds captured that were native target species was twice as high as for Auckland. Mean sugar-water visit numbers per feeder, as well as number of antagonistic displays, were also higher in Dunedin compared with Auckland, and in winter compared to summer. Overall body condition of visiting birds was good, though parasite load in Auckland was somewhat higher.

The next step is to undertake additional local mist-netting and tagging sessions to ensure a high proportion of visiting birds are tagged, and to conduct mist-netting sessions for pathogen and disease sampling towards the end of 2019. The experiment will then continue in 2020 after summer break. Thanks to the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018 for supporting my research.

DARIA ERASTOVA, SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND





▣ Tui bill measurement. Photo Barbara Tomotani.



## Feeding ecology of NZ land birds

We are investigating 11 NZ endemic bird species, divided in three groups of sister taxa: (1) *Nestoridae* + *Strigopsidae* (Kakapo, Kea, and Kaka); (2) *Callaeidae* + *Notiomystidae* (Hihi, North and South Island Kokako, North and South Island Saddleback, and Huia); (3) *Meliphagidae* (Tui and Bellbird). We created two long-term datasets across different lineages of land-birds using: (1) stable isotope signatures of nitrogen and carbon of feathers; and (2) morphology, including classical measurements and geometric morphometrics, with a particular focus on the bill shape (known to undergo rapid change in natural populations). These represent distinct aspects related to feeding ecology and trophic niches.

These two datasets were built using specimens from museum collections worldwide, spanning a period from the 1780s to the present and collected in a variety of locations in NZ. From those, we collected samples of 450 specimens, measured 760 and obtained photographs of the bills of over 900 birds deposited in collections all over the world.

Our initial analysis indicates that there have been changes in diet and potentially feeding niche of some species, as well as changes in bill morphology. But it is still early to draw firm conclusions. Because of that, we are now investigating whether these changes are related to one another and what (other) factors might be in play, for example, spatial variation. We hope to compile the results for publication and we expect them to have implications for current conservation programmes of these species. Thanks to the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2018 for funding this research.

BARBARA TOMOTANI, MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA

## Shore Plovers back on Mana Island

Eighteen critically endangered NZ Shore Plover or Tūturuatu have been released on pest-free Mana Island by the Department of Conservation (DOC). The young birds recently fledged in captivity. They were placed in a temporary aviary on the island in February for ten days to acclimatise before being released into the wild. With a total population of just 250 individuals, all on pest-free islands or in captive breeding facilities, this translocation is a critical step for ensuring the future of the species.

"The aim is to establish a new population that will add to the size and security of the Shore Plover population, as well as being a step towards the Shore Plover Recovery Group's goal of having five self-sustaining island populations," says Shore Plover Recovery Group Leader Dave Houston. "Mana will become the fourth secure population along with Rangitira, Waikawa and Motutapu Islands. New populations are essential for the species to continue to grow. Shore Plovers are highly susceptible to predation, so a predator-free island is currently our only option for wild populations."

At least one more translocation of captive bred birds is planned, which will include juvenile birds. A previous translocation of Shore Plovers to Mana Island in 2007 ended when a rat incursion decimated the population there. "Prior to this the Shore Plovers had bred successfully there and were on the way to establishing a new population on the island," says Mana Island DOC Ranger Nick Fisenzidis. "Pest monitoring is conducted regularly using various methods, from traps on the ground to conservation dogs."

## Big funding boost for community conservation projects in Northland and Chatham Islands

Community conservation projects in Northland that help protect North Island Kiwi, North Island Kōkako and other forest species will benefit from an almost \$800,000 funding boost from the Government announced by Minister of Conservation Eugenie Sage (2nd in photo above) at an event in Puketi Forest in February also attended by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (4th), Green Party Co-leader Marama Davidson MP (8th), Labour MP Willow-Jean Prime (3rd), and members of the Puketi Forest Trust.

The funding from the Department of Conservation's Community Conservation Fund will go to three community projects, including the Puketi Forest Trust, to support one of NZ's most diverse ecosystems where North Island Brown Kiwi and North Island Kōkako live. Funds will help the Trust expand its work on existing and new trap and bait station lines, replace infrastructure, and expand monitoring of the North Island Kōkako population before the next breeding season.

Funds will also support the Kaitiaki Kiwi project to expand the trapping network on public conservation land and increase the amount of land under management to keep Stoats and feral Cats at low levels and increase North Island Brown Kiwi recruitment in Waipoua Forest and surrounding areas, said Eugenie Sage.

Te Runanga o Taumarere ki Rakaumangamanga (on behalf of Russell Forest Rōpu) will also receive funds for trapping networks following a successful aerial 1080 operation in 2018.

"These projects are a great example of communities working together with government to give nature a much needed helping hand to help restore the dawn chorus", said the minister.

Community conservation projects in the Chatham Islands that help protect Chatham Island Tōiko, Chatham Island Pigeon (Parea) and Chatham Island Tui will also receive a \$111,695 funding boost, announced Minister of Conservation Eugenie Sage at an event in the Chatham Islands.

"Rēkohu/Wharekauri/the Chatham Islands are home to 20% of NZ's threatened bird species. The islands have the highest level of endemism of any of NZ's biogeographic regions with many species unique to the Chathams," she said.

The new funding will support four community-driven projects, which will help protect threatened native birds by restoring habitat and enhancing pest control efforts. "These rare species include the Parea (Chatham island pigeon), Chatham Island tui, threatened seabirds such as Chatham Island Tōiko which are unique to Rēkohu/Wharekauri/the Chatham Islands," she said. "The enthusiasm of the people driving these projects is impressive. I look forward to seeing what these groups achieve for conservation and for their home."

The funded projects will protect forest remnants, revegetate and restore ecosystems, and create nature corridors that will allow native species to move across the island and repopulate new areas. One project, an initiative of the Hokotehi Mori Trust, includes trials on trap and lure technology to target rats, one of the focus species of *Predator Free 2050* and a major problem on the Chatham Islands.



▣ Marsh Crake/Mike Ashbee

## Cryptic Critters

Photographs by Mike Ashbee and Imogen Warren Words by Michael Szabo

Most of our wetland bird species have evolved cryptic camouflage to help them hide from predators. The colours and markings of their plumage break up their outlines and help them blend into their wetland habitats, which also makes them notoriously tricky to see!

The colours of their plumage are their first line of defence. Muted shades of brown, buff and grey mixed with white and black mean they can more easily blend into their surroundings. The Marsh Crake, for example, has excellent colours for its wetland habitats. A small rail about half the size of a Blackbird, it has rich chestnut-brown upperparts, wings and crown with small black and white flecks and streaks, a pale greenish bill and long yellowish-olive legs, and a grey face and underparts with black and white barring on the flanks.

One of our most secretive bird species, its cryptic plumage helps it blend into a wide variety of inland and coastal wetland types, particularly sedge and raupo swamps, but also estuarine reed beds, wet pastures and willow-woodlands.

A bird's markings can also help break up its outline to make it more difficult to see. Spots, stripes, streaks, mottling and other patterns can be very effective camouflage in wetland habitats. The heavily mottled and streaked plumage of the Fernbird is perfect for its dense wetland habitats. This small, long-tailed songbird is predominantly streaked brown above and pale below, with loosely-barbed plain brown tail feathers that give it a distinctive tattered appearance, a pointed greyish-black bill and long pale pinkish-red legs.

Fernbirds on the mainland have a chestnut cap and prominent pale supercilium. They inhabit dense vegetation throughout most of New Zealand, from dry shrubland and tussock-covered frost flats to fern scrub and reedbeds in saltmarshes.

In addition to their physical characteristics, many wetland bird species have also developed behaviours that help make them harder to see. Marsh Crake and Fernbird creep quietly around in their raupo and sedge habitats, while the Australasian Bittern stalks its aquatic prey in slow-motion and sometimes extends its striped neck with its bill pointing skyward and 'freezes' to resemble raupo reed stems.

A large and stocky heron species, the Australasian Bittern or Matuku has a thick neck, heavy yellowish bill and relatively short yellow legs, and beige and buff plumage with dark brown streaking and mottling. Little wonder then that this is an extremely cryptic species that is rarely seen.

Its plumage and behaviour allow it to blend into most wetland environments, while maintaining good surveillance of its surroundings. If you continue to approach a bittern while in its 'freeze' stance, it will eventually fly away, or occasionally it will flatten itself to the ground, relying on its plumage to blend into the background.

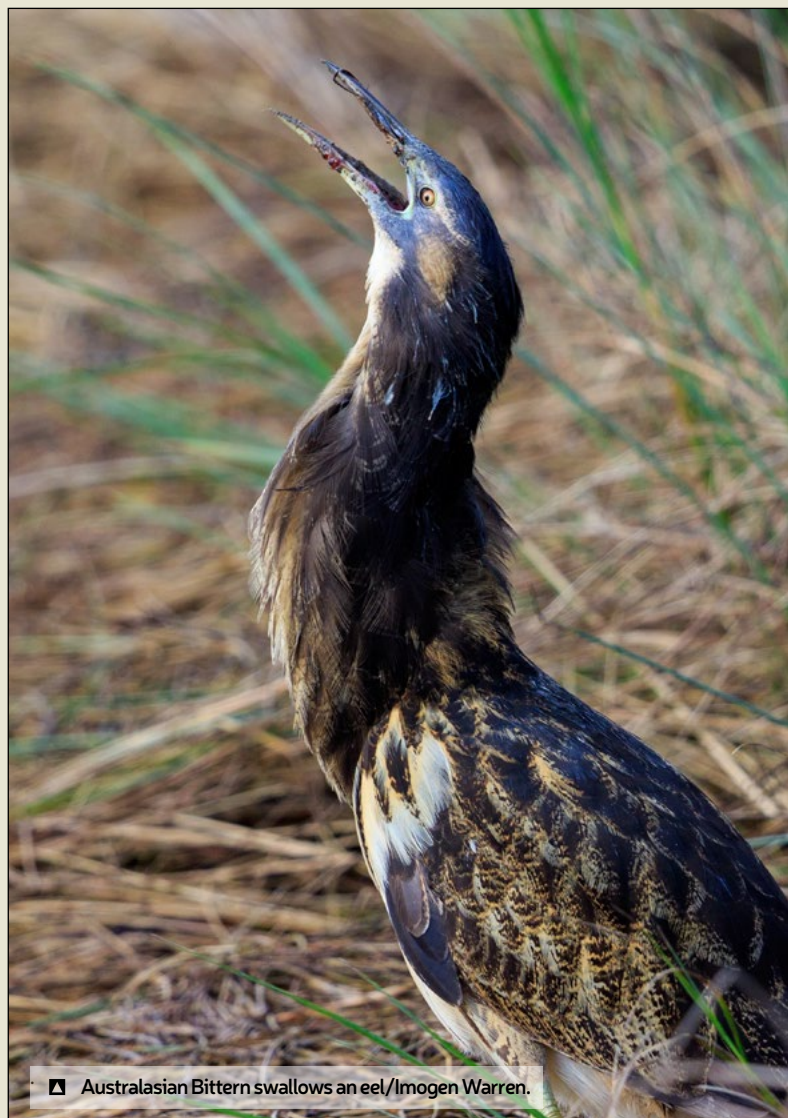
So, while these three wetland species are some of our most cryptic critters, once you know their camouflaged plumages, markings and habits you will be better equipped to find them – just don't expect to see them every time you go looking for them!



▲ Fernbird on fern/Mike Ashbee



▲ Australasian Bittern 'sky-pointing'/Imogen Warren.



▲ Australasian Bittern swallows an eel/Imogen Warren.



■ Buff-breasted Sandpiper (Photo by Adam Colley) and White-throated Needletail (Photo by Steve Wood) are both rare bird species in New Zealand so they would qualify as 'flagged' records on *eBird* and be sent to a reviewer for evaluation.

## NZ Bird Atlas data validation process

The New Zealand Bird Atlas is closing in on its first complete year of data collection, with the first Autumn recording period just about to begin. To date we have amassed over 35,000 checklists from over 570 participants; and 65% of the 3,232 atlas squares now contain data!

Our colleagues at Cornell University in the USA inform us that this is about three times the "normal" volume of *eBird* usage in New Zealand. So, congratulations everyone, you have really taken up the Atlas challenge and are getting out there and covering the country - please keep up the great work!

The effort map is starting to really light up across the country, with checklists from as far north as The Three Kings Islands and as far south as The Antipodes Islands. Summer has seen some fantastic checklists submitted from Fiordland, and the Chatham Islands, with many new squares in between having been surveyed for the first time. As the Atlas project beds in, the Atlas team have been fielding a number of questions regarding the data validation process of *eBird*, and how we can be assured that quality data is being submitted to *eBird* and therefore the Atlas.

Data quality in both the Atlas and *eBird* is critically important. To make sure it is of the best quality, *eBird*'s data quality process ensures that your data is useful for the millions of people that use *eBird*'s resources each year. From automated data filters to a global team of bird experts, *eBird*'s data quality approach ensures that every single record gets evaluated. This focus on maintaining high data quality is essential in making *eBird* one of the most valuable global datasets on bird distribution and abundance.

The first step in the review process is *eBird*'s automated filters, which are the foundation of the *eBird* review process. They provide a first check on each of the species you list, the count, location, and date of every observation that you submitted to *eBird*. Any report that exceeds the expected species, and/or totals for a given species at a location on a given date is 'flagged' for review and then requires further documentation.

Most of us will have encountered a 'flagged' record when entering a checklist. When you see a record flagged on your checklist, you simply need to provide further information on your sighting. This can be comments on plumage, location and behaviour, as well as photos, audio or video that you captured. Records are flagged for one of the following reasons:

1. **Rarity**—a species that is rare or unusual in the region;

2. **Out of season**—a species is reported outside its normal date range in a region;
3. **High count**—species count exceeds what one might expect to find in a typical day's birding in the region on a particular date.

After records are flagged, they are collated into a database where an *eBird* reviewer can evaluate them for validity. *eBird* reviewers are birding experts who volunteer their time to manage the filters and review records. Reviewers are selected due to their bird expertise, *eBird* knowledge, and excitement to share both of those things with others. It is very important to remember that reviewers are volunteers, and we are incredibly grateful for the hard work they do. The New Zealand Bird Atlas and *eBird* would not exist without this team!

Reviewers evaluate each record and determine whether it has enough supporting information to verify that report in the public dataset ('Accepted'—will appear throughout *eBird*), or whether there isn't enough support ('Unconfirmed'—only appears on the list totals of the birder who reported it).

If the sighting is already documented with notes or media (photos, video, audio), this can just take a few seconds per record. If it's a more unusual record, there will be a follow-up note asking the observer for more details. Highly unusual records (such as first records for NZ) will also require acceptance by the Records Appraisal Committee <https://www.osnz.org.nz/rareBirds.htm> before they are accepted.

Many of us will have had a reviewer reach out about one of your sightings. Please remember that this person is volunteering their time to help you and ensure that both the Atlas and *eBird*'s database of bird records is as accurate as possible. This isn't singling you out personally: it's just a request for more information on records that are unusual for that location and date. It is this process which ensures the data used in the New Zealand Bird Atlas is of the highest quality.

The NZ Bird Atlas team will be providing an update on the first year of the project at the 2020 NZ Bird Conference and AGM in June in Christchurch. We are looking forward to discussing the project with members over the weekend. Please also take note of the post-conference Atlas Blitz field trip to the West Coast and register your interest with the conference organisers if you think you might be interested in helping to Atlas this unique part of the country.

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

## Pacific Golden Plovers tracked to Alaska and back



Pacific Golden Plover is the fourth most numerous Arctic breeding species to occur in New Zealand, but until 2019 very little was known about the New Zealand population. Where do they breed – Alaska or Siberia? What is their migration strategy? Where do they stop to refuel during migration? The species is widely dispersed throughout the Pacific: do New Zealand birds 'island hop' during migration?

There is though, one thing that we did know about them: according to Birds New Zealand census data, their numbers in New Zealand have fallen by 60% since the early 1990s.

Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists Trust (PMNT) set about finding some answers to these questions. They were joined by a team from Brigham Young University Hawai'i, and Montana State University in the USA, led by Wally Johnson – the world authority on this species. The aim was to try to catch birds and deploy GPS pinpoint trackers. We knew that these exceedingly shy birds would not be easy to catch, but soon learned just how difficult it would be.

PMNT raised \$22,000, including \$4,600 from the Birds New Zealand Projects Assistance Fund to purchase ten trackers. However, the target of ten birds proved to be out of reach. After two weeks of effort, long days with cannon nets, and mist-netting through the night, just three birds were caught. Each was colour banded and fitted with a solar-powered GPS tracker held in place by leg harness. To conserve battery life the trackers were programmed to report periodically. To pinpoint a bird's position the tracking system requires three good GPS fixes before it sends a report, and an Argos satellite then needs to be in good position to receive the data.

A sample size of three for a project such as this is woefully thin, but we were to be fortunate in that all three devices functioned very well over the following few months. One bird, Amanda, departed on 8 April 2019 and landed in Honshu, Japan, followed a few days later by a second bird, JoJo. Both made non-stop flights of nearly 10,000 kilometres in eight days, a similar pattern to that of Bar-tailed Godwits migrating north from New Zealand.

By late May 2019 both birds were on the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska, confirming that at least some Pacific Golden Plovers in New Zealand are breeding east of the Bering Sea. The third bird, Jim, departed New Zealand on 23 April 2019 and followed a completely different route – stopping on Guam and Okinawa before flying up the Yellow Sea and over northern China and Eastern Russia, eventually arriving in northern Alaska on 5 July 2019.

By September JoJo was the only bird still reporting and is thought to have departed Alaska soon after 14 September. It reached Teraina in Kiribati on 22 September, remaining there until 25 October. By 30 October it was on Tongatapu where it remains at time of writing. A wide network of contacts throughout the Pacific were alerted through various channels, including social media to look out for the other two birds. Similarly, people in New Zealand are being asked to look at any Pacific Golden Plovers for colour bands.

Despite only being able to deploy three trackers, the project has been a great success so far. A second attempt at catching birds was made in November to deploy more trackers. This resulted in three more birds being tagged: Kikorangi (blue) Tea (white) and Whero (red). To conserve battery power their satellite tags won't report often until migration time draws nearer.

KEITH WOODLEY, PUKOROKORO MIRANDA SHOREBIRD CENTRE & BIRDS NEW ZEALAND COUNCILLOR

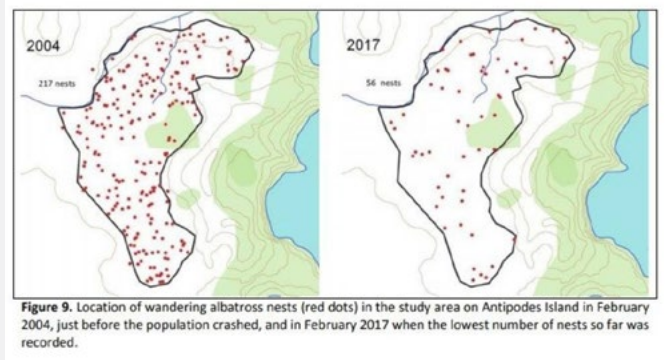


Figure 9. Location of wandering albatross nests (red dots) in the study area on Antipodes Island in February 2004, just before the population crashed, and in February 2017 when the lowest number of nests so far was recorded.

## Antipodean Albatross critically endangered

High death rates and the slow breeding rate of the Antipodean Albatross mean that the species' current rate of survival is "unsustainable", according to a new report published by the Department of Conservation in January. The high death rate is likely to be linked to the number of birds that get caught on hooks set by longline fishing vessels and then drown.

The report pointed to the tracking of 16 birds last year, two of which were killed before their return to land. One died as a result of fishing activity and the other crossed paths with a vessel at the time the bird's satellite connection was lost.

The report said females had declined at a faster rate than males which had led to a sex imbalance since 2005. Now there are more than two adult males for every adult female, with the population of breeding females now 42% of its 2004 level. The number of pairs of Antipodean Albatross nesting is now 65% of what it was in 1994.

The report noted problems ensuring their tracking devices were functional and remained attached to the birds, so further tracking was needed to understand the "scale of interaction between birds and fishing fleets". However, the report concluded initial satellite tracking results suggested bird deaths linked to fisheries 'bycatch' was a consistent explanation for the low survival rate of the female albatross.

The Government is currently reviewing its National Plan of Action for Seabirds after a period of public submissions that closed in late January.

## Drones flown over Muriwai gannet colony

In early December drones were seen being flown over Muriwai gannet colony, much to the alarm of birdwatchers and conservationists. Permits are needed to fly drones on conservation land and in Auckland's regional

parks, but at least some of those flying the drones claimed not to know the rules. This is a major headache for the birds and the Department of Conservation, which says drones can cause serious harm to some of the country's most precious wildlife. Local bird photographer Simon Runting was there on 3rd December and reported: "More issues last night at the gannet colony at Muriwai. A drone being flown all around the colony setting plenty of birds in the air. Was up for about ten minutes and had the whole tern colony in flight for quite a while. I couldn't directly see the terns' nests from where I was but did see four gulls fly off as the terns returned. I did track the operators down who claimed to not know that they were banned but it was a top-level drone and there are plenty of signs."



■ A drone flies close to White-fronted Terns at Muriwai gannet colony. Photo by Simon Runting/Instagram @simonbirdphotography



▣ Gull-billed Tern nest with eggs, Awaroa Bay.



▣ Gull-billed Tern on eggs at Awaroa Bay, and pair close to the nest. All photos by Glenda Rees/NZ Birds Online.

## Changes to Student Awards

A set of awards have been established that provide cash grants as an incentive for students and new Authors to study birds and share the results of their work. A new "Fledgling Fund" will provide cash grants to encourage student members to actively participate in NZ Bird Conferences and Birds New Zealand AGMs. Voluntary contributions to the fund can be made by members who register for each NZ Bird Conference. Each grant made from the Fledgling Fund will cover the conference registration fee and attending the conference dinner. Additionally, Council has been seeking to improve the attractiveness of publishing in *Notornis* and so has established the following:

- A "New Author Award" is offered each year for the best *Notornis* publication where the sole or lead author has not previously published in *Notornis* or in any other scientific journal. This award is \$300.
- A "Notornis Student Award" is offered for the best *Notornis* publication where a student or recent graduate is the sole or lead author. This award is \$500.

Similarly, Council has attempted to increase the profile of students presenting at the Annual Conference by establishing:

- An award of \$100 for the "best oral presentation by a student member of Birds New Zealand at the annual New Zealand Bird Conference". Talks will be assessed on their content, on why the work was done, clarity of presentation, and keeping to time!
- An award of \$100 is offered for the "best poster by a student member of Birds New Zealand at the annual New Zealand Bird Conference". Posters will be assessed on content, context and clarity of presentation.
- Best Poster Award "People's Choice": A prize of a bottle of wine or box of chocolates is offered for the best poster at the annual conference. The winning poster will be chosen by all members attending the conference.
- Birds New Zealand also offers travel grants to assist postgraduate research students from NZ to present their findings at the biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference, hosted by Birds Australia and Birds New Zealand. Two travel grants are offered every two years. This is \$500 if the AOC is held in NZ, or \$1,000 if held in Australia.

Recipients are expected to write a short report for Birds New Zealand and/or submit an article to *Notornis*, be a Birds New Zealand member, and for student awards be postgraduate students. Full details appear in an amended chapter of the Society Manual, 'Guidelines for Awards', available online at:

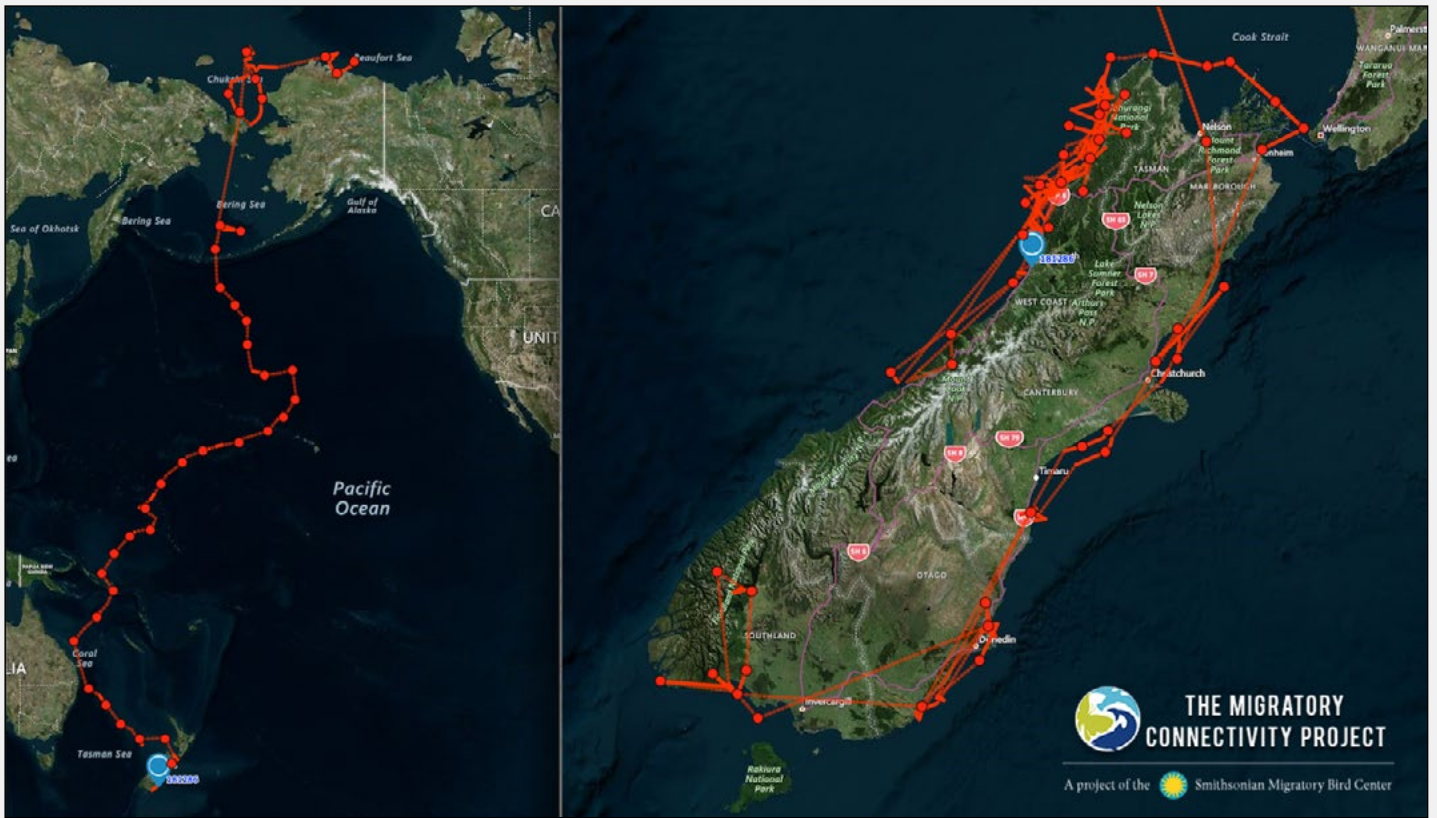
[www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/manual/guidelines/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/manual/guidelines/)



## First record of Gull-billed Tern breeding attempt in NZ

On 21st December 2019 Southland Birds New Zealand member Glenda Rees discovered the first Gull-billed Tern nest with eggs in New Zealand: "Yesterday I discovered the pair of Gull-billed Terns that have frequented Awarua Bay [Southland] intermittently over the past three years or so, now have a nest with three eggs in it. They are on the edge of a small White-fronted Tern colony which is adjacent to a huge Southern Black-backed Gull colony."

Glenda revisited the Gull-billed Tern nest site in Awarua Bay two weeks later only to find that the nest was empty: "A fortnight following my previous visit I finally managed to return today. It was the first time I encountered people fishing off the end of the spit. A lot of the vegetation appeared flattened and there were tyre tracks close to where the nest was and the nest was empty. The only birds still present were Southern Black-backed Gulls and the pair of Caspian Terns. Close to the bridge, about a kilometre west of where the nest was, one Gull-billed Tern momentarily hovered above me as I walked back along the water's edge, then it disappeared across the other side of the spit."



▲ These two maps show the migration of an Arctic Skua from Arctic Alaska to New Zealand (Sept-Nov 2019), and its subsequent movements within New Zealand (Nov-present). Courtesy of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre.

## Arctic Skua migration tracking

Autumn-Lynn Harrison, a Research Ecologist at the US Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre, has tracked the migration of a dark morph Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) from Arctic Alaska to New Zealand's South Island (1st Sept-13th Nov, 2019), and its subsequent movements within New Zealand (13th Nov-present). She used a 5g solar satellite tag made by Microwave Telemetry. The tracked bird does not have colour bands or streamers for identification, just a metal band (always on right lower leg). An antenna sticks up from above the tail at a 45-degree angle. This research is part of the Smithsonian Migratory Connectivity Project ([www.migratoryconnectivityproject.org](http://www.migratoryconnectivityproject.org)). Since 2016, Autumn-Lynn and collaborators have tracked the migrations of three Pomarine Skuas, six Arctic Skuas, and 15 Long-tailed Skuas in the Pacific Ocean from multiple breeding locations in Alaska. A tracked Long-tailed Skua from Nome, Alaska arrived near Dunedin on 3rd February 2020 after visiting the Great Australian Bight throughout January. Autumn-Lynn posts updates on Twitter @needmarine and can be contacted via email at: [HarrisonAL@si.edu](mailto:HarrisonAL@si.edu)

## NZ Fairy Tern breeding success

One of New Zealand's rarest and most threatened bird species, the Tara-iti or New Zealand Fairy Tern has had a successful summer breeding season according to the Department of Conservation (DOC), with seven chicks expected to fledge. With fewer than 40 adult birds left, the species is listed as critically endangered and despite intensive management has teetered on the brink of extinction since the 1970s.

"Seven chicks is a great season – last year (2018-2019 season) we only had two chicks fledge, so this is a big improvement, but more of what we would hope to call an average season," says DOC Biodiversity Ranger Ayla Wiles. "The settled weather during the season resulted in fewer nest losses than last season and overall the birds finished laying earlier. The major challenges this year have been the loss of at least one of the parents of two chicks at Te Arai and the subsequent loss of one of those chicks; the loss of a fertile egg to a rat at Waipu, and the desertion of a chick by its parents half way through the dependency period at Mangawhai."

"We also had higher incidences of compliance issues causing disturbance to the birds. Common problems were dogs in DOC-administered reserves and wildlife refuges and Auckland Council land where dogs are not allowed by law, horses in areas they should not be, vehicles, drones, low-flying paragliders, jet skis, fizza boats, and aircraft causing disturbance, as well as small fires threatening the nest sites," says Ayla Wiles.

▲ Autumn-Lynn Harrison with Arctic Skua.



▲ New Tara Iti chick photo by Darren Markin.



**NORTHLAND**

Several members took part in the 8-14/2 godwit census around Whangarei Harbour. At Ruakaka, 3,038 Bar-tailed Godwits and 380 Red Knots were recorded on 14/2. Those at Marsden Bay on 15/2 were surprised to see large flocks of Red Knots instead of the expected godwits flying inshore seeking a more sheltered roost at high tide; 800 Red Knots were recorded. Here in Northland we are very aware of possible changes to the Whangarei Harbour habitat if new plans for the expansion of the port area go ahead and how it could affect shorebird populations. - ANNE McCracken

**AUCKLAND**

The hot dry summer has made life difficult for many birds. A North Island Brown Kiwi was seen foraging at midday during our annual members' picnic at Tawharanui Regional Park on 18/2 and was likely finding it difficult to gather enough prey from the dry soil in the forest. The picnic was well-attended with 26 participants and a total of 44 species seen, including Pateke, Kaka, Banded Rail, NZ Dotterel, Bellbird and 2 Laughing Kookaburra.

The hot summer likely helped to bring in a number of subtropical visitors, including a Black Noddy at Milford Beach seen by Brian Kuan on 16/1 and a Brown Booby at Muriwai gannet colony over a 3-week period in January (see cover image). A Terek Sandpiper was seen at Island Road in Mangere by Noel Ward on 19/1, and a Common Sandpiper at Omaha Spit by Gwenda Pulham on 19/10. Although common overseas, Common Sandpiper is a rare vagrant to NZ. They favour a wide range of freshwater and brackish wetland habitats, so may perhaps go relatively unnoticed?

Our most recent Muriwai Beach patrol on 7/12 yielded 17 birds of 12 species, including a White-headed Petrel, an Antarctic Fulmar and a White-faced Storm Petrel. Two White-capped Albatross were found 10-metres apart. Both had the outer third of a wing missing from the carpal joint. These fatal amputations likely resulted from injuries from trawler cables or another type of fishing vessel.

The Ambury Park Guided Walk on 15/12 recorded 35 Ruddy Turnstones, 2 Whimbrel, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler and circa 50 Black-billed Gulls. Of interest was the "re-location" of a Red-billed Gull colony from a site close to the America's Cup Base at Wynyard Point to a less disturbed site at Hamer Street near Silo Park. A seawall was set aside for the birds' use. Over 400 birds were present there in November. Breeding was successful; a great outcome both for the gulls and the city. - IAN McLEAN

**WAIKATO**

We held a special event in November in memory of local members John and Stella Rowe who were stalwarts of the Waikato Branch for over 40 years. During that time, they contributed to hundreds of national census reports and made major contributions to the monitoring of local sites and beach patrols.

Our November speaker was Cheridan Mather who talked about the captive breeding of Kaka and Whio for release. A Raglan beach census recorded 680 Bar-tailed Godwits and

a Royal Spoonbill was recorded at Hamilton Lake. A highlight at Maungatautari has been the increased numbers of Hihi seen during this year's survey. There was also news that Rifleman will be introduced there this year. The NZ Dotterels on Onemana Beach produced 15 chicks this season. This number was bigger than the combined totals for the past 4 years. However, only 4 survived to fledge. One nest is yet to hatch. - KEN WEDGEWOOD

**BAY OF PLENTY/VOLCANIC PLATEAU**

Members were out counting in November for the BOP Regional Council/Western Bay District council-led Australasian Bittern surveys. The Maketu evenings garnered some fresh Spotless Crake and Fernbird records, along with small numbers of the target species.

November's shorebird census recorded over 700 Bar-tailed Godwits at 1 of the main roosts on Matakana Island. Hopefully we can repeat this next week during the national count. We had a count of over 130 White-fronted Terns on the second Matakana Island roost site, Tahunamanu. These birds raised chicks on bridge pilings less than 3-metres from the road at Hairini, and within a few metres of diners at the Harbourside Restaurant.

Fifteen chicks were banded as part of the Grey-faced Petrel Project on Mauao. Members also helped out with Little Penguin monitoring nights that the Western Bay Wildlife Trust undertake. Our increasingly pressured wildlife had to endure another shipwreck this week, when a charter fishing vessel ploughed into the base of Mauao. Some of the diesel fuel leaked into the ocean but the wreck itself was removed without too much carnage. - PAUL CUMING

**TARANAKI**

November's field trip along the Rerekapa Track recorded 27 species, including NI Robin, Whitehead, NZ Falcon, Tui and a White-faced Heron. The Messengers visited Barrett Lagoon in late November and saw what they thought was a pair of Pied Shag with a nest and 2 juveniles; I checked it out and verified the ID. Barry Hartley sees them regularly around the Awakino Estuary but this is believed to be the first regional record of nesting and offspring. Another regional first was an Australian Coot seen on Pukekura Park Lake. A pair of escaped Rainbow Lorikeets has been seen around Waitara but efforts by MPI and others have failed to track them down so far. Eighteen Royal Spoonbills were seen at the Waitara River mouth.

At this time of the year migratory waders are seen around the coast with 13 Bar-tailed Godwit on a North Taranaki beach and a pair of Pacific Golden Plover settled in at Waiongana. They were briefly visited by a Whimbrel; the same bird or another was seen at Waiwhakaiho a couple of weeks later. Another exciting event has been NZ Dotterel breeding along the coast. At Waiwhakaiho a pair had a 3-egg nest with 2 fledged. At Sandy Bay, a pair has at least 1 chick, and at Waiongana a pair fledged a chick also after a nil result last year. Three pairs of VOC also raised 5 offspring.

During our December field trip at the

meeting of the waters with a small bush reserve we recorded Shining Cuckoo, Welcome Swallow, and NZ Fantail. At Lake Mangamahoe, waterfowl were numerous with NZ Dabchick, Australian Coot, NZ Scaup, Canada Geese, Black Swans, Paradise Shelducks and shag species.

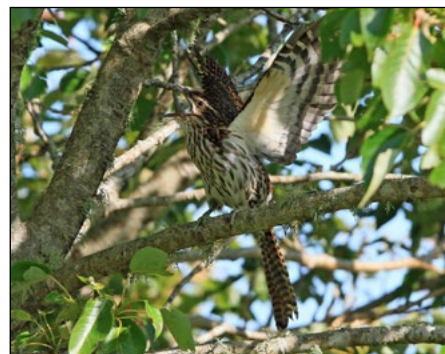
A record of Kerguelen Petrels flying down the coast in late December was the 89th species recorded for Waiongana. January's Beach Birds and BBQ was an excellent day with 14 people enjoying a very convivial time. The birds behaved with NZ Dotterel, Banded Dotterel, VOC and juveniles, Pacific Golden Plover, and a pair of Ruddy Turnstone among the 28 species seen. Birdwatchers returned home for pikelets and refreshments followed by a Michelin-rated BBQ. A great start to the New Year. - PETER FRYER

**HAWKE'S BAY**

Due to a lack of numbers, we had to omit a couple of areas during the November Wader Census, but the major wetland areas were counted. Of note, a Red Knot was spotted in area 6 'Between the Bridges'. In December, we had a successful trip to the Mohaka River mouth. Participants were able to see and survey more than 20 species. It was good to have a field trip to somewhere that many of us had not been to before. Thanks to the Bird Atlas project, we are exploring new sites.

A highlight for Napier DOC staff in December was the discovery of returning Cook's Petrels/Titī to the Boundary Stream seabird site. This is the most inland translocation site for Titī, 24 km from the sea, 700 metres up on the Maungaharuru Range. During a night visit, our Regional Representative Bernie Kelly heard between 10 and 15 Titī circling the site for most of the night. A subsequent visit in mid-January had similar results, with birds seen circling the area above the burrows and at least 1 Titī found in a burrow. This bodes well for the future, so hopefully more birds will return next season.

February saw members participating in the extra Godwit Census. With help from Wairarapa members, a successful count of Bar-tailed Godwits at Porangahau Estuary was conducted, with 244 seen. This was slightly lower than a previous count done at the same time of year. The Ahuriri Estuary count was 147. - THALIA SACHTLEBEN & BERNIE KELLY



One of the Long-tailed Cuckoo/koekoeā photographed in Waitahinga Forest by Duncan Watson (NZ Birds Online).



**WHANGANUI**

High temperatures and strong winds made for generally unfavourable conditions for birding. As these are likely to be the 'new normal' under climate change, it may be best to get used to them. 'Our' flagged male Bar-tailed Godwit, AJD, returned on 14/12 to spend the Summer on the Whanganui Estuary. This is the same pattern noted since he was first banded on the Manawatū Estuary in October 2008. His annual visits involve first arriving at the Manawatū Estuary, usually towards the end of September, spending the next 8-12 weeks there, then moving on to Whanganui any time between mid-November to mid-December.

He remains here until migrating north to the Arctic in the last week of March, usually leaving directly from the Whanganui, although once he flew to the Manawatū, leaving from there a few days later. Paul Gibson has been documenting AJD's comings and goings, and has a wonderful collection of photographs of him through the years. As a rough estimate, he has travelled at least 360,000 km over the past 12 years, but certainly more, given that he was banded as an adult in 2008.

Paul also photographed a White-winged Black Tern among a flock of White-fronted Terns at the Whanganui River mouth at the beginning of February. He and Jim Norris reported an alphanumeric-marked Caspian Tern, banded by Willie Cook at Waimea, Nelson in 2013. Earlier in November they found an Asiatic Whimbrel and 2 Pacific Golden Plovers on the estuary. Unfortunately for those who like to chase rarities, the Whanganui Estuary serves largely as a stop-over site rather than as a summering ground for most of these species. As part of the national survey of Bar-tailed Godwits in early February, we found only 26 birds between the Turakina and Waitotara River mouths.

Paul, Duncan Watson and Dianne Parker visited Waitahinga Forest in late January to photograph Long-tailed Cuckoo. They saw 2 and, taking account of other ones heard but not seen, estimated at least 4 or 5 birds present. In early February, Peter Frost heard Long-tailed Cuckoo calling at several places in the Whanganui National Park from Pipiriki northwards. As noted in previous years, this species' habit of calling loudly and persistently towards the end of Summer, long after their Whitehead hosts have finished breeding, suggests that these are social vocalisations, perhaps among birds gathering prior to migrating to the Pacific Islands for the winter. Long-tailed Cuckoo or Koekoeā is a taonga species among the Iwi along the Whanganui River, its long tail feathers being prized along with those of Huia as a status symbol. - PETER FROST

**MANAWATU**

Atlasing has been at the forefront for our keen members. The Ruahine Ranges are rich in biodiversity but difficult to access; luckily, we have a keen eBirder in the ranks of the Ruahine Whio Protectors who is Atlasing some of the southern-most Whio in the North Island when doing the traplines that protect them. Sue Moore and Phil Battley have also

joined DOC and the RWP in the fabulous beech forests and grasslands of the Northern Ruahine for a couple of trap checks and were happy to get multiple records of Kakariki and Fernbird into the Atlas. With the Ruahine being the southern-most natural limit in the North Island for several species (including Brown Kiwi, Whio and NI Robin) this is an important area to document well.

Elsewhere, Atlas records have included Spotless Crake at a farm lake in inland Rangitikei and Common Mynas breeding in Palmerston North. Other nesting birds of note include NZ Falcons again on the edge of Palmerston North and the poorly-known Black-billed Gull colony that historically breeds either side of the Manawatu Gorge nested successfully at the confluence of the Manawatu and Pohangina Rivers, with over 90 chicks seen recently. But the most surprising record was when a landowner near the Rangitikei River east of Mangaweka reported being mobbed aggressively by oystercatchers. A visit the same week confirmed 2 adult and 2 newly fledged SIPO, 40 km inland. A few years ago, a pair attempted to breed on the Manawatu River near Ashhurst, and 2 were seen by the gull colony this season, so it looks as if SIPO are establishing a foothold west of the ranges in the lower North Island.

It's also been an active summer at the Manawatu Estuary, with researchers from the Max Planck Institute in Germany, University of Groningen in The Netherlands, and Massey University satellite-tagging juvenile godwits at the start of a project to understand how young birds explore New Zealand and eventually settle down at one site. As luck would have it, this summer is by far the best on record for juvenile godwits in New Zealand - at times they outnumbered adults. Already these birds and others tagged at Miranda have journeyed as far north as the Far North and as far south as Otago, and we are on track to learn more from one year of tracking than 10 years of band-reading. A Common Tern has been seen periodically at the Manawatu Estuary, as has a long-staying Little Egret that also frequents the nearby dune lakes. A couple of Ruddy Turnstones have passed through (one was caught and colour-banded) and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper turned up mid-summer. - PHIL BATTLE

**WAIRARAPA**

Six of us made a trip to the Tora Coast (eastern Wairarapa) in November to monitor the Red-billed Gull colony on the Te Awaiti reef and were lucky to have a bach right on the sea front to stay overnight in. The colony seemed in good shape with plenty of chicks observed through scopes. Bellbirds were frequent visitors to the Pohutukawa flowers right beside the bach. A walk into the hills behind were a good chance to "atlas" in harsh, dry hill country farmland. NZ Pipits and the occasional Bellbird were the only natives seen and bird numbers overall were low, as was expected.

Some of the group again helped out with the Lake Wairarapa wader survey where 184 Bar-tailed Godwits, 14 Pacific Golden Plover and a Pectoral Sandpiper were the

highlights along with finding the Black-billed Gull colony had started nesting on the Tauherenikau Delta.

Despite this promising start with the gulls, the colony failed, with chicks and eggs being abandoned in early January. Members had fenced the colony off and there was no sign of disturbance or predation. The Wildbase pathology report indicated probable starvation.

Oliver and Anna checked out several places along the Ruamahanga River and were pleased to see the occasional Banded Dotterel with chicks and surprised to find four juvenile Shining Cuckoos in one tree with attendant Grey Warblers. Most unusual. Members of the group have been hard at work predator trapping (including for cats) at Onoke Spit and on farmland near Masterton where Banded Dotterels were breeding. The Caspian Tern colony on the Spit failed again for reasons unclear. The 'farm dotterels' however had a better season than their counterparts on the rivers nearby, where floods and predation took their toll. To cheer us up after the season's failures, a Christmas pot-luck dinner at Oliver and Janet's was great fun, with delicious food, great company and a very challenging quiz on all things avian testing our knowledge to the hilt.

- JOANNA McVEAGH

**WELLINGTON**

The Wellington members continue to actively contribute to the New Zealand Bird Atlas. By early February 143 participants had submitted over 4,500 checklists for the Wellington Atlas region which includes the Wairarapa. At least 1 checklist has been submitted from over 92% of the 105 Wellington squares. The number of checklists per square ranges from 1 to 837. The 4 adjoining squares encompassing Wellington city account for 48.5% of the submitted checklists. The most species rich square with 76 different taxa is the one that encompasses part of the Zealandia Ecosanctuary and the south Wellington coast. However, the mean number of checklists per square and taxa per square is currently 44.3 (median 9) and 27.10 (median 24) respectively.

These figures highlight the great progress that has been made in the Wellington Atlas region but also the need for much more surveying to approach the goal of the scheme to survey the major habitats in each square in the four different seasons. After completing 4 seasons of the Atlas scheme it will be time to determine which squares and habitats need to be targeted. Nocturnal counts have only been submitted from 15 of our 105 squares. Some species such as Marsh Crake and Spotless Crake have either not been reported or are rarely reported and do not reflect their occurrence in our region. They will need to be specifically targeted. The total number of taxa reported in Wellington currently stands at 121 which is less than in Canterbury (138), Auckland (137), Southland (131) and Waikato (129). The Wellington taxon count will increase by at least one in the very near future with the translocation of Shore Plover to Mana Island in February. - GEOFF DE LISLE

**NELSON**

The Spring wader census was undertaken in December throughout the Top of the South Region, with about 31,000 shorebirds recorded, 83% of which were migrants. Farewell Spit's 12 species included Pacific Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling and Curlew Sandpiper. At Pakawau, for the first time ever, 20 Red Knots were recorded. There were 2 reports from Golden Bay in December of migrant cuckoos in Bainham, with confusing anecdotal reports until both birds were identified. One was a Pallid Cuckoo, the other an Oriental Cuckoo. Also, about the same time on Farewell Spit, a wader survey team found a Spine-tailed Swift and a Fairy Martin at the lighthouse.

NZ Dabchicks bred again on Killarney Lake in Takaka township producing a single chick to maturity from 12/12 to 10/2. In Tasman Bay, Sand Island, a roosting site between the airport and Rabbit Island, has almost completely disappeared. The total number of godwits for Waimea and Motueka Sandspit in December was 3,000-3,500 birds. Exchanges of roosting birds between Motueka to Rabbit Island and vice versa are a regular occurrence and provides some interesting metrics for the management of such important sites (Thanks to Rob Schuckard for wader census notes). In November on Motueka Sandspit a Whimbrel and a Far Eastern Curlew were reported, and Wrybill were seen on the east end of Rabbit Island.

Both Golden Bay and Tasman Bay have had successful colonies of breeding Caspian Terns with chicks from Bells Island banded with Willie Cook at the helm. Motueka Sandspit supported colonies of White-fronted Terns and Black-billed Gulls. Two other successful wader banding sessions were organised in Waimea Estuary led by David Melville and Rob Schuckard, including using the opportunity for training. - GAIL D. QUAYLE

**MARLBOROUGH**

Lake Elterwater is an easy place to pull off SH1 in south Marlborough and see a good selection of wetland birds. Southern Crested Grebes can be seen with chicks there at the moment. In the late Spring we saw large flocks of Hutton's Shearwater feeding off the south Marlborough coast and there has been a sizeable flock of Ruddy Turnstone on the rock platforms at Cape Campbell this summer. If you walk from Marfell's Beach there are flocks of Red-billed Gulls, White-fronted Terns, lots of Spotted Shags, VOCs and Banded Dotterel to see along the way. We often see giant petrels feeding along the coast too.

Down at the Wairau Lagoons there have been Bar-tailed Godwits, stints, Pied Stilts, Black-fronted Terns and Royal Spoonbills along with the lots of NZ Pipits and Skylarks. The Black-billed Gulls have returned to their summer haunts throughout Marlborough Sounds. Picton foreshore is always a good place to spot them, and some are at Lake Rototiti for their summer holiday.

Kristen heard NZ Falcon calling recently while climbing up the eastern side of the lake in the St Arnaud Range, and she spotted a pair of Paradise Shelducks up on one of the tarns. They have to be one of the most adaptable birds when it comes to altitudinal

range. Laura and some of her friends have a citizen science project going with Kea: <https://keadatabase.nz/> Our wader counts are next week, so I wonder what we will see. - HEATHER DAVIES

**CANTERBURY**

Canterbury birders have been getting out and about over late Spring and early Summer, finding a good variety of interesting species. One of most exciting birds in Canterbury over this time has been a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, a species for which there has been only one previous accepted NZ record. It was first seen at the Ashley Estuary in mid-November, but was not found again until a month later, when it was seen at the tip of Kaitorete Spit. It has been seen there many times since. Another interesting sighting at the Ashley Estuary was a Little Egret, reported sporadically between mid-November and early December.

A variety of waders have been seen at Lake Ellesmere recently, particularly around Embankment Road and Wolfes Road. Up to 3 Black-tailed and 2 Hudsonian Godwits have been present there, as well as an Eastern Little Tern. A Marsh Sandpiper was seen in that area in November but then was not reported again until January, when it was seen repeatedly at Kaituna Lagoon. A Common Tern was seen once at Wolfes Road in early December but was not re-sighted. The same goes for a Common Greenshank that was seen there later that month. Good numbers of Red-necked Stints continue to occur around the lake, with a high count of 54 individuals. While the Little Stint that was seen throughout November, has not been reported since then.

Of course, waders are not the only interesting species that have been seen in Canterbury. In mid-December, a Black Kite was spotted at Postmans Road, Kaikoura Flat. Later that month, an Australian martin species (either Fairy Martin or Tree Martin) was seen at the Bromley Sewage Ponds. The bird was unfortunately not picked up again, so the exact species was not confirmed.

Flooding made for a rough breeding season for birds on the Waimakariri River. On the river's lower stretches, Black-fronted Terns had minimal productivity, while the Black-billed Gulls look set to have only a small amount of success. On the Ashley-Rakahuri River, the Black-fronted Terns also appear to have had limited success, but the 2 Black-billed Gull colonies are doing well so far. Breeding success for other species there has been better than normal. - ELEANOR RIGBY

**OTAGO**

Summer weather conditions have been mixed in Otago, with regular strong winds and significant flooding in South Otago. Otago branch members have made some interesting observations. A final Atlas field trip in 2019, led by Otago Regional Recorder Richard Schofield was held on 30/11 to mark the end of Spring. Further Atlas summary results show an overall increase in the total coverage for Otago. Towards the end of Spring, 48% of squares in Otago had had some coverage (38% during Spring), this increased over Summer to a total of nearly 58% of all squares (201 of 348) in the region with some coverage. However,

seasonally Summer has only had coverage of 33% of squares so far and the end of February is fast approaching.

The summer wader count was held on 24/11. Bar-tailed Godwits were by far the most numerous species with 2,435 individuals recorded. Almost two thirds (1,866 individuals) were at just two sites on Otago Peninsula. The next most numerous was SIPO with 437 recorded. The least numerous wader species recorded was Banded Dotterel with only 7 observed, all in the Catlins. Thanks to Maree Johnstone for having coordinated this event.

Interesting observations over the summer included: a Whiskered Tern at Balclutha, a Long-tailed Cuckoo in Dunedin, a White Heron at Hawksbury Lagoon, three Red Knots in Otago Harbour, a Broad-billed Prion in a Balclutha driveway, and a Pacific Golden Plover at Papanui Inlet, Otago Peninsula mid-November, the first Otago record of this species since 1985. Three waders of interest were long-stayers in the Catlins: a Red Knot, a Grey-tailed Tattler and a Ruddy Turnstone. Thanks to Richard Schofield for this summary.

The local *Robins Beyond Orokonui Project* finished in December with more nests found this season than previously. Successful fledging was recorded with some birds were banded. Nest failure also occurred. Remains of chicks close to fledging were found dead in one nest, probably from predation.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

**SOUTHLAND**

Southland had another first record for New Zealand when a pair of Gull-billed Terns that have been in the area for several years nested at Awarua Bay. The nest was photographed by Glenda Rees on 21/12 and the pair produced 3 eggs, unfortunately the eggs and nest had disappeared on a later visit. A large Southern Black-backed Gull colony nearby could have been a factor although there were also signs that a quad bike had driven through the colony. We have approached DOC Conservation about getting some signage and roping-off the area before the next nesting season as White-fronted and Caspian Terns nest in the same place.

A visiting overseas birder reported 6 Chestnut-breasted Shelduck at the Tip Lagoon on 13/11 that stayed in the area until at least 6/12. A Fiordland Crested Penguin was photographed near Bluff on 30/11 and an uncommon visitor to Southland was an Australian Coot reported from a property in Wallacetown by Daniel Crocker on 15/11. An Australasian Bittern was seen flying over Tip Lagoon by Lloyd Esler on 16/12, the first bittern record in this area. A Broad-billed Prion found alive on a beach near Riverton was released later that day.

Another Riverton visitor was a juvenile gibsoni Antipodean Albatross found in a paddock during gale force winds. It had been banded on Adams Island a few weeks earlier and was released unharmed at Kawakaputa Beach by DOC. Finally, a White-headed Petrel found in Queens Park, Invercargill, was released at Ocean Beach near Bluff.

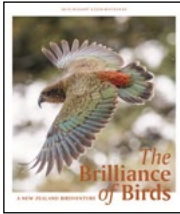
- PHIL RHODES

# Book Reviews

## The Brilliance of Birds

\$55 : Penguin

Skye Wishart & Edin Whitehead



This eye-catching 386-page hardcover book draws together 164 of Edin Whitehead's colour bird photographs and 58 species accounts by Skye Wishart, with an emphasis on their most quirky and endearing characteristics.

The cover image of a Kea in flight is particularly striking, capturing both the bird's dynamic movement and feather details. Some of the best images are intimate portraits, such as pairings of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Tui, and Kaki, and flight action shots, such as NZ Storm Petrel and NZ Fairy Tern. These are distinctive photographs that capture the brilliance of these birds.

Author Skye Wishart will be familiar to readers of New Zealand Geographic magazine where her accessible pieces on birds are regularly published. Here she gets a whole book to delve into them. The texts on Kiwi, Kea and Kakapo stand out, as do her pithy and often humorous standfirsts.

The book has the subtitle 'A New Zealand Birdventure', which suggests a travelogue, but it is not. The structure is an A-Z of New Zealand's birds with a description of each species or family that summarises their natural history. The 230 mm x 200 mm book format is an interesting and practical choice as it allows for the inclusion of both landscape and portrait format photographs at a size that does them justice.

If anything, I would have liked to read more of the author's – or the photographer's – own field observations in the captions. Given that the text conveys such a wealth of information, references and an index would also have been useful for some readers, though not essential.

## The 50 Top Birdwatching Sites in New Zealand

\$39.99 : John Beaufoy Publishing

Liz Light & Oscar Thomas



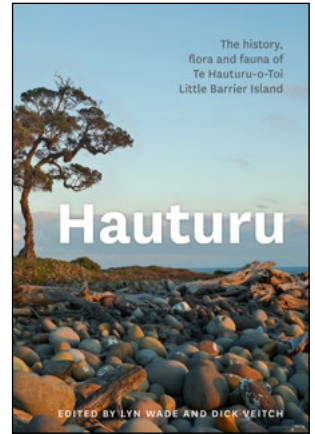
This incredibly impressive 245 mm x 175 mm format softcover birdwatching site guide by Liz Light is a real *tour-de-force*, brilliantly illustrated with almost 200 of Oscar Thomas' excellent bird photographs and a beautiful cover shot of a Kereru by Liz Light. It draws together a huge amount of information in its detailed descriptions of 50 sites over 224 pages covering key species at each site, habitat types, access information, best times to visit, and facilities. If you are planning a Kiwi 'Birdventure', you will need this book.

It includes just about all the sites that I'd expect to see included in such a guide. Inevitably there is a degree of personal preference involved. Does it need Maungatautari as well as Pureora? Would Motukea Sandspit be more accessible than Farewell Spit? I might have included Waipu Estuary for NZ Fairy Tern or Horseshoe Lake at Waitangi wetland for Australasian Bittern rather than the Bay of Islands or Mt Bruce which have species that can be seen in the wild elsewhere.

I also wonder if it might have been better to focus more on the best places to see fewer 'specialty' birds rather than include entries covering national parks: Flora Saddle rather than 'Kahurangi NP'? Ocean Beach or Ulva Island rather than 'Stewart Island NP'? Homer Tunnel or Milford Sound rather than 'Fiordland NP'? These are, however, minor quibbles in the larger scheme.

Keen birders can also supplement this excellent guide with Stuart Chambers' 'Locality Guide' which is available online free of charge via New Zealand Birds Online (<http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/>) and Birds New Zealand's 2016 set of six regional birdwatching site maps via Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre's shop or <https://shop.miranda-shorebird.org.nz/>

## Hauturu \$60 : Massey University Press Lyn Wade & Dick Veitch (eds)



This excellent new book has a strong focus on the birds and ornithology of predator-free Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island, which was established in 1895 as New Zealand's first nature reserve and intended to become a safe haven for endangered species.

Superbly produced, it runs to 400 pages and has a 245mm x 175mm format with softcover. It is the collaborative work of more than 30 scientists and researchers who recount the rich history of Hauturu and its biodiversity. Edited by Lyn Wade QSM and Dick Veitch, who have both been closely involved with conservation on Hauturu for decades, the book is pleasingly illustrated with hundreds of mostly colour photographs by over 50 photographers, including 45 bird photographs. One memorable image shows David Attenborough watching a Kakapo on Hauturu during filming.

The picture it paints is of an internationally important island Taonga that ranks as one of the 'Jewels in the Crown' of New Zealand's conservation estate, with its largely intact ecosystems, wide range of subtropical to subalpine habitats, and vitally important populations of threatened bird species.

The multi-faceted story encompasses conservation innovation, trailblazing pest eradications, the preservation of source populations, ground-breaking seabird conservation techniques, and over a century of dedicated conservation work carried out by rangers, scientists and volunteers.

The main chapter on the birds of Hauturu runs to 29 pages and blends accounts of the island's 40 endemic and native bird species with descriptions of the significance of their Hauturu populations.

Conservation efforts started with an unsuccessful attempt to obtain Huia for translocation in 1893. Since then Hauturu has had a central role in NZ bird conservation efforts, initially under the auspices of the Wildlife Service and now the Department of Conservation in conjunction with Ngati Wai, Ngati Manuhiri, and the Little Barrier Island (Hauturu) Supporters' Trust.

Among the many success stories is the conservation of Hihi/Stichbird, which would be extinct if not for the last remaining wild population that survived on the island, which has since been the source population for many successful translocations elsewhere.

The history of the conservation of Kakapo on Hauturu began with early conservationist Richard Henry, who moved some birds there from Fiordland in 1903, but they were killed by feral cats. All cats were eventually removed in 1982, paving the way for Kakapo to be translocated there once again and breeding success.

North Island Kokako and Saddleback/Tieke were translocated to Hauturu in the 1980s. Their Hauturu populations have since provided source populations for various translocations, as have Hauturu's populations of North Island Brown Kiwi, Whitehead, Rifleman, and Cook's Petrel.

Pioneering cat and rat eradications on Hauturu greatly benefited Cook's Petrel and Black Petrel, and have served as templates for eradications elsewhere. The book also describes the remarkable survival of the New Zealand Storm Petrel on Hauturu in the face of cats and rats, and the eventual location of breeding burrows with eggs on the island.

Anyone interested in the history of bird conservation and ornithology will relish all the detail this book contains.

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



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## CHATHAM ISLANDS – A LAND APART

13 – 22 MAR 2021 **NEW BIRDING VOYAGE!**

Discover amazing endemic wildlife and hear remarkable stories of rediscovery and population recovery from the Black Robin and its rescue from the brink of extinction through to the once thought extinct Chatham Island Taiko or Magenta Petrel. Join us as we small ship expedition cruise the incredibly-diverse archipelagos of New Zealand's Chatham, Antipodes, Mangere, Little Mangere and Bounty Islands and experience conservation in action with a team of Chatham Island experts.



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