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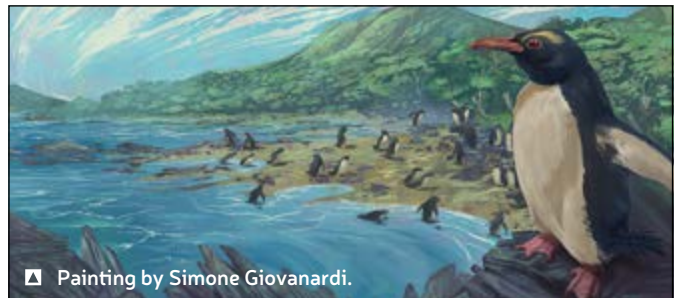
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COVER IMAGE

Tui in flax. Photo by Mike Ashbee.

www.mikeashbeephotography.com



▲ Painting by Simone Giovanardi.

AN EASY-TO-USE IDENTIFICATION GUIDE FROM ONE OF NEW ZEALAND'S YOUNGEST NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS INCLUDING DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS FOR 238 SPECIES WITH SIZE, DISTRIBUTION, HABITS AND HABITAT, AND CONSERVATION INFO, PLUS A COMPLETE CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND

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OSCAR THOMAS
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Fossils reveal ancient origin of NZ penguins

Researchers from Massey University, Canterbury Museum, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Bruce Museum (Connecticut, USA), and Iowa State University have analysed fossil bones from an ancient penguin discovered in coastal Taranaki. Senior curators Alan Tennyson and Paul Scofield recognised the importance of the fossils being found by collectors and assembled study collections. The newly described three-million-year old Dawn Crested Penguin *Eudyptes atatu* now provides a crucial connection to the past, confirming that crested penguins have been living in Zealandia, or the New Zealand continent Te Riu-a-Māui, for millions of years. "It's given us an important new window into the evolution of crown penguins and re-enforces the importance of the NZ continent for seabird evolution. Our growing fossil record suggests that Zealandia was an incubator of penguin diversity in which the first penguins likely evolved and later dispersed throughout the Southern Hemisphere," says Daniel Thomas of the School of Natural and Computational Sciences at Massey University. The research is detailed in *Ancient crested penguin constrains timing of recruitment into seabird hotspot*, published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B (August 2020). The study concludes that the ancestor of all penguins lived in Zealandia over 60 million years ago, and that the ancestor of crested penguins may have originated in Zealandia before its descendants dispersed throughout the Southern Hemisphere: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2020.1497>

From the President's Desk

Council and Annual General Meeting

For Winter, there is quite a lot happening. Council met in July and tidied up a lot of business that was not able to be dealt with because of the cancelled annual conference. Council confirmed that we would not hold an Annual General Meeting this year and that the Annual Report and accounts for 2019 would be presented and debated at the next Annual General Meeting to be held at Thames on Queen's Birthday Weekend 2021.

Council made this decision mindful of the opinions expressed by members that they valued a face-to-face meeting. Council has continued to work on an Annual Report and Treasurer Paul Garner Richards has completed the processes around the Financial Annual Report. These are now completed and posted on the Society's website. Keith Woodley reported that the key arrangements for the 2021 conference were in place and that the meeting was being arranged around the tides at the Firth of Thames.

As part of ongoing work on improving our Health and Safety practises Council has purchased on behalf of Regions a supply of high visibility safety vests. Two will be given to each region and more will be available to be purchased as required.

A unique feature of the Council meeting was that it was completed online via Zoom. Council members reported some hesitation on using this technology before the meeting but afterwards the feedback was very positive.

Membership matters

There has been significant activity to ensure the completion of the new membership database. Vice President Ian Armitage reports the significant changes on page 9 of this edition. I would like to recognise the untiring efforts of Ian Armitage, Roger Sharp, and Ingrid Hutzler in resolving all the issues that such a change brings and ensuring the data in the database is accurate. I would also like to thank Ian Armitage for two substantial donations made in 2019 and 2020 to support development of Phase II of the Society's website. I also want to welcome our new Membership Secretary, Imogen Warren of Foxton Beach, who has stepped into this very important role, and to say that I'm looking forward to working with her.

Regional Representatives

I wish to acknowledge Les Feasey, Geoff de Lisle, and Peter Frost who have over this year stood down as their respective regions' representatives. Regional Representatives are the lifeblood of the Society at the Regional and Project level, and Peter, Geoff, and Les have shown great leadership in developing projects and organising speakers and activities. In the case of Les and Geoff they have each led the hosting of a highly successful Society Annual Conference and AGM. Equally, the Regional Representatives are an essential network for Council to understand the expectations of the membership and to ensure that matters are raised and debated with Council. Council will work to find replacement Regional Representatives. If you are a member in Whanganui, the Far North, or Wellington please have a serious think and consider stepping forward for this essential role.

Projects Assistance Fund

I was pleased recently to receive copies of project reports from projects which have been supported by the Projects Assistance Fund. Brenda Green was able to report on her work on estimating the distribution, population status, and trends of New Zealand Scaup. Georgina Pickerell was also able to report progress on the Otago Region project monitoring South Island Robins near Orokonui Ecosanctuary. I'm pleased to say that a key component of this project is to develop the skills of members in bird capture and bird handling.

More details on these two projects and others are posted on our website: www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/paf/paf-projects/

If you need support for a Society project then remember that the Projects Assistance Fund is available to support you.

Atlas catch-up with Regional Representatives

The team at Wildlife Management International have carried on with their great work supporting the New Zealand Bird Atlas. In July a video meeting was held and I'm pleased to be able to report that all but two Regional Representatives were able to attend, and one of those was able to send a delegate. The conversation was very technical and wide-ranging, and I was greatly encouraged at the enthusiasm of the participants and the amount of energy that the Atlas project is harnessing. There is more detail on the Atlas project in this edition on pages 10-13, but it's clear that the Regional Representatives are making the effort to make this project a success. Again, this meeting showed to me the effectiveness of using video conferencing technology to come together and to discuss and resolve matters of complexity and depth.

New Zealand Birds Online

Colin Miskelley has recently shared a news update on the phenomenal success that is the New Zealand Birds Online project. He reports that since the launch in June 2013, there have been five million visits to the site. Colin also reports that the site now has 13,500 images of New Zealand birds. This initiative supported by the Society, Te Papa Tongarewa, and Department of Conservation is providing much needed accurate and topical information to the public who want to know more about the birds of New Zealand.

Heritage Expeditions 2020-21 Summer Season

Heritage Expeditions have now published a schedule of their exploration voyages during the Southern Summer season, and have announced a reduced, refundable US\$1,500 deposit for all new 2020-21 Southern Ocean reservations. See their ad on the back cover of this issue for more details. There is more detail also posted online here: <https://mailchi.mp/heritage-expeditions/heritage-expeditions-e-newsletter-3207782?e=2e375b6949>

Pivotal

Birds New Zealand magazine is designed and printed by the team at Pivotal, an award-winning digital and offset printing company that is also a Living Wage Employer. Located in the Wellington CBD, the company is locally-owned and operated, and offers a range of print production services. They have been in the print industry for over 30 years, so they have a wealth of experience and know-how. If you require any print services, you can contact Miles Goodlet for a quote. His email is: miles@pivotalprint.co.nz

I remind all members that *Birds New Zealand* is run with the good efforts of volunteers and that we should recognise those among us who work hard for the Society and ensure that we have quality projects. Now is the time to be looking around your leaders and thinking who you would like to see recognition for at next year's conference. The relevant forms are available on the Society's website.

Finally, as Georgina Pickerell has so elegantly put it: "Trees are in blossom, song thrushes are singing... it must be spring and time to see what our Mopani robins are up to!" Yes, nest monitoring will soon be underway in the hills around Dunedin and so I wish you all the best as another spring arrives and settles in.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT

2021 Membership Renewals

Annual membership subscriptions are due on 1st January 2021. Renewal invoices will be emailed or posted in November 2020. If you have not already, please notify our Membership Secretary of your email address (membership@birdsnz.org.nz). You can renew via the website, either by direct debit payment or using a credit card:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount>

Please pay promptly because we depend on your subscription to continue our work encouraging and supporting the study and enjoyment of New Zealand birds.

Falla Memorial Award, A.T. Edgar Junior Award, & Meritorious Service Awards

Nominations are called for these awards, to be with the Birds New Zealand Secretary (secretary@osnz.org.nz) or (P.O. Box 834, Nelson, 7040) by 31st December 2020. Please use the standard forms which can be found on the Birds New Zealand website <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/manual/> or obtained from your Regional Representative. The Awards committee will send its recommendations to Council for consideration at its summer meeting. More information on award procedures is available from the Birds New Zealand Secretary, or the website (Manual / Guidelines).

FALCON flying!

We are very excited to announce that DOC's 'FALCON' Bird Banding System has been launched. It represents a new way of curating the dataset containing over two million records of the NZ National Bird Banding Scheme. A central repository of all banding and resighting/recovery data is held in a customised relational database, which can be interacted with by all stakeholders through an online interface.

Registered banders will be delighted to know that their annual reporting requirements will be fully managed on their behalf by FALCON. You can also add banding and resighting records directly through a web-form as an alternative to the Data BOX spreadsheet. We hope to receive banding and resighting records weekly or monthly as opposed to annually. Thousands of historical and current records will be available to search, map, and even download. If you are looking for a specific bird, the Advanced Search function will help. The public can report sightings of banded birds to FALCON, allowing the Banding Office to verify the information before loading these onto the database.

Over the coming weeks, we will send login invitations to Level 3 certified banders that have registered banding projects. Once they are familiar with the application, they will be in a position to assist Level 2 and Level 1 banders when we bring them onboard. We expect more than 800 banders to use the FALCON System; however, other interested stakeholders – such as those that report sightings of banded birds – will also be invited onto FALCON. Birds New Zealand members who would like to know more or are interested in becoming authenticated users should send an email to: falcon@doc.govt.nz

MICHELLE BRADSHAW

New members

Birds New Zealand warmly welcomes the following new members: David Wright (Northland); Nadine Tupp (Auckland); Prof Paul Kayes (Bay of Plenty); Darren Smith (Taranaki); Valerie Hart (Hawkes Bay); Carmen Chan (Wellington); Dominic Koch, Moira McLeod, (Nelson); Taylor Hamlin, Ann De Schutter, Tim Seville (Canterbury); Alex Verry, Simon Leary, Lara Urban, Petrina Duncan (Otago); Katherine Lagerstrom (Rest of World).

Donations and Bequests

Birds New Zealand is working hard to ensure a better future for our birds, but to do so we need your help.

Making a donation

Birds New Zealand is a registered charity (CC 41020) which means tax credits are available for donations made in New Zealand. You can donate in the following ways:

* Deposit funds into our bank account: 02-0290-0164715-00

* Make a credit card payment online: www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/you-can-help/make-a-donation/#form/Donation

Leaving a gift in your will

No matter how much it is, leaving a gift in your will really does make a difference. All funds received go into the Projects Assistance Fund, so you can be confident that your gift will have a real impact and our birds will have a voice now and into the future.

It is important to consult your solicitor, Guardian Trust, or Public Trust office for advice on drawing up your will. A general gift allows Birds New Zealand to direct funds where they are needed, but we are also very happy to discuss options if you would like to leave a gift in your will for a specific purpose. Here are the ways that you can support Birds New Zealand in your will:

* *Specific Legacy*: You may wish to leave a specific amount of money, shares, bonds, items, or a nominated gift to Birds New Zealand.

* *Residual Legacy*: You may wish to leave a gift of all or part of your net estate (what remains after all taxes, specific gifts to family and friends, and the cost of administering the estate have been paid). This type of legacy should be expressed as a percentage or share of your estate.

Benefits of Birds NZ Membership

You can join Birds New Zealand today for just over a dollar a week. The subscription fee of \$70 per year is very reasonable, and for students it is just \$35 per year (see <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/> for more details). Members receive *Birds New Zealand* magazine, our quarterly colour magazine, and *Notornis*, our acclaimed quarterly colour scientific journal. To join, please visit our website and fill out the online membership form: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/> Or contact our Membership Secretary:

membership@birdsnz.org.nz

Or contact your nearest Regional Representative:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/>

The Gift of Birds

Are you looking for a Christmas gift to give? You can gift someone a 2021 Birds New Zealand subscription for just over a dollar a week to help foster a lifetime of study, knowledge, and enjoyment of birds. Please send an email to eo@osnz.org.nz and we will send you the Gift Voucher, or visit our website for more details:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/you-can-help/buy-a-gift-voucher/>

New Membership Secretary

The Society's new Membership Secretary is Imogen Warren. Imogen is a school teacher in the Manawatu region. She has considerable earlier experience in management, administration, and internet technology, as well as being a superb photographer of birds. She took over the role on 1st August and will manage the new membership system.

IAN ARMITAGE, VICE PRESIDENT



31 NZ Fantails/Piwakawaka huddling together in a shed/
Margaret Davis.

Birds New Zealand on social media

Birds New Zealand's popular Facebook page continues to grow, and now has 8,500 followers. A post of this photo of 31 NZ Fantails/Piwakawaka huddling together in a Mosgiel shed proved popular (above), reaching over 200,000 people. Other popular recent posts (illustrated below and right) have included items marking the first World Albatross Day - Te Rā O Ngā Toroa on 19 June 2020; photos of a white (leucistic) NZ Fantail; and a photo comparing the bills of five prion species. Social media can be a powerful way to promote interest in New Zealand birds. If you are on Facebook, you can check out the Birds New Zealand page at: <https://www.facebook.com/Birdsnewzealand/>



This leucistic white NZ Fantail/Piwakawaka was found in King Edward Park, Stratford, flitting around over the Pātea River by photographer Guy Vickers on 11 April. These two photos were subsequently taken by Janet Hunt (top image) and Alan Gould over the following months, and the bird was still being seen there at the time of writing.



This photo from Ian McLean shows the different bills of five species of prion found during one of the regular Birds New Zealand beach patrols on the west coast of Auckland. These are part of a long-term nationwide survey recording beach-wrecked birds that has been running since the 1940s. The species shown are (L-R): Antarctic, Broad-billed, Slender-billed, Fairy, and Salvin's.



This poster artwork was produced for World Albatross Day 2020 by Owen Davey for the Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).



Albatross researchers Kath Walker and Graeme Elliott with banner, standing with an endangered Antipodean Albatross (Toroa) on Subantarctic Antipodes Island to mark the inaugural World Albatross Day - Te Rā O Ngā Toroa on 19 June 2020. The date marks the day the global Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) was signed in 2000.



▲ Curlews at Sandbach Flashes/Nikk McArthur.

R. B. Sibson's Cheshire connection

Earlier this year I went birding at Sandbach Flashes in Cheshire, England. While searching online for a bird checklist for the Flashes afterwards I uncovered an unexpected Birds New Zealand connection dating back to the 1930s.

With freshwater habitats – known locally as ‘flashes’ – rapidly forming at sites of industrial subsidence, and local birdlife quick to take advantage of them, birding there must have been an exciting activity back in those days. One person in particular was instrumental in recognising the significance of the site. Reading the South East Cheshire Ornithological Society's publication, *The birds of the Sandbach Flashes*, the following sentence leapt at me off the page: “*The first person to watch and record the birdlife of the Sandbach Flashes was R.B. Sibson. He made detailed observations from September 1935 to July 1939, when he emigrated to New Zealand.*”

Richard Broadley Sibson (1911-1994) will be a familiar name to many Birds New Zealand members. He joined the newly established Ornithological Society soon after his arrival in New Zealand in October 1939, eventually serving twice as President (1952–54; 1980–83) and 17 years as editor of *Notornis* (1955–64; 1965–72). Among his many achievements was the instrumental role he played in the ‘discovery’ of the great wader flocks on the Firth of Thames and the subsequent establishment of the Miranda Naturalist's Trust. He also combined his passion for ornithology with his career as an educator by establishing the King's College Bird Club. A number of alumni have subsequently made their own significant contributions to ornithology and Birds New Zealand, having initially been mentored by him.

During his four years as a teacher in Sandbach, he recorded over 130 bird species at the flashes, including rarities. This was “a fine tally for an inland locality” as he put it himself, and it placed the Sandbach Flashes on the ornithological map. He published his observations in *The North Western Naturalist* in 1945/46 in contributions that led to the Flashes being notified as a (protected) Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1963.

Dr Tim Lovegrove, a King's College Bird Club alumnus who is now an ecologist at Auckland Council, writes that he remembers Sibson as “a kind scholar and mentor with an infectious enthusiasm for sharing the beauty of the natural world with others”. R.B. Sibson expressed these values himself when summarising the purpose of the Club: “The important things are to get out in the field; observe with a critical eye; make notes; draw if you can; and above all, get some fun out of your bird-watching”. His sense of humour and talent as an educator also shines through in the Club's motto: “*Floreat semper aves atque spectatores*” (Long live the birds, and those who watch them). R.B. Sibson should be justifiably proud therefore, that from Sandbach to Miranda, birds and birders alike continue to flock to the outstanding wetlands that he helped to document and protect.

NIKKI McARTHUR

Identifying an ancient Taranaki seabird

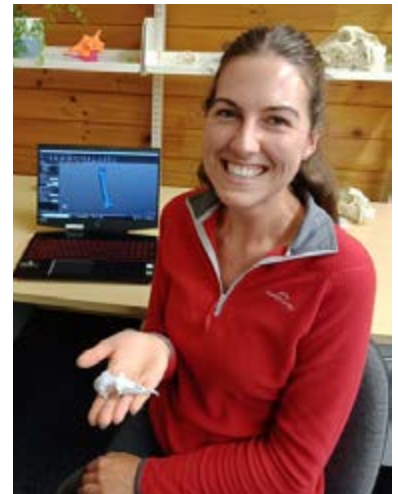
About 25% of the world's circa 360 seabird species breed in New Zealand, with circa 10% of them being NZ endemic species. The sparse fossil record for most seabird lineages makes it difficult to determine when and how New Zealand first became a seabird biodiversity hotspot.

Newly discovered fossils from a coastal Taranaki location are revealing the modern origins of seabird lineages that are important to New Zealand and the rest of the world. My study will analyse a previously unidentified seabird from the Pliocene-aged Tangahoe Formation (circa three million-years-old) in coastal Taranaki which is held by Canterbury Museum. I will work with Senior Curator Professor Paul Scofield from the museum to analyse the mystery bird.

Skulls are often important for identifying ancient seabirds but for this ancient Taranaki bird only wing bones remain. For my study I will develop and apply an identification method based on advanced 3D shape analyses to help reveal the identity of this ancient seabird.

I will apply this method to the ancient Taranaki seabird to discover which group of seabirds has been present in New Zealand for at least three million years. In so doing, my study will provide new information about the deep time history of the New Zealand seabird biodiversity hotspot. This research is funded by the 2020 David Medway Scholarship.

EMMA HOLVAST



▲ David Medway Scholarship recipient Emma Holvast



▲ Fossil bones of the Taranaki seabird/ Canterbury Museum

Checklist Committee trainee scheme

Birds New Zealand Council wish to see a revision of the 2010 *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand* published in 2021. During preparation of this update, Council also wish to provide an opportunity for Birds New Zealand members to learn about Checklist Committee processes and discussions, with the aim of developing a larger and more diverse pool of candidates with the required skills to join the committee in future.

Any current member of Birds New Zealand with an interest in avian taxonomy (whether serious or just curious) and who is contactable by email is welcome to join the scheme. All participants will be added to an email group list, and will be sent regular instalments of Checklist Committee deliberations, debates, and decisions.

If you are interested in being a Checklist Committee trainee, please send me an email: colin.miskelly@tepapa.govt.nz

COLIN MISKELLY,
ACTING CHECKLIST COMMITTEE CONVENOR

Restored urban forests support native birds

My doctoral research at the University of Waikato investigated the benefits of urban forest restoration for city residents and native birds. Recognising that cities represent complex, interconnected networks of human actions and their effect on ecosystems and organisms, my thesis integrates the social and natural sciences in a multidisciplinary framework, with the aim of investigating the capacity of urban forest restoration to break the cycle of the extinction of nature experience by providing habitat for native forest birds and reconnecting urban residents with nature in NZ cities.

Using interviews, I explored Hamilton residents' experiences of urban nature in frequently used parks and gardens. This identified a gap between what residents claim to value and their actions affecting native biodiversity. For example, people claimed to prefer native plants, but gardens were dominated by introduced species, or people valued native birds but did not design gardens to benefit them, or protect them from pet cats. Given this value-action gap, this study suggests we cannot currently rely on private gardens to provide adequate resources for native birds and highlights the need for ecological restoration of public green spaces.

To evaluate the success of urban forest restoration and determine how native forest bird communities changed over time, I monitored birds and mammals at 43 sites in Hamilton, the Hakarimata Ranges, New Plymouth, and the Kaitake Ranges. The results demonstrated that urban forest restoration increases native bird species richness and diversity over time, and transforms the bird community from one dominated by introduced generalists and seed-eaters, to one dominated by native forest birds. This research highlights that provision of habitat through restoration is the necessary first step in re-establishing native forest bird communities in NZ cities. I am grateful for the generous support of Birds New Zealand through the 2019 David Medway Scholarship.

ELIZABETH ELLOIT NOE

Influence of translocations on Tieke song diversity

In Spring 2019, fieldwork was conducted on three separate populations of North Island Saddleback/Tieke aimed at understanding the role cultural evolution in shaping song dialect patterns. This research is the focus of a Masters' thesis undertaken at Massey University in the School of Natural and Computational Sciences.

Three questions were asked: (1) does cultural complexity increase when saddleback sourced from three different, culturally divergent populations were simultaneously reintroduced to an area to form a new population? (2) have song types changed over one decade? and (3) can song types change over a single generation?

To answer them, we collected high quality digital song recordings from Tieke at the study sites and analysed them with specialist bioacoustics analysis software. The success of this field season was essentially due to the Projects Assistance Fund grant provided by Birds New Zealand, which allowed us to acquire the necessary equipment.

The project hit several unpredictable hurdles, including COVID-19. This delayed completion of the thesis which is now scheduled for December 2020. All fieldwork was completed earlier in the year, and currently the statistical analysis and writing is underway to meet the new deadline.

KYLE SUTHERLAND, MICHELLE ROPER,
KEVIN PARKER & DIANNE BURTON



■ NZ Scaup photo by Alan Tennyson/NZ Birds Online.

Estimating the NZ Scaup population

To date, New Zealand Scaup/Pāpango population estimates have been based on observation, rather than direct counts. The aims of this paper are to (1) collate and explore changes in distributional records of NZ Scaup; (2) collate count data to estimate the population status and trends; (3) review the literature to establish potential key ecological and environmental factors; (4) carry out exploratory statistical analysis to determine any correlates between counts and environmental or ecological factors; (5) identify ecological and environmental data sets for further statistical modelling, and (6) make recommendations for further research.

Data was collated from Classified Summarised Notes, *eBird*, *iNaturalist*, the OSNZ Bird Atlas, research and governmental organisations, the grey and published literature, and individuals. As sampling biases of systematic and opportunistic data were similar, and *eBird* data was further explored. To enable a national distributional and population estimate to be made, the total number of NZ Scaup recorded in *eBird* was tallied between 2008-2018 and mapped in ArcGIS. Ecological and environmental factors that influence *Aythya* populations globally were summarised from the literature.

Counts were significantly positively correlated with count effort and more precise during Autumn/Winter. Taking into account the limitations of data accuracy; a suspected gender and littoral zone area bias; low count effort in some region; the probability that in general counts (particularly strongholds) have overestimated the number of birds; variability of weather conditions; and a total count from collated data of fewer than 15,000 birds per annum (2008-2018), it is more likely that the NZ Scaup population is closer to the estimated 5,000-10,000 birds (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Birdlife International 2016) than 20,000 birds (Heather & Robertson 2015).

Globally, *Aythya* populations are in decline, which is strongly correlated with water quality degradation and habitat loss. As similar downward environmental trends occur in New Zealand, the NZ Scaup population is also likely to be in decline. Research is required into count methodologies, bird movements, gender, diet, predation, and littoral zone quantity and quality (<10m deep). Analytical tools such as spatial modelling also need to be developed and tested so that the value of NZ Scaup as an indicator species for shallow freshwater and coastal habitats can be further explored. There is also value in testing aerial vs ground-based count accuracy for large waterbodies/flocks.

To improve count precision, at a minimum, observers doing NZ Scaup and other waterbird surveys must record the following information: site name (accurately named from LINZ Gazetteer of place names), GPS location, geographic name of area counted, observers' name(s), date, start/stop times, temperature (Celsius), wind speed (knots) and direction, cloud cover (8ths), rain (mm), gender, and age (adult/juvenile). It is recommended that all these parameters be included as prompts in *eBird*.

I am very grateful to Birds New Zealand for a Project Assistance Fund grant to publish this work, which has now been submitted for publication in *Notornis*.

BRENDA GREENE



Composite image of the putative hybrid heron/Oscar Thomas and Steve Wood.

Possible hybrid of Reef Heron x White-faced Heron

I visited Rangatira/South East Island in the Chatham Islands as a DOC volunteer in September 2016. While there with two DOC rangers, I photographed what I believed to be a Reef Heron/Matuku Moana, which was reportable as an unusual species. I submitted an Unusual Bird Report (UBR) to the Records Appraisal Committee, but the description didn't add up. As I had mentioned it was associating with an adult White-faced Heron, they concluded it was a juvenile of that species.

Fast-forward to February 2020. There have been several reported sightings of a 'Reef Heron' on Rangatira since my 2016 sighting. Most recently Steve Wood photographed a heron in flight which he sent to me knowing it to be an unusual bird. His bird and my 2016 bird appear to be the same individual, and therefore cannot be a juvenile White-faced Heron as one remaining in that plumage state for so long is impossible.

It would be too great a coincidence for them to have the exact same (unique) appearance and exist in the same location, when both identification options are so uncommon there. I have compared Steve's photo to images of typical White-faced Herons and typical Reef Herons, and noted the characteristics of the bird against them as follows:

* *Against White-faced Heron:* Uniformly slate grey plumage; same plumage for over three years; lemon-yellow iris; stubby legs yellowish with dark plates; and a shorter and very subtly down-curved bill.

* *Against Reef Heron:* Paler feathering around chin and forehead (manifested differently to the white chin stripe sometimes present); darker flight feathers compared to rest of wing; shape and visibility of the loreal skin; and as outlined in the UBR response, "structure of the bird was too slender and elegant, the neck too long and thin, and the bill narrow and evenly tapered."

After circulating the images online I have concluded that this bird could potentially be the first recorded hybrid between a White-faced Heron and a Reef Heron (*Egretta novaehollandiae* x *Egretta sacra*). This is based on the unique characteristics described above, and the fact that both species occur very infrequently on Rangatira, suggesting that if a vagrant Reef Heron were to appear, it might settle for whatever mate it can find, due to the limited choice of mates. I understand that identifying a hybrid is difficult, but occurrences of hybridisation in the *Egretta* genus are not unheard of overseas.

Colin Miskelly also reports: "I saw this bird myself in March 2018, but only in flight, and not great views. It was flying with a White-faced Heron, and I assumed at the time that it was a melanistic White-faced Heron (and realised that the 'juvenile' conclusion for the bird that Oscar photographed 18 months earlier could not be right)."

A certain way to tell would be genetic analysis, but until that happens, it's identity remains as speculation.

OSCAR THOMAS



Aerial seabird survey of northern NZ

The results of an aerial seabird survey conducted on 23rd November 2017 which targeted Australasian Gannet, Red-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern colonies at remote locations in northern New Zealand have been published. Forty sites on 37 islands were surveyed, from the Hauraki Gulf north to the Three Kings Islands and south to Kawhia Harbour.

A total of 30,757 nesting pairs of Australasian Gannets were counted at 18 colonies. This is 135% and 21% higher than the numbers recorded in 1946 and 1969 respectively, but about 8% lower than that recorded in 1980, the last complete census. This is probably within the margin of error of both censuses. Big changes were apparent at several colonies but it is suggested that these changes represent movements between colonies because, at a subregional scale, the total numbers show little change over the past 37 years.

Red-billed Gull colonies were found at 25 of 40 surveyed sites, supporting 3,172 nesting pairs. Two of the colonies had not previously been reported. Using the latest available data since 2000 for all known sites in northern New Zealand, this brings the estimated overall regional breeding population to 8,343 pairs. Almost 80% of nesting pairs counted were on the Three Kings Islands. This count, aggregated across all Three Kings Islands colonies, was 43% and 129% above counts from aerial photographs taken in 2014 and 2015.

It is possible that substantial numbers of gulls did not breed in those years if conditions were unfavourable. Even during the 2017 survey, large numbers of apparently non-breeding birds were seen, although it is not clear if these were all immatures and sub-adults, or if some were mature birds skipping breeding in 2017. Whatever the case, large inter-annual variations in the numbers of breeding birds complicates long-term monitoring unless the variation can be explained and factored out.

Only 1,106 pairs of nesting White-fronted Tern were recorded, mainly at the Three Kings Islands and around Muriwai. Taking the latest counts since 2000 for all known colonies, the overall regional breeding population is about 5,025 pairs. White-fronted Terns were difficult to see from the air, so isolated small colonies and individuals could easily have been missed. Given this, and the transient nature of many of their colonies, this species is probably unsuitable for monitoring by aerial survey, at least from aircraft. The use of drones, however, should be investigated.

Overall, whereas aerial surveys are useful in helping to inventory the location and general size of the colonies of some species (ie, gannets), they may not be suitable for long-term monitoring of these species unless the often-large variation in numbers counted annually can be accounted for. Instead, it may be better to focus on measures of reproductive performance, particularly if the aim is to have early warning of population decline, or if a species is being used as an indicator of the health of marine ecosystems. The survey report produced by Peter Frost for the Northern New Zealand Seabird Trust is available online: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1911-Report-Aerial-survey-RBGannetsTern-2017.pdf>

PETER FROST



▣ Ingrid Hutzler, Roger Sharp and Imogen Warren training on the new system. Photo/Ian Armitage.



▣ Kerry Jayne Wilson (left) with John and Stella Rowe.

New membership management system

Council is pleased to advise that a substantially redesigned membership management system 'went live' on the Birds New Zealand website on 1st August. The new system has been developed by Roger Sharp and Ingrid Hutzler, and is a substantial improvement. We owe our thanks to Roger and Ingrid for the many hours of dedicated hard work they spent bringing the new system into operation. Considerable technical improvements have been made that will provide a much more secure and efficient basis for managing the personal records of members. As a part of the development process the membership categories have also been simplified: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/membership-plans-and-fees/>

Notable improvements are: renewal of annual membership subscriptions can be made online through the website, including the option of using a credit card to make a payment; renewals can continue to be made by a direct credit payment through the banking system; members can quickly and easily update their own personal details, such as changes of names, postal addresses, email addresses and phone numbers; new members may join through the website and can also use a credit card to make a subscription payment; Regional Representatives can quickly assemble lists of members in their regions and view the membership status and contact details of local members; easy registration of members attending annual conferences, including options for payment of fees and other costs (this greatly helps RRs when organising conferences); and improved ability to make a donation to the Projects Assistance Fund and buy a membership Gift Voucher.

Another significant change is that membership renewals will be made on the anniversary of when each person joined the Society, not at 1st January of each year as is the case presently. The main benefits of this approach will be a more even spread of income throughout the year, a more even workload for the membership secretary, and some reduced costs. It is proposed that new members will automatically be sent a Welcome Letter and the first set of quarterly publications at the next mailout.

It is also proposed that members will be sent renewal notifications at six weeks and three weeks before the renewal date, and again three weeks and six weeks after. A reminder sent at six weeks after a member's renewal date will indicate that if the member does not renew within two weeks of receiving the reminder, they will not be sent the next issues of the Society's quarterly publications. Once they renew their membership, the four-quarterly publications cycle will restart at the next available issue without any back issues for those missed due to the non-payment of fees. This approach will ensure that the member will still receive one-year's issues of quarterly publications.

The introduction of membership renewals on the anniversary of joining will require amendments at the 2021 AGM to Clauses 6 and 7 of the Society's constitution, specifically Clauses 6.2, 6.3 and 7.2. Notices of Motion with supporting reasons will be notified in *Birds New Zealand* in early 2021. In the meantime, and until Clauses 6.2, 6.3 and 7.2 are amended in 2021, the existing arrangements for invoicing members will continue to be applied.

IAN ARMITAGE, VICE PRESIDENT

Celebrating John and Stella Rowe

The Birds New Zealand Waikato Branch was thrilled to be able to honour and celebrate John and Stella Rowe's forty-year contribution to OSNZ/Birds New Zealand and ornithology at a surprise lunch-time event held for them in November 2019 at Hamilton Lake. The turnout was reportedly well beyond that of the branch's regular evening meetings. Paul Cuming, once a protégé, travelled from the Bay of Plenty – where he is RR – to be there, and John was briefly speechless, but he got the final word!

The gathering heard how the Rowes have contributed to a very long list of ornithological projects, including: the branch's East Coast Waikato beach patrols, the Grey-faced Petrels project at Mt Maunganui and Rabbit Island, OSNZ Bird Atlas projects, Chatham Islands Taiko surveys (making nine trips to the Chathams between them), Kakapo volunteering on Codfish Island, the Maud Island Fluttering Shearwater translocation project with Brian Bell, assisting Mike Imber at various NZ offshore islands including banding and feeding Black Petrel chicks on Little Barrier and Great Barrier islands, assisting Graeme Taylor and Kerry-Jayne Wilson on Great Mercury Island field testing a prototype Chatham Petrel burrow 'gate' designed to exclude prions, and as long-term volunteers at the Miranda Shorebird Centre.

Stella was the Waikato Regional Representative for eight years before she served on Council for three years. She also co-authored the OSNZ *Beach patrollers' guide to stormcast seabirds in New Zealand* with Adrian Plant, which was first published in 1989 and then in a revised edition in 2015. Both John and Stella helped survey the endemic Mangaia Kingfisher on Mangaia in the Cook Islands over two months in 2002 with Peter McCormack, Ed Saul, Hugh Robertson, Raewyn Empson and others, where they gathered breeding data and discovered that Ship Rats were present on the island, resulting in a paper being published in *Notornis*.

For 20 years after retiring they also volunteered for DOC, which allowed them to get to various remote areas to work with a wide variety of species from forest birds to seabirds. Retired for 34 years, John is now 92 years-old. He attributes their long years of active ornithological endeavours to fitness acquired from plenty of tramping, skiing, and mountaineering together. "We have lots of wonderful memories of all the trips we have done and the wonderful people we have met," he says.

They have also enjoyed various overseas birding trips to Australia, Asia, South America, and southern Africa. The highlights of these trips were the birds of Amazonia and Australia. During their various Australian trips they were pleased to see over 700 species, with highlights including sightings of Princess Parrots in the outback, Palm Cockatoos at Cape York, Orange-bellied Parrots in Victoria, and displaying Regent Bowerbirds in Queensland.

John and Stella continue to make a contribution to ornithology, monitoring several bird habitats, including a monthly beach patrol, and submitting NZ Bird Atlas checklists. Long may it – and they – continue!

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



▣ Data shows that high country areas are under-surveyed, a habitat where NZ Falcon/Karearea occurs. Male bird on left, female on right.

Tramping around the Bird Atlas mountain

Words by the New Zealand Atlas Team Photographs by Mike Ashbee

On 1st June 2020 the New Zealand Bird Atlas project turned one. After 365 days of nationwide birding, and with 1,825 days left of this five-year project, we have compiled the following summary of amazing achievements so far:

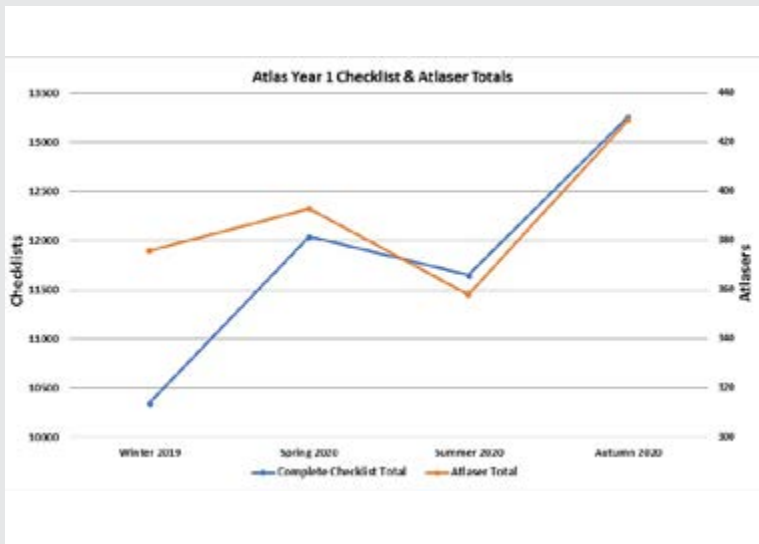
- * Nearly 50,000 checklists submitted to the Atlas portal by more than 700 Atlasers across the country;
- * Of the 3,232 10x10km grid squares that cover the entire country, more than 2,250 of them received data (around 70% of all squares);
- * A total of 537,533 observations. (An observation being a report of a single species on an *eBird* checklist. Whether the species count is 1 or 100,000, it is still one observation); and
- * A total of 243 bird species recorded in New Zealand.

It is clear what a huge effort everyone has put into this, so well done and thank you for getting involved. We're pleased to report that the number of checklists submitted and the number of Atlasers participating has increased since the Atlas began.

This is in line with a historical increase since 2015 in both the number of *eBird* users and checklists in New Zealand (Figure 1). We are hoping this trend continues over the next four years as the Atlas community continues to grow.

The most ubiquitous species within the first year was the Blackbird/*Manu Pango*, recorded in 1,885 squares which represents over 80% of all the squares surveyed. The second most widely detected species was the Chaffinch/*Pahirini* detected in just over 1,800 squares, while the third most observed species was the NZ Fantail/*Piwakawaka* found in more than 1,700 squares. The data show these three species are widespread from the tip of the North Island way down south to Stewart Island. This is redolent of the last Atlas in 1999-2004 with these three species among the most reported taxa.

We have also begun to look at comparing current species distributions to the last Atlas from 1999-2004. Tui, for instance, were shown to be widely distributed across the North Island but detected mainly west of the divide on the South Island.



▲ Figure 1. Total number of Atlas participants and checklists submitted to the Atlas eBird portal in Year 1.



▲ Figure 3. Distribution of NZ Tomtit/Miromiro from the 1999-2004 NZ Bird Atlas (left) compared with the data so far in the current Atlas



▲ Figure 2. Distribution of Tui from the 1999-2004 NZ Bird Atlas (left) compared with the data so far in the current Atlas (right).



▲ Figure 4. Number of complete checklists submitted in each grid square.

Already in the first year of this Atlas we can see a very similar distribution forming (Figure 2). Obviously, this picture is still incomplete, and comparing a five-year data set with a one-year data set isn't ideal, however it gives us a good indication of what to expect by the end of May 2024 after the five-year data collection period.

Examining some other distribution maps such as NZ Tomtit/Miromiro shows some interesting trends (Figure 3). When the data so far is overlaid onto satellite imagery, we can see how their distribution is closely correlated to remnant patches of forest. And if we were to compare it to the last Atlas results, NZ Tomtit have not been detected as widely. Is this because they are declining? Or is this simply a reflection of the Atlasing effort thus far? We don't know yet, but we can certainly use this to be more focused with our efforts to get onto some of the forested areas not yet surveyed. We know that this is likely for a lot of other species too, particularly New Zealand's native and endemic species.

While analysing the data, we also looked at how many Birds New Zealand members have been contributing to the Atlas and

we found that fewer than 25% of members have contributed so far. However, those members make up the majority of data submitted, having contributed 78% of the data so far. We are actively working to engage the remaining 75% of members as well as the wider birding community. Remember that this is Birds New Zealand's flagship project and we can all do our part to contribute whether it is by submitting checklists or promoting the Atlas to members and the wider birding community.

Where to for the next four years?

As expected, the picture is far from complete after one year, and we know we have a lot more work to do as a birding community, but rest assured if we continue the way we're going we are going to accumulate a vast dataset rivalled by no other NZ national bird Atlas. After the first year of the 1999-2004 Atlas there were 50% of grid squares with data and 231 species detected. We have 72% of squares with data and have detected 243 species. The previous Atlas went on to cover over 95% of the country by the end of the five-year period so we are in an awesome position to potentially get the whole of the country surveyed.



▣ Data shows that high country areas are under-surveyed, a habitat where Rock Wren/Piwauwau occurs.

As mentioned above in relation to NZ Tomtit, a lot of our effort has been around populated areas where roads and highways allow access. The data shows how close the majority of our efforts have been so far to major highways and roads (Figure 4). This is understandable as these provide easy access over large parts of the country. However, this has left large gaps of more remote agricultural, forested and high country areas under-surveyed. We are now very aware of this, and where possible, Atlas participants should try to begin to tailor their efforts to expand beyond just the roads. We realise that not all land is publicly accessible but speaking with landowners can often grant you access, and we all have local contacts that we can get in touch with to help gain access to farms, forestry blocks, and the myriad other land cover types.

Other under-surveyed areas include the DOC estate and we have been actively working with DOC to incorporate their Tier 1 bird monitoring data into the Atlas dataset over the 5-year period. This dataset will only cover the spring or summer periods and will only be a small number of checklists that will unlikely detect all the species in a particular grid square. So, it will still be up to us to lace up our boots and try to plan more Atlasing back-country and high country adventures where we can!

Another thing we can start to do is help out other regions with lower membership. The data shows the breakdown of regions (Figure 5) and we can see that regions where there are fewer Birds New Zealand members (and generally lower human populations) have fewer grid squares with data. Regions such as the West Coast and areas like eastern parts of the North Island will need a lot more effort so we would encourage members

nearby to start venturing into some of these areas where possible. We were sad to not be able to undertake the West Coast Atlasing field trip after the AGM this year, however we are working on re-scheduling this for some time in the near future!

Atlasing Tips and Tricks

Remember the simple aim of every Atlaser is to detect all the possible species within each grid square, across all four seasons. There were many tips and tricks covered in the fourth and final Webinar we held during lockdown and this can be accessed via the New Zealand Bird Atlas portal. A couple of tools worth highlighting again are:

Maps.Me and the Atlas Grid

It is possible to have the NZ Bird Atlas Grid on your phone to use even in remote out of service areas. We've field tested the *Maps.Me* app in some remote spots and see it as a highly valuable tool for Atlasers to use. The app helps you locate yourself within a grid square and see where you are in relation to adjacent grid square boundaries, even whilst out of cellular service, all using your device's GPS. You can use the app to help with Atlas trip planning as it contains lots of walking tracks and basic topographic information for tramps. Additionally, we've created some KML mapping files that can be easily downloaded and imported into the app too. These show the locations of every single checklist submitted during the first year of the Atlas, therefore helping you to target certain areas or habitats where Atlasers have not yet been within grid squares.

Maps.Me is free and can be downloaded from your device's



▣ Data shows that high country areas are under-surveyed, a habitat where Kea occurs.

app store on both Apple and Android devices. Instructions on how to download the NZ Bird Atlas Grid KML file and import it into the app can be found on the Atlas *eBird* portal 'About' page. We hope it becomes a useful tool for you all on your Atlasing adventures.

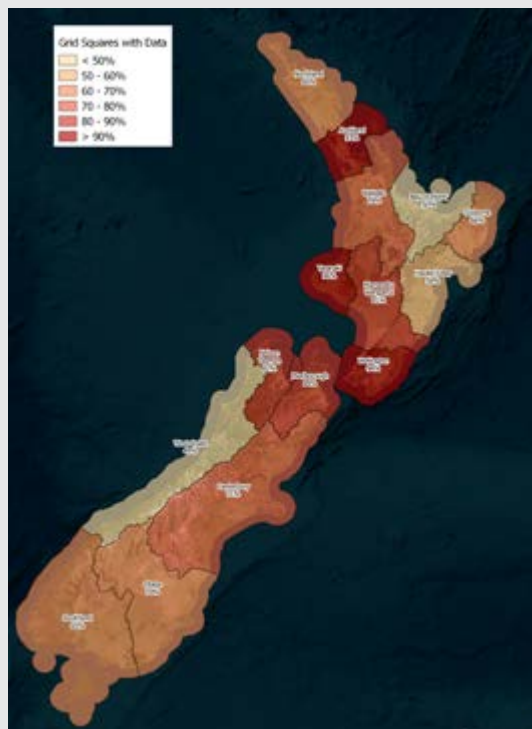
Merlin Bird ID app

This is another free app from Cornell that provides bird identification resources and is intimately linked with *eBird*. In the NZ pack, there are 257 species accounts complete with descriptions, photos, audio and an ever-improving photo ID tool to use in the field. It works offline and is a tremendous asset to any birders tool belt alongside resources such as Heather & Robinson's Field Guide or the NZ Birds Online website. Remember the more data that is put into *eBird* that includes photos and audio recordings, the more accurate the Merlin bird ID app becomes. You can utilise the sound recordings as playback for cryptic or nocturnal species such as the crakes and Little Owl.

Merlin is free and can be downloaded from your device's app store on both Apple and Android devices. Be sure to sign in with your *eBird* account details, and change the Common Names to English (New Zealand) in the settings!

As always, we want to thank you for all the time and effort you have put in so far, and we hope you continue to enjoy this awesome challenge together with us. There is a lot of birding still to be done, and that excites us, and we hope it excites you too. Hopefully we will see you out there in the field, and remember that if you need any help at all, we are here to support you all.

The New Zealand Bird Atlas Team (Mike, Dan, Pat and Sam).



▣ Figure 5. Breakdown of regions showing the percentage of grid squares within each region with at least one complete checklist in the first year of the Atlas.



🚩 Emperor Penguin with chick. Photo by Colin Miskelly/NZ Birds Online.

Penguins originated in New Zealand and Australia, not Antarctica

Modern penguins originated in New Zealand and Australia 22 million years ago rather than in Antarctica, a new study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in August suggests. The study – *Genome-wide analyses reveal drivers of penguin diversification* – also sheds light on the adaptability of penguins to changing climates, and on the danger they face in the current climate crisis.

"We are able to show how penguins have been able to diversify to occupy the incredibly different thermal environments they live in today, going from 9 degrees Celsius in the waters around Australia and New Zealand, down to negative temperatures in Antarctica and up to 26 degrees in the Galapagos Islands," said Rauri Bowie, one of the lead researchers and a professor of integrative biology at University of California (Berkeley). "But we want to make the point that it has taken millions of years for penguins to be able to occupy such diverse habitats, and at the rate that oceans are warming, penguins are not going to be able to adapt fast enough to keep up with changing climate."

A team of 23 scientists from universities in the Americas and Europe used 22 genomes from 18 penguin species to reconstruct the order, timing, and location of their diversification, and to track changes in their thermal niches over time. They found that modern penguins diverged in the early Miocene (3 million-years-ago) in New Zealand and Australia, and identified *Aptenodytes* (Emperor and King penguins) as the sister group to all other living penguin species. The ancestors of the King and Emperor penguins split off and moved into Antarctic waters, probably attracted by the abundant food supply there.

This means that penguins first occupied temperate environments and then radiated to colder Antarctic waters. The Antarctic Circumpolar Current's intensification about 12 million-years-ago promoted penguin diversification and geographic expansion. The new study shows that lineage diversification in penguins was largely driven by changing climatic conditions and by the opening of the Drake Passage and associated intensification of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current.

Penguin species have introgressed through much of their evolutionary history, following the direction of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, which might have promoted dispersal and admixture. Introgression is the movement of a gene from one species into the gene pool of another by the repeated backcrossing of an interspecies hybrid with one of its parent species.

Changes in thermal niches were accompanied by adaptations in genes that govern thermoregulation and oxygen metabolism. Estimates of ancestral effective population sizes confirm that penguins are sensitive to climate shifts, as represented by three different demographic trajectories in deeper time, the most common (in 11 of the 18 species) being an increased population size between 40,000 and 70,000 years ago, followed by a precipitous decline during the Last Glacial Maximum. The latter effect is most likely a consequence of the overall decline in marine productivity following the last glaciation.



🚩 Spotted Dove/Peter Reese–NZ Birds Online.

Spread of the introduced Spotted Dove

The natural range of the Spotted Dove is India, China, south-east Asia, Indonesia and The Philippines but it has been introduced to other parts of the world where it has established itself. It was introduced into Australia in the 1860s and has spread along the east coast to South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia. It was introduced to the main Hawai'ian Island in the late 1890s, and a decade later to Los Angeles, and is now a common bird in the parks and gardens of southern California. In the 1920s it was introduced to Fiji and about that time there was a major release from an aviary in Mt Eden, Auckland. Initially the doves could be found around Albany, Takapuna Beach, East Tamaki and the road between Whitby and Kawakawa Bay.

Introduced bird populations, including natural introductions such as Welcome Swallow and Spur-winged Plover, seem to go through a quiet accumulative phase before reaching a critical mass when suddenly the numbers escalate and the birds are seen everywhere. In the case of the Spotted Dove this acceleration started with the birds finding the Mangere wastewater treatment plant. In 1984, OSNZ Auckland surveyed Puketutu Island at a time when sewage sludge was spread out to dry on paddocks by Floodgate Lagoon. Weed species growing there produced masses of seed that brought in hundreds of finches and sparrows. Spotted Doves joined the feast and we counted just over 200 doves on that survey.

With such numbers and an abundant food source it was obvious the doves would soon spread, but I didn't expect them in Titirangi, believing the area to be too forested to suit them. However, ten years later they turned up in our garden where I put out grain for finches. Taking advantage of that food source the doves soon multiplied and we usually had 18 of them on the front lawn waiting to be fed in the afternoon. They have since spread through Titirangi out to the west coast at Huia, Karekare, Piha and Muriwai.

In recent months there have been several records of the dove from Hamilton, Otorohanga and Te Kuiti. The doves are well established all-round the perimeter of Lake Rotorua, and we have seen them further east at Lake Rotoma. In late 2018, we discovered they were also well established in the Whakatane/Opotiki areas in the Bay of Plenty.

In addition to the Auckland population, the 2007 OSNZ Atlas shows populations around Whangarei and Hawke's Bay. I don't think they will enjoy places like Ohakune and the Ureweras but otherwise they should have no difficulty spreading throughout the rest of the North Island. Given that they managed to cross Bass Strait from Victoria to reach Tasmania, the South Island may well eventually have a population of Spotted Doves.

MIKE GRAHAM

Orokonui Robin Project 2019–2020

Otago Birds New Zealand members have been monitoring South Island Robins/Kakaruwai in a mixed forest block adjacent to Orokonui Ecosanctuary since 2016, but 2019 was the first year that we operated under authorisation to band robins with unique colour band combinations. The project aims to find out if robins are successfully establishing a self-sustaining population outside the Ecosanctuary's mammalian predator exclusion fence and to provide Birds New Zealand members with the opportunity to progress nest monitoring and bird capture and handling skills. The project, expected to continue for another four years, has received a grant from the Projects Assistance Fund to cover costs.

In 2019, ten members were involved with helping to locate birds, train them to come to mealworms, find nests, and monitor the outcome. As visits to the site were fortnightly, we focussed our efforts on monitoring the nesting attempts of four pairs. Six nests were found, two of which fledged young, and four of which failed before fledging. In addition, we were fairly sure that there was another nest at the start of the season that we did not find before it failed. We could not establish the cause of failure of most of the failed nests, but a nestling with a damaged skull was found outside one nest, suggesting predation was the likely cause of failure.

Preliminary nest survival analysis indicates that although overall nest survival was higher than in previous years it remained relatively low. Five robins were banded by a Level 2 bander on the team: four breeding adults (2M and 2F) and one recently fledged juvenile bird. The 2020 monitoring season will start in mid-August when we hope to resight the banded birds and continue with banding and nest monitoring, with the help of nest cameras.

GEORGINA PICKERELL

2021 assessment of the conservation status of New Zealand birds

The conservation status of a species or subspecies is used as a variable in determining its priority for conservation management, in environmental planning decisions, and as a measure of the effectiveness of past management. In early 2021, the Department of Conservation (DOC) plans to convene its panel of internal and external bird experts to re-assess the conservation status of New Zealand birds. The last assessment was done in 2016: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/science-and-technical/nztcs19entire.pdf>

I welcome submissions for changes to the current threat classification of any NZ bird species or subspecies, either because you think we got it wrong in 2016, or because new information has become available in the last five years, e.g. new population estimates, new population growth rate estimates, and recent or proposed taxonomic changes. Please check the DOC notice that invites submissions and explains what information is required: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/have-your-say/all-consultations/2020-consultations/new-assessment-of-the-conservation-status-of-new-zealand-birds-2020/>

When making your submission, please refer to the criteria in the NZ Threat Classification System manual <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/science-and-technical/sap244.pdf> and preferably send a copy of any new data, published or unpublished, that will help the panel make its decisions. If requested, unpublished data and proposed taxonomic revisions will be treated in confidence by the panel.

Please send your submission to: Hugh Robertson, Biodiversity Group, DOC, PO Box 10420, Wellington 6143, or email hrobertson@doc.govt.nz by 31 January 2021.

HUGH ROBERTSON



▣ Royal Spoonbills photo by JP Mower/NZ Birds Online

NZ Birds Online hits 5 million

Use of the New Zealand Birds Online website (<http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/>) launched in June 2013 has grown steadily. A joint project between Birds New Zealand, Te Papa, and Department of Conservation, it took just over seven years to hit five million sessions, on 27 July 2020. The COVID-lockdown in April and May 2020 apparently allowed more people the time to learn about our birds, with these two months being our busiest ever (both had in excess of 103,000 sessions, compared to a previous high of 93,733 in Nov 2019). This spike in use created another milestone, with 1.005 million sessions in the 12-month period starting on 1 August 2019.

Three new species have been added over the past year. The first was the extinct Chatham Island Crested Penguin. The second was the Collared Petrel, first recorded in NZ near the Three Kings Islands in March 2011, and officially added to the NZ list in July 2019. The third was a rather infamous vagrant species from Australia, the Rose-crowned Fruit-dove. The first known individual of this species to reach NZ was intercepted and killed as a potential biosecurity risk by Biosecurity NZ, despite this action being in contravention of the Biosecurity Act and the Wildlife Act.

The 13,000th image submitted was from photographer Jonathan Mower on 24 June 2020, showing a Royal Spoonbill in breeding plumage. Since then the archive has surged past 13,500 images, mainly due to 368 images sourced from the excellent Australian website, BirdLife Photography.

COLIN MISKELLY

More Kākāriki Karaka released at Lake Sumner Forest Park

Eighteen Orange-fronted Parakeets or Kākāriki Karaka raised in captivity were released into the wild at Lake Sumner Forest Park in the Canterbury high country on 18 April. This followed the release of 15 birds in the Hurunui River valley in March.

"I'm delighted that after a record breeding last year, these distinctive rare birds are set to fly free from their bubble into Lake Sumner Forest Park," said Minister of Conservation Eugenie Sage. "Releasing birds into the wild is a vital part of the recovery plan for this critically endangered species."

The Department of Conservation (DOC) worked with Ngāi Tahu, Isaac Conservation & Wildlife Trust, and Christchurch Helicopters to transfer the birds from aviaries at McLean's Island into the Hurunui valley. "The young captive-bred kākāriki were due to be released several weeks earlier and this has now become more urgent for the welfare of the birds and to free up much-needed space in the aviary. Monitoring before the Alert Level 4 lockdown showed the 15 birds released the previous month had teamed up with wild kākāriki. DOC is hoping this new group of birds does the same," said the minister.

The rarest of our six kākāriki species, Orange-fronted Parakeet is found only in Arthur's Pass National Park, Lake Sumner Forest Park, and Blumine Island in Marlborough Sounds. The total population is estimated at 200-300 birds.



▣ Keith Woodley at the Waitara godwit mural in Taranaki/Peter Fryer.

FAR NORTH

Far North birders have been conducting monthly Atlas outings and beach patrol surveys on 90 Mile Beach. The highlight of the Summer 90 Mile Beach surveys was a flock of 250 Australasian Gannets with Buller's and Sooty shearwaters. During our June trip, the number of Red-billed Gulls significantly exceeded the usually dominant Southern Black-backed Gulls, and a Ruddy Turnstone flew alongside our vehicle.

Royal Spoonbill numbers continue to increase; a recent count at Unahi Wharf totalled over 1,000 birds in a nearby paddock, and 40 on the Macrocarpa there. A White Heron was also seen among the spoonbills. There were also frequent sightings of solo Reef Heron in Mangonui and Houhora harbours.

Kiwi are being heard regularly in the Coopers Beach area. During the summer drought, kiwi populations on some of the islands in the Bay of Islands suffered due to the lack of rain. Dogs and traffic there are still inflicting losses to the kiwi population. Following the severe drought, Australasian Bittern have been recorded again calling at Lake Ngatu and Opuā wetlands.

Eastern Barn Owls have increased their territory to the east of Kaitiā into Doubtless Bay. The only Far North Caspian Tern colony, on Walker Island in Ranganui Harbour, had a very successful breeding season. Many immature terns were seen on the 90 Mile Beach patrols. There is a new Pied Shag colony over the stream at Rarawa Beach with 11 active nests, and Australian Magpies are moving progressively north, putting pressure on White-faced Herons, Swamp Harriers, Tui, and other native species.

– ISABELLA GODBERT & LOIS WAGENER

NORTHLAND

As members reported their observations from 3 winter coastal counts at our June Branch meeting, it was noted that Pied Shag numbers have declined especially around the Whangarei Harbour sites, and there appear to be fewer breeding sites around the harbour, or they are in serious decline. Pied Shag numbers at the Waipu site also appear to be declining, but this could possibly be a seasonal factor. There is some concern about how the impact of the 2 major storm events this winter may be affecting shag breeding sites.

The Lake Drive lake in Tikipunga where 18 species were counted last November is now surrounded by new housing. The pond rose 4-metres in the major flooding event in July. It will be interesting to see the impact of human activity on the bird population there, which included 4 pairs of Australasian Little Grebes that raised chicks last season.

At the June meeting Ayla Wiles from DOC presented on the strategies being employed to protect the NZ Fairy Tern nesting sites, and the very labour-intensive efforts to monitor and assist the breeding success of NZ Fairy Terns at the East Coast's breeding sites. Ayla also asks birders to be on the lookout for a flock of Rainbow Lorikeets that have been reported in the SH1 Kaiwaka area. This is a new biodiversity risk in Northland, so it is important to report sightings of them to DOC.

– ANNE McCRACKEN

AUCKLAND

Our winter shorebird surveys included a census at Mangawhai on 27/6 with 12 participants who recorded 242 Northern NZ Dotterel, 61 Banded Dotterel, 133 VOC, 5 Wrybill, 8 Ruddy Turnstone, 50 Bar-tailed Godwit, 2 Australasian Bittern, 4 Grey Duck, and 2 NZ Dabchick. The South Kaipara census on 6/6 with 22 participants counted 16,930 SIPO, 1,985 Bar-tailed Godwit, 542 Red Knot, 758 Banded Dotterel, 282 Wrybill, 47 Ruddy Turnstone, 2 Large Sand Plover, 9 Red-necked Stint, 6 Whimbrel, 184 Black-billed Gull, 1 Black-fronted Tern, 1 Little Tern, and 30 NZ Fairy Tern. The census of Waitemata Harbour on 7/6 recorded a total of 311 SIPO, 109 Bar-tailed Godwit, 47 Wrybill, and 6 Banded Dotterel. The relatively calm winter weather without many days of strong westerly winds was a bonus for seabirds with very few found on our Muriwai Beach patrols. The 13/6 patrol found 1 Broad-billed Prion and 1 Cape Petrel, while the 11/7 patrol found only 1 Australian Magpie.

Our winter public Guided Bird Walk at Ambury Park on 5/7 was popular with 56 participants. Birds seen included 168 Royal Spoonbill, 26 Caspian Tern, and c.500 Wrybill. A Bethells Beach/Te Henga Field Trip on 18/7 attracted 15 members who spent the day atlassing at 3 atlas grid squares, practising Beach Patrolling skills, and a visit over private land to a lake depicted in Don Binney's

painting of a Kawaupaki (Little Shag) in the book "A Flying Start", which commemorated the first 50 years of OSNZ. Birds seen included 3 Royal Spoonbill roosting within a colony of c.20 Pied Shag, 3 NZ Dabchick, a pair of Northern NZ Dotterel, a Reef Heron, and a beach-wrecked Fairy Prion.

Local sightings included a Carolina Wood Duck at Martyn Wilson Field in Remuera (16/6) and a pair of Rose-ringed Parakeets was seen prospecting nest holes in trees at Coyle Park in Pt Chevalier (10/6). Two possible Red-whiskered Bulbuls were reported from Michael's Avenue Reserve in Ellerslie (4/9). If confirmed, this would be the first NZ sighting of this invasive species. Worryingly, there are still reports of Red-vented Bulbuls in Auckland City, with MPI advising of sightings at the port and in the suburbs of Birkdale, Milford, and Mount Eden over the last year.

– IAN McLEAN

WAIKATO

Monthly meetings have restarted with Bruce Postill, our Waikato RR, giving his postponed talk about "Birding in North Korea". David Riddell gave an interesting talk at the July meeting on the food chain at Miranda and how each wader species feeds on different invertebrates. Maungatautari has been busy with the arrival of 83 new North Island Brown Kiwi, bringing the total released there to 132 since October 2018. Another 75 are expected in the 2020/21 breeding season. Takahe have been both going and coming, which helps with the genetic diversity of the species, and Hihī and Kokako counts are being conducted. A couple of interesting finds over the past few months were a Dunnock at Raglan, a Kotuku at Huntly, Australasian Grebe near Hamilton, and NZ Falcon at Aotea Harbour. An interesting beach wreck on my own beach at Onemana was an Antarctic Fulmar.

– KEN WEDGEWOOD

TARANAKI

Our first field trip in a long time was a morning ramble around Barrett Lagoon, which recorded 32 species. Tui, as ever, were numerous and vocal in the flowering coastal Banksias. There were also 3 fat Kereru, Paradise Shelduck, and Grey Duck, and a Pied Shag in a pine tree where a pair fledged 2 offspring last November.

Barry Hartley, on his regular trip around the northern estuaries, saw 18 Pied Shag at Awakino and 7 Royal Spoonbill on the Mokau River, but still no indication of breeding. There appear to be more SIPO over-wintering, with birds seen from the south to north coasts and estuaries. Ron Lambert was visiting Lake Mangamahoe when he saw a NZ Falcon separate a Spur-wing Plover from a flock of 9, although the result was unknown. The Australasian Little Grebe is still on the lake. The July field trip to Lake Mangamahoe produced all the usual birds, including the Australasian Little Grebe. Tony Green got a couple of photos of the NZ Falcon prior to the group's arrival. More than 30 people attended the August meeting to hear Keith Woodley talk about 'Birding in North Korea' and NZ satellite-tagged godwits. The meanderings of juvenile birds are truly amazing. Thanks to Keith for a thoroughly interesting talk and to



Steve Purdon for his help.

Nine of us visited Lake Ratapiko on a fine warm almost-Spring Sunday. Welcome Swallow were most numerous. We also saw NZ Scaup, Paradise Shelduck, and Mallard on the two lakes, plus Tui and Kereru. Further east over the Tarata Saddle and Domain, we saw Tui, Bellbird, Kereru, and introduced songbirds during a pleasant day's ramble.

– PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

Winter has been a fairly quiet season in Hawke's Bay this year. June saw the completion of the winter wader census. The more unusual sightings during the survey included a Spotted Shag, 2 Lesser Knots, and a Whimbrel. The Whimbrel was regularly seen in the Ahuriri Estuary for a couple of weeks, providing a highlight in this popularly visited area. Other recent sightings of note include 2 NZ Falcons at the Hastings Golf Course, which have been seen on a fairly regular basis by Christine McRae. Ron and Liz Jackson did a beach patrol in June and found a wrecked Soft-plumaged Petrel. This was enough of a rarity and the corpse in good enough condition, it was sent to Te Papa in Wellington.

In July the branch held its AGM. Our Regional Representative Bernie Kelly gave an interesting talk about his visits to the seabird translocation site at Boundary Stream over December–January, when he heard returning Cook's and Mottled petrels. As part of the talk, attendees were treated to some stunning drone footage of the site and surrounds. The meeting was wrapped up with suggestions and discussions for upcoming field trips: something to look forward to in Spring!

– THALIA SACHTLEBEN

WHANGANUI

Coastal Whanganui is visited by several species that appear only or mainly during autumn and winter. Lesser Redpoll is one of these species (others are NZ Falcon, Kaka and various shorebirds moving between islands). In Summer, redpolls are reasonably common at altitude on the Central Plateau, especially around the upper tree line on Mt Ruapehu but they become less abundant at lower altitudes. In Winter, redpolls appear on the coastal plain, both in coastal scrub and nearby farmland with rough pasture, and in urban areas. In Whanganui itself, Lynne Douglas and others find them on pavements or in the gutters of streets lined with seeding Pohutukawa, especially during mast fruiting years, wherever masses of the tiny seeds have gathered. They and other species exploiting this food source—Goldfinch and House Sparrow—do not apparently forage for Pohutukawa seed in well-grassed areas, suggesting that it is only economic to feed on these tiny items when searching and handling times are minimised.

Another example of species feeding on a mass gathering of minute items was made by Robyn and Colin Ogle, who saw Grey Teal filter-feeding through a scum of pollen that had accumulated in one corner of Virginia Lake. Subsequent observations have added Mallard, Australasian Coot, and domestic duck as species that feed on this otherwise unlikely

food. Obviously, in this case, filter-feeding waterfowl are better adapted than the coot, which had to resort to scooping up the pollen by sideways movements of its bill.

Jim Norris and Paul Gibson continue keeping the Nankeen Night-herons that roost behind the Behind-the-Door-on-4 Café at Upokongaro under observation. Five birds – 2 adults and 3 juveniles – have recently been noted. Like the birds that roost at Kemp's Pole on the Whanganui River, where currently 7 birds roost, these birds depart their roost in the near dark, between 20–35 minutes after sunset. Anyone looking night-herons needs to hope that the birds behind the café at the Upokongaro show themselves briefly in daylight (the new owners of the café are happy for you to do this, and will happily sell you a coffee while you wait), or go down to the jetty opposite the café at dusk and look for silhouettes as the birds leave the roosts. Fortunately, Nankeen Night-herons usually call when they depart nightly, making it easier for you to know where to look.

– PETER FROST

MANAWATU

We received 2 records of NI Brown Kiwi in the Ruahine Range from trampers and DOC staff. The first was of kiwi footprints in the snow on the track to Sunrise Hut while the second was of numerous probe holes near Maropea Forks Hut. The Atlas project is accumulating records of Whio and Fernbirds in the Ruahine Range too, with a recent Fernbird at the popular Rangiwahia Hut being notable. Elsewhere, the Manawatu Estuary has had a Little Egret through the winter, and a Gull-billed Tern made a brief appearance in June. A few inland Caspian Terns have been seen in the Manawatu throughout the winter, and a SIPO was seen on the Manawatu River near Ashurst in early August, on a gravel bank where the species has attempted to breed in the past.

Our bimonthly meetings resumed in August, with Zoe Stone (postdoc at Massey University) talking about her work on species management, including Kakapo on Hauturu, Eastern Bristlebirds in Australia, and movements of reintroduced birds in fragmented landscapes in NZ. We are steadily building up our atlassing numbers and plan to have a dedicated atlassing weekend in the Rangitikei region during Spring.

– PHIL BATTLE

WAIRARAPA

Atlassing in May took 8 of us on the road-less-travelled into the eastern hill country. Over four hours during 10 random stops we recorded the expected introduced birds and NZ Fantails. In small pockets of bush or scrub we sometimes found a few Tui and Bellbirds, but only 1 Kereru. It was an interesting example of how Atlas trips can be a great incentive to explore new areas and at the same time add useful data to our Atlas project.

Due to prolonged high-water levels over winter, the June Lake Wairarapa Wader Survey could not be done. On a cold winter day 5 of us visited Palliser Bay and Cape Palliser to complete a series of Atlas counts. Our first stop of interest was a shag covered rock with 2 Spotted Shags – scarce in these parts – plus Pied, Little Pied, and Black Shags.

We repeatedly saw Northern Giant Petrel offshore. We also saw some fur seals, a few VOCs, Pied Stilts, and White-faced Heron but no dotterels of any sort. We also visited the Rengarenga Project area, a small reserve where Rengarenga Lilies grow in their original habitat. Eleven eBird lists were added to the NZ Bird Atlas.

Eight brave walkers gathered at Pukaha on a chilly morning. The tree cover being fairly dense forced our ears to do the birding with Bellbird, Whitehead, and NZ Tomtit identified from among the trees, yet we were also gratified to see the plumpness of several Kereru and the familiar flitting of NZ Fantails. Bonus bird sounds were NZ Falcon and Kaka. Those who stayed to the end were rewarded with good views of the elusive Whiteheads.

– JOANNA McVEAGH, OLIVER DRUCE & ANNA HORNSTEIN

WELLINGTON

In June, following the encouragement of Andrew Hawke we held our first monthly meeting using 'Zoom'. Brendon Dunphy from Auckland spoke on his studies on the conservation physiology of seabirds. The Zoom technology proved to be very user-friendly and prompted us to repeat the process for our July meeting. The July meeting was a hybrid event where members had the option to hear the meeting at home or they could come to our normal meeting room at the Te Papa Collections building and see the presentation on a big screen. Much to our surprise 16 people turned up for the meeting with a remote talk given by Patrick Crowe (from Blenheim), of Wildlife Management International, on his studies on Flesh-footed Shearwaters.

For the August meeting Graeme Elliot talked from Nelson on his studies on Antipodean Albatross at the Antipodes Islands plus a summary of the other birds found on the island. The August meeting was also a hybrid Zoom meeting but this time we had 25 join it at the Te Papa Collections building.

Special thanks to Graeme Taylor who has been our Zoom host and to Colin Miskelly for managing the technology at Te Papa. We have learnt a lot from our 3 Zoom meetings. Zoom enables us to reach a much wider audience for our monthly meetings, including members from the Kapiti Coast and further afield. Furthermore, with Zoom we are able to have many more out-of-town speakers. We still have more to learn about the best use of this technology including how best to offer access to non-Wellington Birds New Zealand members. The attendance of members at Te Papa with the hybrid meetings highlights the importance having face-to-face meetings and the value of personal interactions with our birding colleagues.

– GEOFF DE LISLE

NELSON

It's been great feeling comfortable with having indoor meetings again. There's been a good turnout these last two months, July and August. Especially so for David's "Melville Medley", focusing on local birds and issues. Winter is an interesting time in our region. Spotted Shags come into Nelson Harbour on an evening to roost on Fifeshire Rock. They can be watched easily from the car park opposite,

off Rocks Road, and small groups of up to about 30 Little Black Shags have been seen in Waimea and Motueka Estuaries, and Nelson Haven.

There have been few reports of the wood ducks this year, but with over 200 small ponds scattered around the Richmond/Tasman area they may be scattered around. Most of these ponds are on private land. Not so private are the Wakapuaka Oxidation Ponds and associated wetland. It is a great place to watch a good variety of waterfowl, with the occasional bonus of several Australasian Coot not normally recorded here. The highlight was 4 NZ Dabchick seen one day at the end of May, a count of five a day or so later, and then a sighting of an individual on a small pond in a newish Appleby subdivision. Again, I wonder what all those other ponds out there hold? The NZ Dabchick family from the Takaka Killarney pond haven't been reported lately. Small groups of Cirl Buntings have been seen in both Golden and Tasman Bays, in coastal areas.

Reports have come in of marked birds (dead and alive): Caspian Terns banded in the Waimea Estuary, Black-billed Gulls from the Wairau River, and from their armchairs at home, members have been watching the trips of satellite tagged Godwits online. Banding field work in the Waimea Estuary has been held for SIPO. Members keen on Atlas eBirding are encouraged to check the 'effort' maps regularly and venture into squares that need more effort! A small core of local birders is contributing enthusiastically.

- GAIL D QUAYLE

MARLBOROUGH

The Cape Campbell area is still recovering from the November 2016 earthquake. Along the coastline 3km either side of Cape Campbell I have recently encountered over 40 species of birds. Time of tide, daylight, and the places seaweed has been washed up all influence where the birds feed and rest. The gulls (Red-billed, Black-backed), terns (Black-fronted, White-fronted, Caspian), and shags (Pied, Little, Spotted, Black) visit daily, arriving with the sun and leaving as it goes down. I wonder where they go? The oystercatchers (VOS, SIPO), White-faced Herons, Banded Dotterels and Ruddy Turnstones stay the night, having stretches of coast, reefs and bays that they prefer at different times of tide. It has been interesting watching the Black-fronted Terns resting facing into wind, and the Banded Dotterels and oystercatchers shelter among the dry seaweed and driftwood.

The odd Northern Giant Petrel, Little Penguin, Australasian Gannet, Lesser Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit have visited. Since mid-April some species have been on the move. The number of Ruddy Turnstones has reduced. Swamp Harriers have flocked up in groups of 10-12, some heading off across the sea in the direction of the Wairarapa.

Welcome Swallows have flown out of the hills and followed the coast north and west. I encountered as a single flock of shearwaters with over 8,000 birds flying north. Sacred Kingfishers have arrived from inland and more recently flocks of Redpoll and Cirl Bunting have joined the resident flocks of Goldfinch and Greenfinch. There are NZ Pipits

and Skylarks all along the coast that feed both in the pasture and the beach. The Banded Dotterels and a pair of Paradise Shelduck also feed on pasture and coast.

Interestingly, I haven't seen any Black-billed Gulls, perhaps because there are no freshwater streams running with the dry conditions. The Red-billed Gulls, Ruddy Turnstones, herons, oystercatchers and Banded Dotterels all spend a lot of time feeding in the seaweed. The Cape is a great place to come to see birds, and with a scope the lighthouse provides a great platform for viewing birds out at sea.

- HEATHER DAVIES

CANTERBURY

There have been a variety of interesting sightings recently around Canterbury. In early August, a Whio/Blue Duck was seen on Horseshoe Lake, on the road to Lewis Pass. Horseshoe Lake is not the kind of place that you'd expect to find a Whio/Blue Duck, so this was a particularly unexpected sighting. Another interesting sighting in more northern Canterbury was of a Yellow-Eyed Penguin/Hoiho seen briefly at South Bay, Kaikoura.

While the NZ Dabchicks appear to have left Pegasus Wetlands, they have been replaced by another notable bird in the form of a Northern Shoveler. While the Northern Shoveler was first seen on the wetlands above Tiritiri Moana Drive, it was last seen further down the wetland. In nearby Kaiapoi, Marsh Crakes are still being regularly seen near the Waimakariri River. There has even been a report of 4 Marsh Crakes being seen there on the same visit. In Christchurch itself, a NZ Falcon continues to be reported, often near the Botanic Gardens and Hagley Park. The Cape Barren Goose at Travis Wetlands continues to be seen, and there have recently also been sightings of Cape Barren Goose at St. Anne's Lagoon.

Our June meeting started off with Canterbury's AGM, postponed from March. We also held a photography competition which everyone enjoyed. In July, Dan Burgin from the NZ Bird Atlas team talked to us via Zoom. Although an online speaker was something new for us, the evening ran very smoothly. One benefit was that it allowed people to listen in from the comfort of their own homes and gave members further afield in Canterbury the chance to participate. Dan gave us a great update about how the Atlas project is going in Canterbury, plus some tips on getting the most out of eBird.

- ELEANOR GUNBY

OTAGO

Winter feels short in Otago with flowers blooming early in many gardens, bringing a range of native birds into visibility and onto the front page of the newspaper with our Regional Representative Mary Thompson quoted. During June, at the completion of the first full year of the Atlas, 251 squares (72%) in Otago had at least some coverage from 4,489 visits. Progress continued during Winter with at least some coverage from 254 squares, close to 73%. Otago continued Atlas field trips with 2 taking place since the lockdown, which recorded 42 and 45 species. Everyone involved was enthusiastic and there have

been some new learners who have benefitted hugely from the training provided.

The winter wader count took place on 5/7. A total of 388 Bar-tailed Godwits were counted which is close to three times the number recorded overwintering in the previous 2 winter counts. The most numerous wader recorded was SIPO (1,370), followed by VOCs (160), Banded Dotterel (155), Pied Stilt (152), and Spur-winged Plover (66). Winter observations of interest included: Black Swans with cygnets at 3 locations; Royal Spoonbills overwintering at Tahakopa estuary; 2 Caspian Terns at Titri, Waiholo; Marsh Crake and 23 Australasian Crested Grebe at Lake Hayes and another at Broad Bay Otago Harbour; 2 observations of intermediate Bronze/Pied morph Otago Shags; a leucistic House Sparrow; unmistakable flying parakeets of unidentified species (perhaps introduced?) north of Dunedin; 373 NZ Scaup at Balclutha lagoon; 200 Silvereyes in Orangapai; and over 32 Kereru near Dunedin Botanic Gardens.

World Albatross Day was celebrated on 19/6 and Monarch Wildlife Tours offered a special trip off Taiaroa Head, where at least 6 species of albatross were seen. Indoor meetings have been popular since the end of lockdown and the local AGM was held on 22/7.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

SOUTHLAND

While our sightings were a bit few and far between during Lockdown Alert Level 3, I did manage to spot our lone Mute Swan on 9/5 in the Waihopai River. A Kaka turned up in South Invercargill in Milford St. on 14/5, possibly a visitor from Stewart Island. A lone female Chestnut-breasted Shelduck was spied by Oscar Thomas in the Tip Lagoon on 16/5, and a pair was seen there on 21/5. Pete McClelland photographed a Morepork on 4/6 in suburban Arthur Street.

Our regular visiting White Heron turned up in the Tip Lagoon on 13/6 but did not stay long unlike previous years, while another species, an Australasian Coot, was seen by Sean Jacques on 18/6 at the Clifton water treatment ponds. Marsh Crakes have been seen several times in the Tip Lagoon and nearby areas where it is presumed that they breed. One was seen feeding on 19/6 in the lagoon while another sighting in jointed rush in the New River Estuary was the first sighting in this area. At the shellbanks we did an Atlas count and were delighted to see a flock of 11 Red-necked Stint, which made wading through an ice-covered channel worth the effort.

Our June winter wader count turned up a couple of nice surprises with an Australasian Crested Grebe at Fortrose seen by Lloyd Esler and a Black Stilt at Riverton Estuary reported by Neil Robertson and Shawn Herron. We had more people available for this count than any other time I can remember. The Common Greenshank was still at Riverton Estuary on 27/6 seen by Paul and Sean Jacques. Oscar Thomas and Fraser Gurney were rewarded for their journey south when they managed a fleeting look at it on 3/7, and finally an off-course Kerguelan Petrel was found storm-wrecked inland in Southland but still alive and sent into care at a Dunedin wildlife hospital.

- PHIL RHODES



1. Black Noddy on Milford Beach (North Shore)/Brian Kuan. 2. Pallid Cuckoo near Collingwood/Bradley Shields. 3. Oriental Cuckoo near Collingwood/Reuben Swafford. 4. Australian Tree Martin on Farewell Spit/Steve Wood. 5. White-throated Noddy on Farewell Spit/Steve Wood. 6. Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Kaitorete Spit/Greg McKenzie. 7. Kerguelen Petrel found at Murihiku/Sean Jacques. 8. Red-tailed Tropicbird/NZ Bird Rescue Charitable Trust, Green Bay.

Bird News

Some of these sightings have not received official acceptance by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee (1st November 2019 to 1st August 2020).

New Zealand Dabchick continued moving south in 2020. A pair bred on Killarney Lake (Takaka) producing a chick to maturity from 12/12 to 10/2. Further south, 4 were at Wakapuaka Oxidation Ponds “one day at the end of May”. Even further south, 2 were at Pegasus wetlands near Christchurch (6-20/5). And even further south 2 ‘probable’ NZ Dabchicks were seen on Lake Ellesmere on 28/6 and 10/7. Two juvenile and 2 adult **Hoary-headed Grebe** were at Lake Elterwater (Marlborough) on 18/11, followed by 3 adults with “1 or 2 well-grown juveniles” on 13/12, confirming that breeding took place for a second year.

Chestnut-breasted Shelduck were at Tip Lagoon, Invercargill, from 26/11 to 12/3, with up to 6 reported there. Only one **Plumed Whistling Duck** has been reported at Anderson Park (Taradale) since 29/12. Nine **Australian Wood Duck** comprising a pair with 3 ducklings, another pair with 1 duckling, and another adult was seen at the Playhouse Café ponds near Mapua on 21/11, and a **White-eyed Duck** was at Blenheim WTP on 5/4 and 29/4. A **Northern Shoveler** turned up at Waituna Lagoon (Southland) on 16/11, another one at Pegasus wetlands on 27-28/5, and another at Lake Rotomahana inlet (Rotorua) on 19/7. The Renwick **Black Kite** has not been reported since 25/1/19. However, another was seen at Kaikoura Flat 22/12/19, and then another at Patetonga (Waikato) on 12/2.

A **Yellow-eyed Penguin** was seen at Akaroa Harbour entrance on 28/11. Another was on Kaikoura Peninsula from 16/2 to 25/2, and another at Moeraki Bay (7/3). An **Eastern Rockhopper Penguin** was photographed at Nugget Point (2/2). An **Erect-crested Penguin** came ashore at Foxton Beach on 25/2, a **Royal Penguin** found on Codfish Island was taken into care (12/3), and an Erect-crested Penguin and a **Snares Crested Penguin** were released back into the wild on Otago Peninsula on 19/3.

A **White-naped Petrel** was found at Patoka (Hawke's Bay) on 22/1. A **Wedge-tailed Shearwater**, a White-naped Petrel, 4 **Black-winged Petrels** and a **Wilson's Storm Petrel** were seen out past the Poor Knights Islands on 17/2. A white morph **Southern Giant Petrel** was seen off Plimmerton on 25/5, and then another off the south Wellington coast on 28/6. A storm-wrecked **Kerguelen Petrel** found at Murihiku (Otago) on 23/7 was taken into care in Dunedin and released a few days later. A dozen **Grey Petrel** were seen on a pelagic trip off Gisborne on 25/7. A **Brown Booby** was seen roosting at the Muriwai gannet colony from 3/1 to 29/1, and then a second bird was photographed there on 22/2. A **Great Frigatebird** was seen near Tuhua (BoP) on 24/4, and a **Red-tailed Tropicbird/Amokura** was taken into care in Auckland on 27/3.

A promising report was a possible **Ruff** (Reeve) seen at Piako Floodplain on 28/6. A **Common Greenshank** was at Lake Ellesmere on 30/12 before one was repeatedly seen at Riverton Estuary in Southland (3/5-3/7). A **Sanderling** was at Awarua Bay on 29/12. The long-staying Sanderling was last seen at the Ashley

Estuary on 9/2. Then one was seen on the South Manukau on 9/6. A possible **Latham's Snipe** was reported at Upper Waiwera on 7/6. A **Greater Sand Plover** found at Lake Ellesmere on 14/10 was present until 25/11, and a **Lesser Sand Plover** was a Miranda on 14/1. A **Great Knot** on Motueka Sandspit on 27/4 was a first record for the site. A **Terek Sandpiper** was seen at Mangere repeatedly from 19/1 to 12/5. A **Common Sandpiper** was reported at Omaha Spit on 19/10 and then one was photographed at Waipu on 24/12/19, possibly the same bird? A **Buff-bellied Sandpiper** was found at Ashley Estuary on 19/11. Probably the same bird was found on Kaitorete Spit on 22/12 where it stayed to 12/3.

An unusual record was a **Brown Skua** at the Muriwai gannet colony on 13/2; also unusual was a **Black Noddy** at Milford Beach (North Shore) on 6/1. An adult **Sooty Tern** defending a nest with two chicks was at the Three Kings Islands on 27/2. Southland member Glenda Rees found a **Gull-billed Tern** pair with one bird sitting on a nest with 3 eggs at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 21/12. She found only 1 adult present and the nest empty on 4/1, and reported “tyre tracks close to where the nest was”. A Gull-billed Tern was at Motueka Sandspit 7/4, 23/5 and 6/6, and one was seen briefly at Foxton Beach on 2/6. A **White-winged Black Tern** seen at Napier's Southern Marsh on 20/12 was joined by a second bird there on 3/12 and 5/1/20, and a **Whiskered Tern** was seen roosting at Balclutha on 31/1.

A notable record was an **Eastern Barn Owl** in suburban Palmerston North on 8/4. There was something akin to a **White-throated Noddy** ‘invasion’ over summer. One was reported at the Poor Knights Islands on 5/12. Then Steve Wood photographed one at Farewell Spit lighthouse on 14/12. Two months later Steve Wood reported 80 to 100+ White-throated Noddies flying over his Upper Moutere (Nelson) property on 13/2. Over the following week he recorded (with photographs) 4 there on 16/2, 25 on 18/2, and 20+ on 20/2. Following this, ‘8 or 9’ were reported at Rapaura Road (Marlborough) on 4/3. Another 4 were reported on Stewart Island on 12/3. Steve Wood photographed an **Australian Tree Martin** at Farewell Spit lighthouse, also on 14/12, and Sav Saville found another at Wolfe's Road, Lake Ellesmere, on 17/2 that was seen again on 20/2. A **Tree/Fairy Martin** was reported at Bromley Oxidation Ponds, Christchurch, on 30/12 and a possible **Pacific Swift** was reported at Te Atatu in Auckland 22/3.

A juvenile **Pallid Cuckoo** seen at Rockville Hall, Collingwood, from 5-13/12, was remarkable enough, but an **Oriental Cuckoo** was also present nearby that stayed from 5-11/12. Then a probable **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** was reported in Haast Pass on 20/2.

A dead **Common Myna** was found near Wellington airport (8/1), and there were reports of 2 Common Mynas at Okiwi Bay (23/2) and 1 at Tuamarina Pond in Marlborough (12/3). The nearest breeding records are from Foxton (Manawatu), so these birds could be part of a colonisation of the South Island. The long-staying Common Myna was still present in New Brighton, Christchurch, on 16/7.

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



GALAPAGOS OF THE SOUTH

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— MICHAEL HARRIS

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SUBANTARCTIC WONDERS

“THIS IS ONE OF THOSE ULTIMATE TRIPS”

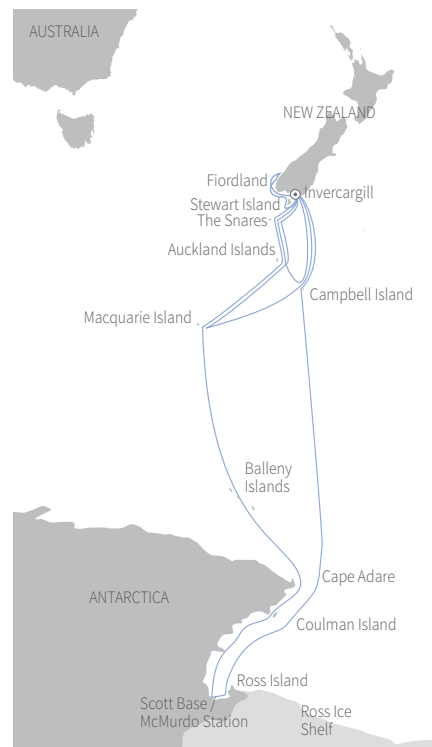
— VERONA VELTMAN

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