

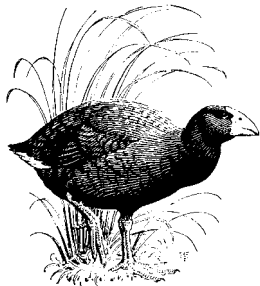


No. 5 March 2015

# ***Birds New Zealand***



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



# Birds New Zealand



NO. 5 MARCH 2015



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## QUOTE

Ko te reoreo a kea ki uta, ko te whakataki  
mai a toroa ki tai, he kotuku ki te raki, he  
kakapo ki te whenua.

"The voice of the Kea is heard inland, the  
cry of the albatross is heard at sea, a Kotuku  
in the sky, a Kakapo on the ground"  
Meaning: Everything has its rightful place.

*This whakatauki (proverb) was used  
for the Waitangi 175 commemorations,  
marking 175 years since the signing of the  
Treaty of Waitangi.*

## COVER PHOTOS

Front and Back covers: New Zealand  
Dotterels at Cable Bay, Doubtless Bay,  
Northland. Both photos by  
Rebecca Bowater FPSNZ AFIAP



## PUBLISHERS

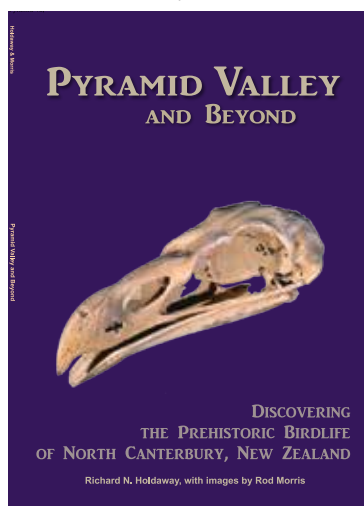
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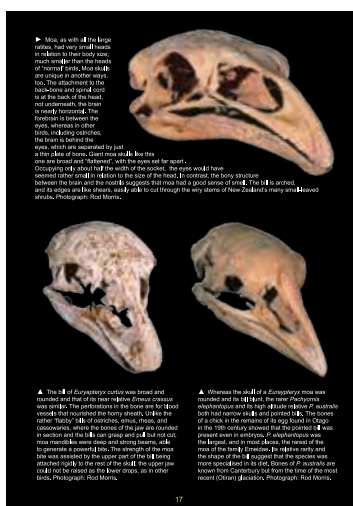
Articles for inclusion in *Birds New Zealand*  
are welcome in any form, though electronic is  
preferred. Material should be related to birds,  
birdwatchers, or ornithologists in the New  
Zealand and Pacific region, and can include  
news on birds, members, activities and bird  
study, literature/product reviews, letters to the  
editor, birdwatching sites, and identification.  
Illustrations are especially welcome, though they  
must be sharp. Copy deadlines are 10th February,  
May and August, and 1st November. The views  
expressed by the contributors to this publication  
do not necessarily represent those of the  
Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc.

## NEW BOOK

The birds of North Canterbury  
as you have never seen them before



Front cover



Sample page

A4, 44 pages, full colour, soft cover.

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For every copy sold via *Birds New Zealand* or the Birds New Zealand website,  
25 cents will be donated to the Birds New Zealand Projects Assistance Fund.



# President's Report

Vice President Bruce McKinlay and I have recently returned from Japan. Bruce was representing the New Zealand Government at the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership meeting and I was representing the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. The flyway partnership is an informal and voluntary initiative which aims to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them. Partners include governments, inter-governmental agencies, international non-government organisations and the international business sector.

Following the meeting Bruce and I hired a car and, accompanied by a person from Birdlife International, undertook birding in Hokkaido which is in the north of Japan. It is of course in the middle of winter there and to make matters worse we were caught in one of the biggest snow storms the area has seen for several years. However we still managed to see some amazing birds and visit interesting places. That is one of the reasons that I enjoy bird watching because it can be undertaken anywhere in the world and also leads you to places that normally tourists would not get to visit.

## Facebook Page

The Society's Facebook page started several years ago by Sheelagh Leary as a means of communicating information about our organisation. This Facebook page now has over 650 followers, many of whom are not members but obviously have an interest in birds and I believe that we need to foster that interest until they eventually decide to join as members.

This page is now moderated by Bruce McKinlay and Katherine Steed and contains many interesting articles.

## Annual General Meeting Weekend

I urge members to get their registrations in for the conference and annual meeting weekend which this year will be rather special being a celebration of the 75th year of the Society. Actually that reminds me that I have not yet registered, but will do so over the next week or so.

I have had three members contact me picking up on my challenge to identify people who have been members longer than my personal 50 years. These were Jill Hamill, Stuart Chambers and Hugh Clifford. I know that there are others and it would be great to identify them so that they can be acknowledged at the annual meeting. I urge anyone that has been a long time member to contact me at [president@osnz.org.nz](mailto:president@osnz.org.nz).

## Student Support

At the December Council meeting there was overwhelming support to investigate ways of encouraging students to participate in Society activities. This is one of the key outcomes of the strategic plan that was also discussed at the meeting.

On behalf of Council I have contacted all the Regional Representatives encouraging them to support any students who wish to attend the annual meeting. Council believes that involvement will lead to membership and support of the Society.

Council also agreed that a student representative would be appointed now that Stephanie Grosser has been elected to Council. Following a call for a student representative Council has decided to appoint Lotte van Ginkel as a student representative. I encourage any student members to get their contact details either directly to Lotte or provide them to Ingrid who can pass them on. There are some outstanding ornithological students in New Zealand universities and Council believes that you really can make a valuable and important contribution to the Society, in the present and into the future.

## Member Survey

There has been pressure on Council to investigate additional membership levels including an option to not receive the journal *Notornis*. Council is hampered in considering the implications of changes in the membership categories because of a lack of demographic information about our members.

Council has therefore decided to undertake a short survey to gather some basic information and preferences for receiving our publications. This short survey is included with this copy of *Birds New Zealand* and I encourage all members to complete this form and return it by the due date. This will give the Council more information on which to base future decisions, particularly around membership levels.

## Field Guide

The new edition of the field guide is now with the printers following the completion of proof reading and preparation of the illustrations. This will be a substantially updated version of the field guide with most of the text re-written and a number of new illustrations to incorporate the additional birds accepted onto the New Zealand list.

It is hoped that this book will be launched at the annual meeting weekend, as we believe that is an appropriate way to celebrate our 75th year.

## Location Maps

The Society is also in the final stages of preparing a series of six maps identifying the 120 main easily-accessible birding sites in New Zealand.

This is a project that was mooted many years ago when Nick Allen accepted the challenge and visited the sites so that he could prepare easily understood directions. It is also hoped that these series of maps will be able to be launched at the annual meeting as well.

## Brochure

Keith Woodley is working on an update of the membership brochure and this is also intended to be available at the Annual General Meeting. This brochure will provide a key piece of the strategic drive for new members and the dissemination of information about the Society.

There is clearly an interest in birds in the wider community and we need the tools to raise our profile.

## Website

The Society website is another one of the tools that are essential for the dissemination of information in this era of computers. This site has been established with a very generous donation and as a source of information it is of great pride to me and Council. However that information is of little use if it is not utilised and I therefore encourage members to not only visit the site to gain information but also encourage others with an interest in birds to visit the site.

The site address is [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz).

Another very informative site is [www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz). This is a widely-used mechanism for informing people about birds and there are many examples of its use by government and local authorities and other organisations. The site has a huge number of hits on a daily and monthly basis, demonstrating again the interest in birds in the wider community.

## Teen Camp

As mentioned in my previous report Sharon Alderson and the project and activities committee have organised a camp for

teens on Mana Island from the 7th to the 11th of April 2015. This is an opportunity for teens to get a hands on experience with birds and develop skills in bird ecology. If there is interest then visit the Society website and obtain further information.

I often hear stories about the very instructive field camps of the old days and the impression that these made on participants. This is another opportunity for young people to receive the grounding that hopefully will trigger an interest for the rest of their lives.

Richard Holdaway has now donated to the Society some tents that he had for one of his exploration projects some years ago. This will give the committee the opportunity in the future of having a camping base to take the field course into areas without buildings, which will increase flexibility. We thank Richard for this generous donation.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

## New Members

*A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:*

Lynne Anderson (Hawkes Bay); Nathan Arcus (Northland); Hinewai Bell (Marlborough); Karen Bell (Marlborough); Paul Bell (Marlborough); Dianne Boundy (Far North); Kimberley Collins (Wellington); Adam Cross (Auckland); Andrew Frost (Marlborough); Darren Gash (Northland); Jenny Gillanders (Northland); Mike Graham (Auckland); Megan Jolly (Manawatu); Sarah Knight (Northland); Carolina Lara Mendoza (Auckland); Carlos Lara (Otago); Wayne Linklater (Wellington); Ben Lovell (Northland); Bridget Makan (Wellington); John Podd (Manawatu); Lisa Read, RNZAF Base (Auckland); Stephen Samson (Auckland); Hayley Sharp (Northland); Paul Shaw (Northland); Paul Shortis (Wairarapa); Danielle Sijbranda (Waikato); Alastair and Helen Thompson (Hawkes Bay); Michael Thorsen (Otago); Antoinette Vujnovich (Auckland).

## Donations

*We thank the following members for their generous donations to the Society:*

Sharon Alderson; Nicholas Allen; Neil J. Andrews; Francie Betts; Steve Braunias; Anthony Carey; C. Carter; Jack Davidson; Geoff de Lisle; Enviro Research Ltd; Michael Fitzgerald; Jill Hamel; Jillian Hanna; Graham I Hunt; James F Hunter; Ted Kirk; Noel Knight; Stuart Laurenson; Marion A Macbeth; Alva McAdam; Kevin Parker; C. John Ralph; Benjamin Rodriguez; Jenny Ross; Ian Roxburgh; Hayley Sharp; Shona Smith; Heather Smithers; Sue Stubenvoll; Kath Varcoe.

## Birds New Zealand AGM & Conference 2015

The Birds New Zealand AGM and Conference 2015 will be held in Blenheim during Queen's Birthday weekend 2015 (Friday 29th May to Monday 1st June 2015). All events and meals will take place at the Marlborough Convention Centre (42a Alfred Street, Blenheim) and the Scenic Hotel Marlborough (65 Alfred Street, Blenheim) unless stated otherwise.

29th May (Friday):

4-6pm Registration (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

30th May (Saturday):

8-9am Registration (Marlborough Convention Centre)

9am-4pm Scientific Day: Day 1 (Marlborough Convention Centre)

4-6pm Birds NZ AGM (Marlborough Convention Centre)

6-7pm Happy Hour (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

Followed by an Informal Dinner (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

31st May (Sunday):

8-9am Registration (Marlborough Convention Centre)

9am-4pm Scientific Day: Day 2 (Marlborough Convention Centre)

4-6pm Open mike and Social (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

6-7pm Happy Hour (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

7pm onwards Conference Dinner (Marlborough Convention Centre)

1st June (Monday):

Field trips (departing from Marlborough Convention Centre)

Please refer to the online registration form on the Birds New Zealand website ([www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)).

## Membership Survey

### — we need your feedback!

Included with this edition of *Birds New Zealand* is a short membership survey, which is designed to gather information about member's expectations in regards to *Notornis* paper copies and membership subscription options. We urge you to complete this survey and provide Council with your feedback so it can be implemented in the strategic planning process. Council will report the results of this survey and a recommended course of action to the Society's AGM in June.

New Zealand members can either use the questionnaire included in this posting and return by Freepost, or download it from [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz) and email to [eo@osnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@osnz.org.nz) by 20th April 2015. Overseas and family members please download and return the questionnaire by email.

## Nominations for Regional Representative 2016

Each RR serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, though incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms.

Nominations for the RR of each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040) on 31st July 2015.

The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a member of the Society.

If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2016 year.

### Request for Missing Back Issues and Indexes of *Notornis* 2005-2011

If any member has the following eleven issues available and "surplus to requirements", Sandy Bartle would be grateful if you could please email him at [sandy.bartle@inspire.co.nz](mailto:sandy.bartle@inspire.co.nz). He is missing the following issues which are no longer available: Volume 53 (4) and index; Volume 54 (1-4) and index; Volume 55 (1-4); Volume 56 (4 only); Volume 58 (2 only); indexes to volumes 52 and volume 60. He is prepared to pay a reasonable price for all of these.

# Let's Band Together to Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day!

International Migratory Bird Day is a day that is dedicated to celebrating the migration of nearly 350 bird species that travel throughout the Americas ([www.birdday.org](http://www.birdday.org)). It is observed on the second Saturday of May. This year's theme is Restore Habitat, Restore Birds. Habitat loss and degradation threatens many of our native bird populations, so I say that this year we add to the geographic scope of International Migratory Bird Day and celebrate it here in New Zealand! In particular, I suggest we celebrate the 26 bird species, most of whom are migratory, that nest on our braided river systems. Braided rivers are under stress from introduced vegetation, water use practices, pollution, and riverbed work. Such pressures put strain on the entire ecosystem and many of its residents are under threat. This includes numerous endemic species, such as Black-billed Gulls (Nationally Critical), Black-fronted Terns (Nationally Endangered), Black Stilts (Nationally Critical), and Wrybills (Nationally Vulnerable). It is likely that these birds also face challenges on their wintering grounds, however, in many cases there is not a lot known about their habits once they leave their breeding grounds. Fortunately, there has been a strong effort by numerous researchers to colour band many of these birds that call riverbeds their home.

As a way of celebrating International Migratory Bird Day, this May 9th, I'll be out birding with a purpose. My family and I will be heading to Waikanae Estuary in search of banded birds. Resight data, such as these, help illuminate movement patterns of bird populations. They also enable scientists to estimate key parameters, such as survival rates and population size, which are essential for conservation planning. So I invite you to celebrate International Migratory Bird Day by visiting coastal areas in your regions to look for banded birds. If you are unsure of where to go contact your Birds New Zealand regional representative and they should be able to make suggestions.

If you see a bird with colour bands it is important to record the exact position of each band (e.g., left leg: metal above the knee, nothing below, right leg: nothing above the knee, yellow over blue below the knee), or better yet, take a photo. If you are really patient and up for a challenge and you see a bird that has only a metal band you might still be able to read the numbers written on it with a spotting scope or binoculars, just be sure not to harass the bird in your efforts. When you get home, report your sighting to our National Banding Office using the website below and we will inform the bander of the sighting and let you know any information we have about the bird.

SARAH JAMIESON

Banding Officer, Department of Conservation



▲ Sarah Jamieson banding.

To report a banded bird: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/bird-banding/reporting-a-bird-band/>

For more information about our braided rivers: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/documents/conservation/native-animals/birds/sea-and-shore/life-on-a-braided-river.pdf>  
<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/land-and-freshwater/Freshwater/PRR/conservation-braided-river-birds.pdf>

## Masterton's Urban Falcons

Masterton's Queen Elizabeth II Park has resident New Zealand Falcons. A few of us have been following them for a while and the questions have been:

1. Where does the male go when we see the female only?
2. More worryingly, what might happen if they start breeding by the paddle boats (where we keep seeing them) and decide, "This is our patch! All you lot, out!"?

So Tony Silbery of DOC and I started some conversations on a Monday, that started some more conversations. By Thursday afternoon we had a pool of information that told us:

These falcons have been living AND BREEDING in the park for two to three years. Yippee and Phew! Lower the potential aggro alert. And how wonderful to have these glorious birds in our midst.

There are three, not two, in all likelihood. Mum, dad, and daughter is probably the reason for the lone female sightings and my photos of a lone lady preening after her bath on Monday. It also probably explains the recent visit to Colin Sladden's fruit trees by three falcons.

Park staff have observed anecdotally that rabbit and feral pigeon populations are down. So too are the Turtle Doves released to fly around rather than in the park aviary. Tony's suggestion; "Time to restock the buffet."



Some planning to keep a protective eye on these beautiful citizens can be done along with some public education and appreciation. The point is, however, we weren't at this point a week previously. It was only by people being willing to add small contributions together that we have the picture outlined above. By Monday we had pinpointed the nesting site. Just another observation that didn't seem much to someone at the time, but a dead chick at the base of the right sort of tree. Soon after that a favoured tree for perching in while munching Turtle Doves was noticed. Citizen science works.

For a while some arboriculture, necessary for public safety, kept things quiet on the falcon front, but we are reliably informed that they are back in town.

ROBIN LIST



## Foraging areas and behaviours of a managed Hutton's Shearwater colony on the Kaikoura Peninsula

The Hutton's Shearwater Trust has been working tirelessly since October 2008 to conserve the endangered Hutton's Shearwater/Titi (*Puffinus huttoni*) that is endemic to the Kaikoura region. The decline in the number of Hutton's Shearwater colonies in this region, in combination with the decline noted in the Red-billed Gulls in the same region (note report on website from Jim Mills' work and Mills et al. 2008) brings urgency to further study the Kaikoura coastal productivity and to understanding the foraging behaviours of these important seabirds.

Understanding seabird diet is particularly important for the conservation and management of a species, as food availability is dependent on environmental conditions that can affect the temporal and spatial distribution of prey species and in turn affect breeding and chick rearing. These conditions can lead to a mismatch in resources and cause low growth rates, low fledging success and high chick mortality. To date, very little is known about the diet of the Hutton's Shearwater, and the studies available have been based only on gut content found within dead carcasses.

The Birds New Zealand Research Fund has allowed the purchase of monitoring loggers (depth, temperature, wet/dry and time). These will be used to assess the daily foraging behaviour of Hutton's Shearwater adults from the Kaikoura Te Rae o Atiu Peninsula colony. These loggers will allow the construction of an accurate activity budget and maximum diving depth.

With the miniaturisation of technology we are now able to investigate activities and behaviour of species that can potentially forage kilometres offshore. Traditionally this has caused great problems in assessing their daily activities, which may include time spent flying, diving, and resting on the sea surface but also time spent in the colony.

The data collected by the loggers will be integrated with stable isotope analysis of the bird's feathers and the Kaikoura nearshore food-web (fish and plankton) to investigate the birds' potential diet. These are vital resources given the diverse marine habitats surrounding the Kaikoura Peninsula. We are very grateful to Birds New Zealand for the opportunity to track these birds.

DELLA BENNET  
(MSC student)  
University of  
Canterbury  
Foundation

■ Della Bennet collecting larval fish and plankton samples for stable isotope analysis.



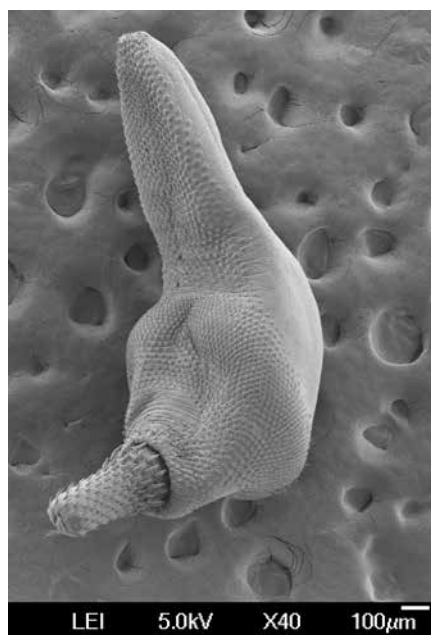
## Parasites in bird faecal samples

The Evolutionary and Ecological Parasitology Research Group at the University of Otago research freshwater and marine parasites with complex life cycles (i.e. requiring several different host species to grow and reproduce), looking at their evolution and ecology as well as their impacts on wildlife. Many parasites use a range of bird species as definitive hosts (i.e. the host where they mature and reproduce). These parasites can have serious pathological effects on birds, inducing high mortality rates during peaks of infection. Unfortunately, very little information exists on bird parasites in New Zealand. Even the basic question "What parasite species infect which bird species?" remains mostly unanswered.

Many parasites live in the gastrointestinal tract of their bird hosts, and acquiring information on the parasite species infecting birds usually requires sacrificing birds for dissection. However, infection levels can be evaluated by counting and identifying parasite eggs in bird faeces. Traditional methods for counting parasite eggs in faeces of birds or animals are time consuming and strenuous. They are designed for counting eggs of known parasites in agricultural samples, not for identification purposes. However, a novel egg flotation device and counting method, developed by Menixis Ltd, in partnership with the Centre for Innovation (University of Otago), could save considerable time, and ultimately money, but has not yet been tested on parasites from bird faeces. It has the advantage of separating parasite eggs from faecal samples so that these could be used for molecular and morphological identification, and it can potentially be used in the field as a quick and cheap method of screening birds or other animals for parasites. We will compare the efficiency and reliability of a classical faecal egg count method with the new flotation method and, if the latter proves successful in our trials, it could be applied on a larger scale for identifying areas of high parasite infection and bird species at risk of parasitic diseases. In cases of mass bird mortality or sickness, this could be an invaluable tool for diagnosis of parasite pathogens.

At a number of marine and freshwater sites we will focus our study on water birds, since these are particularly susceptible to parasite infection and usually yield a large number and variety of intestinal worms. In addition to evaluation the Menixis

device, lists of parasite taxa and data on quantitative infection levels will be compiled for every bird species.



■ Scanning electron micrograph of an undescribed acanthocephalan parasite discovered recently in the intestine of a Stewart Island shag.

# Determining the Population Status of Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*) on Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island

Endemic to New Zealand, the Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*) is a globally vulnerable seabird that breeds on just two islands, Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island (Aotea) in the Hauraki Gulf of northern New Zealand. Black Petrels are killed in long-line and trawl fisheries within the New Zealand Exclusive Economic Zone and overseas, with birds being caught on both recreational and commercial vessels, particularly in northern New Zealand and the Hauraki Gulf. The Black Petrel is recognised as the seabird species most at risk from commercial fishing activities.

Along with a number of collaborators and able field assistants (many from Birds New Zealand) and funding support from Department of Conservation, Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), Guardians of the Sea Charitable Trust and Birds New Zealand's project assistance fund, I am working with Black Petrels on Hauturu as well as Great Barrier Island this season. Although presumed to be recovering following the eradication of feral cats and kiore, the current status and population trend of Black Petrels on Hauturu are unknown. Building on what we know from the long-term Black Petrel study on Great Barrier Island and earlier Black Petrel work by Mike Imber on Hauturu, our project will ascertain the current status of the Black Petrels on Hauturu by using three methods: acoustic recorders, burrow monitoring and random surveys across the island and comparing this information with the earlier information.

I look forward to being able to share the outcomes of this project with all members of Birds New Zealand, DOC, MPI, Guardians of the Sea Charitable Trust and the wider scientific community.

ELIZABETH BELL

Wildlife Management International Ltd,  
PO Box 607, Blenheim 7240  
biz@wmil.co.nz



■ Elizabeth Bell working with a Black Petrel. (Paul Garner-Richards WMIL)

■ Black Petrel. (Dave Boyle WMIL)



## Joining Birds New Zealand

If you are reading this but are not a member of Birds New Zealand you would be very welcome to join us. Our membership consists of the whole spectrum of people interested in New Zealand/South Pacific birds from beginners with just an interest through keen birdwatchers and amateur ornithologists to professional ornithologists, so you should find others of a similar level to you, or find resources that are of interest to you.

For our very reasonable subscription fee of \$70 (students pay just \$35.00 and overseas/corporate rates etc. are also available) you will receive a quarterly issue of this magazine *Birds New Zealand*, which is the Society's main mouthpiece to members, has articles of bird/ornithological interest and both national and local news; a quarterly issue of *Notornis*, the Society's scientific journal; and from time to time either free or discounted major Society publications.

In addition to reading material and, with time, a useful collection of reference books, members have access to meetings, both indoor and in the field, on a national and regional basis providing opportunities to gain knowledge on birds/ornithology and learning practical skills whilst networking



with knowledgeable people. Our extensive library of books and journals is open for members to borrow and view items. Members are also encouraged to provide data to the Society's schemes, and supply sightings to the eBird online reporting tool. These data provide information on which research may be conducted, often with conclusions relevant to decision-making processes on the conservation of birds.

For further details and/or a membership form you should take one of three actions:

- Visit the Society's website [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)
- Contact the Society's membership secretary.
- Contact your nearest regional representative.

# Learning Five Minute Bird Counts

I've been subjected to some friendly teasing from friends and family, who find it amusing that I just spent two days on a bird counting course. "How hard can it be?" they laugh, counting off 1-2-3 on their fingers. I admit even I can see the amusing side. Picture this, a dozen adults standing in a rough circle not on a track or in a clearing but right in amongst the tree trunks, deep in the ferns, poked by branches, barely able to see a bird for the trees. Each clutches a clipboard. A series of strange scenes ensue. Eyes shut, ears cocked, they point in seemingly random directions. Then eyes open but utterly silent they turn their heads this way and that all the while scratching away with their pencils on the clipboards.

We were standing like this just metres from the path, a tramper walked past head down, a Bellbird call trills out loudly from one of speakers our tutor has hidden, still he doesn't look up. What a fright he'd have got if he'd looked up and seen our silent coven standing still amongst the trees.

I've put my teasers in their place, explaining the intricacies of the five minute bird count technique, which was the subject of the course. A Wellington Birds New Zealand newsletter drew the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) course to my attention just at the right time. I'd already been buddied up with an experienced bird counter to learn about the Birds New Zealand five minute bird counts at Zealandia. And although I knew a good number of bird calls, I soon realised that knowing calls and counting them are two very different things. The counting involves intense attention to both sight and sound, identifying glimpses of fluttering as a particular species while simultaneously listening to calls from many different directions.

The free NMIT five minute bird count course is held at different venues throughout the country. I attended one held at Holdsworth Lodge. Most of the participants were DOC staff, all of whom were about to take part in Project Kaka bird counts. But there were a couple of other non-DOC participants: one a volunteer like me, the other a Regional Council staff member. The course was a good mixture of theory and practice. I found the different ways of recording useful, particularly the idea of doing a quick sketch which showed the directions that the bird sounds came from, a neat way to avoid confusion as to whether it was the same bird calling again.

I'd wondered how the instructors could be sure we'd see and hear enough birds, but that was easily solved. They came equipped with a sound system that they hid in the bush to play recorded bird noises. Initially I was disappointed to discover that the course only covered the 10 most common bush birds, but I soon realised this was a good starting point and that the techniques for learning the calls could easily be applied to learning other bird calls.

The module we used for learning about the 10 most common bush birds is available online on the DOC website (as is a lot of the other material used on the course) and this might be enough for some people wanting to refresh their skills. But for me, I felt that attending the course really accelerated my observation skills and knowing that I would be tested kept me focussed. I also enjoyed learning as part of a group, sharing experiences and knowledge and learning more about other conservation projects such as Project Kaka. I'd recommend the course to anyone committed to getting started with five minute bird counts.

For more information on the course see <http://www.nmit.ac.nz/programmes-and-courses/a-z-of-study-areas/conservation/conservation-field-skills-training-schemes/#Conservbioassets>

For the online module on identifying the 10 most common forest birds see <http://www.doc.govt.nz/global/training-courses/bird-id/birds.html>

GILLIAN CANDLER

# Flyway Tui

We have a property at Kereru, Hawke's Bay, being about 35 km west of Napier and 30 km west of Hastings. It is then another 15 km west to the Wakarara and Northern Ruahine ranges.

One afternoon in mid-September some years ago small groups of Tui were observed flying up the east/west gorge on our property late afternoon. This event has been noticed most years since.

This year September 2014 (numbers are individual birds)

19th	1620-1720 hours	c310
20th	1640-1745 hours	c308
21st		no count done
22nd	very strong cold southerly wind	no count done
23rd	1600-1730 hours	c132
24th	1630-1800 hours	6
25th	1630-1800 hours	4

The Tui fly in groups varying in number from about four to 25, with 2-5 minute gaps between groups. They fly a definite path only about 100 metres wide. If they are flying into stiff northwester some will stop briefly in tall trees.

We don't know if Tui were flying west on evenings prior to the 19th September or how many flew up on the 21st and 22nd. It appears the 'movement' had tailed off after the 23rd September.

Are there other flyways in Hawke's Bay and elsewhere? Is this movement due to changing food sources or breeding?

The Hawke's Bay Regional Council and the Animal Health Board have an intensive possum control programme in the Mangatahi/Kereru area with bait stations on farmland, and aerial 1080 in the Wakarara Range and the north-eastern Ruahine Ranges which has been going for about 10 years. Bird numbers have increased markedly during this programme.

JIM HAMILTON and CHRISTINE MCRAE



# Birds New Zealand Research Fund—Expanding the indigenous habitats in the East Otago landscape

The Landscape Connections Trust's project "Expanding the indigenous habitats for forest and wetland bird populations in the East Otago landscape" aims to understand the bird distribution of a key suite of indigenous forest birds, to identify their habitat requirements, and in doing so to identify the best dispersal corridors to enable their expansion as well as the restoration requirements of existing habitat.

Without this information there is no strategic basis to justify dispersal corridors, or promote ecological restoration in particular sites to increase the abundance of the unevenly distributed species. Volunteers from the Otago branch of Birds New Zealand will complete consistent and repeatable bird counts across the East Otago project area, focussing on specific habitat types.

The results of this sampling will contribute to the development of a management plan which will summarise the extent and distribution of indigenous bird habitats within the project area, and provide landscape-scale guidance on ecological enhancement of indigenous bird habitat quality and extent.



# Three Kings Gulls by Air

Lou Gurr and Fred Kinskey published a review of known colonies of Red-billed Gulls in 1965, compiled from data that went in part back to 1887 and included data as recent as 1961. The Far North sites were plotted on a Google Earth map by Peter Frost. As part of a nationwide survey of Red-billed Gulls, Far North Birds New Zealand members visited these Far North sites and other known breeding sites, and submitted a report excluding the Three Kings Islands to Peter Frost and Graeme Taylor, convenors of the current study, in December 2014.

Inclement weather and inaccessibility prevented reporting on the Three Kings Islands and northern locations N1-N9 until 18th December 2014. Gurr and Kinskey suggested that there were tens of thousands of Red-billed Gulls nesting there, so it was clearly a very important site. When the weather cleared briefly, and a fixed wing aircraft and funds to hire the aircraft became available from the Department of Conservation, Birds New Zealand, and Far North members Les Feasey, Kevin and Lisa Mathews and Carol Davies raced to organise a flight. Members of DOC (Kaitaia) and Ngati Kuri Iwi were invited to participate as guests but were unable to do so, due in part to the rapidity with which the flight arrangements were made.

The flight left Kaitaia about 11:15am and took us over Scott's Point, (N8) out to the Three Kings Islands (N1-N6) for a circumnavigation of the Islands, and back over North Cape (N9) then down the East Coast to Kaitaia Airport. The plane used was a seven-seater Piper Navajo operated very efficiently by Great Barrier Airlines (GBA). GBA runs a regular charter service for doctors from Whangarei to Kaitaia, and by piggybacking on that service we were able to fly and return to Kaitaia at a considerable saving.

A document Peter Frost recommended, by Moore and Powlesland of DOC on the use of aerial photography, was useful, but the full import of some of their suggestions relating to using GPS didn't have an immediate impact, which, in retrospect, created more work in determining locations. Camera equipment was a Nikon D4 with a 400mm f2.8, a Nikon D810 with a 200-400mm f4, and a Canon EOS 600D with a 70-300mm f4-f5.6. Over 1,500 photos were taken, and these were individually examined and graded for Red-billed Gull presence and activity. Initial examination suggested about 1,000 birds and four to six nesting sites. After well over 100 hours of photo examination 174 photos were deemed significant. 44 of these photos showed Red-billed Gull presence and produced the following results:

- 3,500 to 4,200 Red-billed Gulls visible and more projected;
  - 17 or more nesting sites of which four had over 100 birds, although 10 sites had fewer than 20 birds, and further photo examination may reveal others;
  - 10 sites where there were more than 100 birds feeding on the water:
- Broken down to individual sites these are the results so far:
- N1 West Island-locations under review
  - N2 Great Island-locations under review
  - N3 Great Island-locations under review
  - N4 Great Island-locations under review
  - N5 South West Island- locations under review
  - N6 Princes Island-locations under review
  - N7 North Cape – no Red-billed Gulls seen
  - N8 Scott Point – no Red-billed Gulls seen
  - Matapia – no Red-billed Gulls seen

▼ Birds on water.



## ▲ Three Kings Islands.

Further photo examination is turning up additional nesting and roosting locations. Kevin, Carol and I expect that it will take quite a bit more work to place the major nesting locations with some reliability, and the number of Red-billed Gulls at Three Kings Islands with some certainty. We are continuing this work.

LES FEASEY, KEVIN MATHEWS  
and CAROL DAVIES

Moore, P. and Powlesland, R. 2012. *Birds: complete counts—aerial photo counts, Version 1.0. Inventory and monitoring toolbox: birds (DOCDM-308974). Wellington, New Zealand: Department of Conservation* (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/inventory-monitoring/im-toolbox-birds-complete-aerial-photo-counts.pdf>).



▲ Feeding gulls.

## ▼ Three Kings crew.





## Discovery of First Breeding Attempt of Glossy Ibis in New Zealand

On New Year's Day, 2015, Mary Thompson, Peter Schweigman and Sue Galloway saw a Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) sitting on a nest. The nest was in dead willows with the Royal Spoonbill colony at Wainono Lagoon, South Canterbury (44° 41.57' S, 171° 9.41' E). This is the first recorded breeding attempt of Glossy Ibis in New Zealand.

### The Discovery

Wainono is a 300-hectare shallow brackish coastal lagoon 25 km north of the Waitaki River. The main reason for our expedition to Wainono Lagoon was to check out the Royal Spoonbill nesting colony that we had discovered last season. We paddled our canoe 1.5 km across the lagoon, landed well away from the colony and approached it from the landward side to about 50 m away in order to not disturb the birds. Gratifyingly, the main spoonbill colony was still thriving with more active nests than the 2013/14 season.

The dramatic highlight of the day was discovering a Glossy Ibis sitting on a nest. There were also two other Glossy Ibises roosting in the trees within a few metres of the nest. All three were adults resplendent in breeding plumage. Through the telescope we could see the beautiful rich chestnut red colours on head, neck and body and the green/purple iridescence of the black wings. The bill was pale grey/brown and there was a distinct white border between head feathers and the side of face. The two non-sitting ibises flew off shortly after we arrived and did not return while we were there.

The nest was near the edge of the spoonbill colony although within a metre of several occupied spoonbill nests in a dead willow overhanging the Hook River where it enters at the northwest corner of the lagoon. The nest was about 3 m above the water and was a tight construction of twigs, estimated to be about 50 cm wide and deep. It was smaller and more compact compared to the wider, more open, tangled platform of the spoonbill nests.

The ibis was most likely incubating eggs as several times, during the two hours we were observing, the bird stood up and changed sitting position and looked into the nest and appeared to use its bill to "adjust eggs" before re-sitting. We did not want to disturb the birds by trying to check for eggs or chicks. We managed to take some images, albeit of low quality, through the telescope to document this discovery.

Sue Galloway and Mary Thompson made a return trip on January 22nd, 2015 to see if any chicks had successfully hatched. The Glossy Ibis was still sitting on the nest. Two other Glossy Ibises flew off together soon after we arrived at 10.30 am. Throughout the day the sitting bird often stood up, turned around, looked in the nest and settled down again. We did not see any evidence of chicks in the nest although very young chicks would not have been visible from our viewing point. We remained for the whole day, observing the nest from about 50 m away.

Just as we were packing up to leave the two Glossy Ibis that had been away all day flew in at 5.40 pm, circled around several times and landed in the willow very near to our sitting ibis on the nest. The two that returned were the same size and smaller than the sitting bird. This suggests it was the male who had sat all day (this agrees with documented observations) and the other two were females, which are documented to be noticeably smaller. One came down to the nest and opened its wings and poked its bill about briefly (maybe a greeting display) and then flew off to a nearby branch to roost and preen. Both 'returnees' spent some time preening near the nest. Then at 6.30 pm, the sitting bird stood up, preened, sat down, stood up and walked off the nest. The other bird moved down to the nest, appeared a bit restless but sat down – changeover had occurred. The one that had sat all



▲ Glossy Ibis sitting on nest, 1st January, 2015.  
(Photo by Mary Thompson).





■ Peter Schweigman and Mary Thompson (Otago Branch, Birds NZ) overlooking the willows in which the Glossy Ibis nest (arrow) was discovered on 1st January, 2015. (Photo by Sue Galloway.)

day spent the next 30 minutes preening. We left at 7 pm, so don't know whether this bird eventually took off to feed, but we presume so. It (he) had certainly sat faithfully all day (at least 7½ hours) and the 'new' sitter seemed to have settled down to the task. So it seems they still felt incubating was worthwhile.

From reading about the breeding biology of glossy ibis, where incubation is documented to be 20–23 days, then if eggs had been laid before 1st January, we would have expected hatching to have occurred as we were there 22 days later. However if the chicks were very young they would not have been seen from our vantage point. And it is possible that they had not yet hatched if the eggs had not all been laid by 1st January. Alternatively the eggs may be infertile or a second replacement clutch may have been laid recently. At time of writing this we had not yet undertaken another trip to see if any chicks had successfully hatched or fledged (which is documented to occur at 25–28 days). Nevertheless, we think this first breeding attempt by Glossy Ibis is a significant discovery even if the outcome is unsuccessful this time. We will have to wait another year to see if these and more ibises return to Wainono and establish a breeding colony there.

### The Context

The Glossy Ibis is widespread around the world and a vagrant to New Zealand, presumably from south-eastern Australia. Small numbers have been regularly and widely reported for over 100 years, with occasional irruptions such as in 1953/1954 when 14 were seen together in Manawatu, 18 at Dillons Point, Marlborough and 24 at Invercargill Estuary, although these numbers were not maintained. Since the 1970s small numbers have been seen regularly, but mostly in ones (eg. Travis Wetlands, Christchurch), twos (eg. Foxton, Little Waihi) and four this summer (Dillons Point Wetland). The continued presence of Glossy Ibis raised the enticing possibility that breeding might occur in New Zealand, but with such small numbers in any one location it seemed unlikely. Nevertheless, with only three ibises present at Wainono, a pair has built a nest and presumably laid eggs and incubated them.

A number of factors may have combined to make this site conducive to breeding, including the following:

- Glossy Ibis have visited the area previously; the 1999–2014 Atlas has one record of Glossy Ibis at Wainono, and we saw two adults in breeding plumage at the Spoonbill colony in Dec 2013. In 1994, four were seen at All Day Bay, 60 km away. Intriguingly, the first record of Glossy Ibis in New Zealand

was in 1902 at Washdyke, Timaru, 35 km north of Wainono, so birds may have been in the area unnoticed for many years since then.

- Their association with a successful Royal Spoonbill colony (now 30 active nests raising at least 40 young, with some pairs still sitting or with young chicks on the nest at 22nd January 2015) may be a key factor. Elsewhere Glossy Ibises are often found nesting with other water birds such as shags, herons and spoonbills, and at Wainono this is also the case.
- The area around Wainono Lagoon has features that match well with described typical breeding habitat, with nest sites in tall dense reeds or low trees over water in fresh to brackish wetlands.
- The adjacent irrigated dairy paddocks as well as soft muddy verges of the lagoon would be productive feeding areas (food includes invertebrates, worms, crustaceans and small fish).
- The site is not easily accessible to human disturbance.
- In eastern Australia there is a notable movement of Glossy Ibis from summer breeding sites in southern Australia to northern areas in winter. This type of movement may happen in New Zealand too. The two ibises seen last season may have migrated north in winter with the Royal Spoonbills and encountered another ibis, also in northern wintering grounds, and these three birds then returned with the Spoonbills to Wainono. In Australia Glossy Ibises wander nomadically and do not necessarily use regular nesting sites. It will be interesting to see if the Glossy Ibises return to breed at Wainono next season and establish a breeding colony.

MARY THOMPSON



■ General view of part of the Royal Spoonbill colony and the Glossy Ibis nest (arrow). (Photo by Mary Thompson).



# Norfolk Island's endangered Green Parrot numbers on the rise

The population of the critically endangered Green Parrot (*Cyanoramphus cookii*) on Norfolk Island is on the rise, thanks to an intensive collaboration between Massey University researchers and Norfolk Island National Park (NINP) ecologists and rangers.

Dr Luis Ortiz-Catedral, ecology researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Natural and Mathematical Sciences at Massey University, arrived on Norfolk Island a year ago to assist with the implementation of an action plan to try and bolster Green Parrot numbers. Dr Ortiz-Catedral has previously had success helping increase the populations of other threatened species in New Zealand, including the Red-fronted Parakeet and Orange-fronted Parakeet.

"We know over the last 30 years the population of Norfolk Island Green Parrots has gradually declined, mostly due to the limited number of suitable nesting sites, competition for nests and predation by cats and rats. But before we could work out a plan to arrest the decline we needed to find out exactly how many birds were left in the park," Dr Ortiz-Catedral said.

"In July 2013 it was estimated that there were between 46 and 93 individual birds remaining, from an estimated population of 240 birds in 2010. There was also a gender skew, with fewer adult females than males. There were only 10 confirmed records of adult females, with a maximum number of 23 breeding pairs. Although the Green Parrot breeds all year round, there is a notable increase in breeding in the late summer/early autumn season.

"Part of the problem was habitat. The Green Parrot prefers to use nesting hollows in native trees. Predation by cats and rats, and competition for nesting hollows by introduced bird species and bees meant the Green Parrot was easy prey and could be eaten or displaced from its habitat.

Armed with this up-to-date information, Natural Resource Manager for Norfolk Island National Park, Abigail Smith, developed an action plan for the recovery of the Norfolk Island Green Parrot.

"We knew that the best way to help the Green Parrot was to implement an improved assisted breeding programme that would deal with the introduced Crimson Rosellas, starlings and rats that interfere with incubating females," says Ms Smith.

"Once hatched, chicks have roughly a 65 per cent chance of surviving to fledging, thus the key modification to the assisted breeding programme was minimising disturbance to females while nesting," says Dr Ortiz-Catedral.

The first step in the action plan was establishing as many predator-proof nesting sites as possible. Over a six-month period 75 nesting sites were constructed and monitored by Norfolk Island National Park staff once a month for signs of nesting activity. Active nests were monitored twice a week, and any chicks found were weighed and measured to ensure they were thriving. Active sites were also monitored using motion-sensor cameras to record activity and detect any interference from other species. In addition, an extensive search of old and degraded nest



■ Norfolk Island Green Parrot

sites, and research into potential new sites to be constructed, were fed into the project database of safe nesting sites.

The second step, implemented simultaneously, was to improve the effectiveness of cat and rat control on the island, and, in collaboration with the Norfolk Island Government, also initiate a control programme for feral birds across the island.

Since 1996, Norfolk Island National Park had implemented a cat-trapping programme, with varying degrees of success. Thirty baited cat traps were placed strategically within the park, and set twice a week. This current cat-trapping programme is under review and a cat management plan is being prepared.

A rat-baiting programme has also been implemented, with 800 bait stations checked each month, and all known, functional nest sites further surrounded by three bait stations and three break-back traps set. Rat activity throughout the park is monitored regularly and a review of rat bait is also underway.

One year after the start of the action plan commenced, the results have been astounding. There are now 78 predator-resistant nest sites for the Green Parrot, with 11 active nests.

"This winter 51 chicks have fledged, of which 25 are female. This is a significant step towards balancing the observed sex skew in the population. This is by far the most productive winter breeding for the species in record," Ms Smith said.

Ms Smith and Dr Ortiz-Catedral are delighted with the results so far, but say they still have a lot of work to do.

"The results so far have been spectacular, and that is thanks to so many people working together to make this possible. But we still need funding to keep the momentum going, and to really make a difference to conserving the Green Parrot species for generations to come," Ms Smith said.

"I believe the key to the success of this project has been the close collaboration between managers and rangers on the ground and scientists visiting Norfolk Island. Together we have developed local capacity to establish a solid foundation for the recovery of one of the world's rarest birds. The work done on the ground by all the staff from Norfolk Island National Park is nothing short of extraordinary," Dr Ortiz-Catedral said.

Up to this point, funding to implement the emergency plan for the Green Parrot has been provided by Parks Australia, the Australian Department of Environment, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, the Parrot Trust of Australia, the Parrot Society of Australia, BirdLife Australia, Island Conservation, the Nature Conservancy, the World Parrot Trust, the Parrot Society of the UK, the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Massey University and Wildmob.

Dr Ortiz-Catedral and Ms Smith hope that more funding can be found to keep the momentum of the project going, and ensure the long-term future of the Green Parrot remains bright.

■ Abigail Smith and Luis Ortiz-Catedral.





# Wildlife Tracker App Launched

It's time to get those smart phones clicking! A new conservation tool, Wildlife Tracker, has just been launched on the Apple Store. The free to users phone app enables New Zealanders and tourists to support local conservation projects and organisations by sending in photos of endangered New Zealand birds, such as Kea, as well as marine mammal and reptile sightings.

Boost New Media, a web/app development and Agile training consultancy developed the app, pro bono, after meeting Tamsin Orr-Walker, Chair of the Kea Conservation Trust at the Boost Start-up Weekend in Queenstown in October. Tamsin pitched the idea of gathering community-based Kea sightings utilising smart phones to a group of 50 people, six of whom chose to help develop the minimum viable product (MVP) over the 54-hour epic weekend. A combination of diverse expertise, sheer determination, teamwork and passion (washed down with copious amounts of coffee) provided a winning combination, and the Wildlife Tracker concept was born!

"Kea are a difficult species to survey as they cover an enormous range – over 3.5 million hectares of extreme terrain, across the length of the South Island. To gather formal sightings across this area is prohibitively expensive and an impossible challenge for a small not for profit organisation such as ours, but making it easy for people who are already out there with their phones, such as trampers, skiers, hunters and trappers, would enable us to increase surveying abilities for Kea immensely ... and of course other species would also benefit", Tamsin explains. "There are many of us in conservation who are passionate about protecting wildlife, but we don't have the resources to keep tabs on all of the animals that need our help. This app will allow people all around New Zealand help us track and identify Keas and other endangered species."

"Tamsin's idea for an app that could help to protect and identify the Kea and other wildlife inspired me," says Boost New Media General Manager, Kirstin Donaldson (one of the original members of the Start-up Weekend team). "We believe in protecting wildlife and as the Kea Conservation Trust would not be able to afford to develop the app without assistance, it was a great opportunity."

The Wildlife Tracker is designed to be extremely easy to use. When the user opens the app, they have three options: take a photo, submit a photo from their picture library or search wildlife. Users can also find out detailed information about the species and projects they are supporting and access links to find out more information on organisations which they can support. Additional information includes tips for taking useful ID photos and, information on how to keep photographers and animals safe. When the user sends their image, the GPS location, date and time are also automatically sent to the database in email form. This provides each conservation organisation with a verifiable record of where and when that particular animal was present.



▲ Boost Team.

So will people use the app? During the development phase a survey was conducted online to see whether the app would be welcomed by the public. Over 115 survey responses were received over a 24 hour period and results showed a strong positive reception: 99 % of people said they would be willing to contribute to conservation whilst they were outdoors, and 88% said that they would use the Wildlife Tracker concept.

Currently 20 species/groups are loaded onto the app: 12 bird species (including Kea, Rock Wren, Falcon and tagged seabirds), six marine mammals (including Maui's and Hector's Dolphins, Orca and tagged sea lions) and geckos and skinks. Additional species will be added on as other projects and organisations become involved.

*With the launch of the second version of the app, the Kea Conservation Trust is very keen to receive feedback from users as to ease of use or additional functionalities people would like to see included in the future. Feedback can be sent to the Kea Conservation Trust at [info@keaconservation.co.nz](mailto:info@keaconservation.co.nz).*

As with other not for profit ventures, the Wildlife Tracker would not have been possible without the support and input from both the tireless Start-up Weekend team and mentors in Queenstown, or the Boost New Media design and development team in Wellington, who very generously took on the challenge to make our vision a reality: a true community project from the beginning!

The app is now available in the Apple Store at no charge, and a free Android app is currently in development. The Apple Store link is <https://itunes.apple.com/nz/app/wildlifetracker/id940322770?ls=1&mt=8>

Kea are a unique and endangered New Zealand endemic parrot species. The only mountain parrot in the world, they face a number of challenges which impact on the remaining 5,000 individuals inhabiting the Southern Alps. Predation, continued persecution and injury/death from anthropogenic sources are all ongoing threats. If you would like to help Kea, please visit the Kea Conservation Trust at [www.keaconservation.co.nz](http://www.keaconservation.co.nz) and download the 2nd version of the Wildlife Tracker app!

■ Left: iOS Simulator screen shots. Right Kea photo taken via the app, by Mat Goodman in the Murchison Mountains.



# Birds of the Heaphy through the Ages (Part 2)

## Early Explorers

Some early European explorers mentioned birds in their journals or reports, but often only those they managed to catch and eat. For example, Heaphy and Brunner, with Maori guide Kehu, passed down and back up the West Coast in 1846. On the way south Kehu caught a number of Weka, but on their way north this species was scarce and birds were skinny. The party stopped at the Heaphy River mouth and caught about 20 passerines, mainly crows (Kokako), thrushes (Piopio) and Robins.

James Mackay led a party over the Heaphy route in 1860, and named a hill Mount Kakapo "from one of the men catching a specimen of those now rare birds".

For their Christmas holiday in 1863 William Washbourn and son Harry went up to the Goulard Downs, taking a pet Kaka to try and attract down other birds which they could catch and eat. This was totally unsuccessful and Harry later recalled a paucity of birds in the area. He was back there on an expedition with Charles Lewis in 1883 and four hungry men could only catch one Kokako and one Robin, which didn't make for a very filling meal.

Winfield Higgin followed the newly blazed Heaphy Track in 1863, and was an exception in recording many species seen in the Heaphy Valley. There were "pigeons, wild ducks of two or three kinds (Blue and Grey Duck for sure and Brown Teal possible), woodhens (Weka), New Zealand canaries (Yellowheads), thrushes, saddlebacks, crows (Kokako) and numerous tribes of flycatchers. The birds were all extremely tame. We heard the kewi kiwi and kakapo every night though unable to catch any having no dog."

A party of gold-miners including John Salisbury set off from the Mount Arthur Tablelands in 1878, travelling down the valley to Karamea, returning via the Heaphy Track. Kakapo were numerous in the Karamea Valley, as well as Tui, Pigeons, Weka and Kaka. On the Goulard Downs they caught and ate a black, downy petrel chick, perhaps a Westland Petrel, though Salisbury called it a Black Petrel.

Another species could be added, recorded by Julius Haast on his long exploratory trip around western Nelson Province in 1862, though he only went up the coastal section of the Heaphy. On mountain summits he encountered a shy plover, presumably the New Zealand Dotterel. This species is not mentioned by other observers, except as part of the Laughing Owl nest remains, but the Goulard Downs would have provided some suitable habitat. Haast also noted the Whio or Blue Duck was "found in all the rivers, and is easily killed."

## The Clouston Years

The birds of the Heaphy, especially the Goulard Downs, really came to the national attention in 1915 when Robert Clouston attracted well known naturalists to the Downs to experience the remarkable bird life. Interviews with reporters resulted in newspaper headlines such as "Thousands of Kakapos" and stories about thousands of Great Spotted Kiwi and Weka. Other species reported were Blue Ducks "by the dozen", thousands of Kaka, Saddlebacks, owls, wrens, Robins, and more common bush birds; even Cook's Petrels (perhaps the same as Salisbury's Black or Westland Petrel). The Goulard Downs were quickly declared a wildlife sanctuary and Clouston became the ranger, a position he held until 1932. Some of these numbers were later disputed, especially the thousands of Kakapo, which certainly were thought to be in very low numbers within a few years.

In the 1950s the Wildlife Service made expeditions to the Downs, looking especially for Kakapo, which they failed to find, and Gordon Williams studied Clouston's bird reports, though not totally convinced of his expertise. Clouston recorded single sightings of Bittern and a possible Banded Rail, whilst Harriers and Falcons were rare, and he only mentioned Kea two or three times, understandable as this species was a fairly recent arrival in the Nelson area. Blue Duck were common, and in 1917 he saw a pair of small ducks which he thought were probably Brown Teal,

though Williams thought, wrongly in my opinion, they were more likely Grey Teal. Although Brown Teal were found as fossils in caves they were neither represented in the Laughing Owl prey (too high an altitude?) nor in midden remains, though possibly Higgin saw them. Both Shining and Long-tailed Cuckoos were noted with two or three records of Laughing Owl. Of the rarer bush birds Yellowheads were still seen frequently, there were two mentions of Bush Wrens, a pair of Saddlebacks with a flock of Yellowheads in 1919, with another pair in 1922, and a report by G. Harris of Karamea of a pair of Piopio in 1916. The only introduced species Clouston mentioned was the Dunnock, and he also failed to mention Pipits, fairly common on the Downs today.

## Modern Times

Expeditions from the Wildlife Service visited the Goulard Downs in October 1958 and June 1959 to study the bird life. They were particularly interested in tracking down Kakapo and the team had experience in Fiordland and two Kakapo-sniffing dogs. No sign of Kakapo was found and the leader, Gordon Williams, concluded that their numbers had been greatly exaggerated by Clouston; something others had thought at the time. There have been a number of possible reports since then, but none in recent years. The Wildlife Service team found Kiwi were common; Great Spotted only (unlike Clouston who also reported Little Spotted), and Weka were in good numbers. Weka are still in good numbers, and a long-term Kiwi study shows a steady population; so much so that birds have been captured on the Downs for translocation. Kaka were and still are in good numbers, and they saw more Kea than in Clouston's time. There were no Yellowheads, Saddlebacks or Bush Wrens, but they never worked the Heaphy Valley. A Rock Wren was seen on Mt Goul, a species not recorded by Clouston, and in November 2005 one was seen on Mt Perry, with a partner appearing the next summer. Introduced species, with only Dunnock mentioned by Clouston, had become much more common with Chaffinches and Redpolls particularly numerous.

The South Island Kokako is a bit of a mystery here. Remains were found in the Goulard Downs Laughing Owl nest and in Megamania Cave, but not in Maori middens at the Heaphy River Mouth. In 1846 Heaphy, Brunner and Kehu caught a number of Kokako (or crows as they were usually known) at the Heaphy River Mouth. Higgin in 1863 recorded 'crows' and noted that all the bird species were extremely tame. A very hungry party including Lewis and Washbourn could only catch one Kokako in 1883 and Salisbury doesn't mention it in 1878. No mention of this species was made by Clouston or any of the other visitors in the early 20th century. But then in 1995 calls thought possibly/probably to be Kokako were heard near the Aorere Shelter with a series of sightings and calls heard since. Near the Gunner River Bridge there were three possible records (sighting and calls) in 1996 with another in 2008, and there are also reports from the Oparara Valley. So it seems that the Grey Ghost has risen from the dead.

Graham Petterson walked the track in 1947 and, as well as finding a small pile of moa gizzard stones on the Goulard Downs, observed Pied Shags and a mixed colony of Red-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns at the Heaphy River Mouth. Ron Scarlett of Canterbury Museum spent a lot of time there whilst excavating the Maori site between 1959 and 1963 and listed the birds seen. Surprisingly he failed to mention the gulls or terns but did record Pied and Black Shags nesting up the river, which they still do. In 1930 he saw only one pair of Variable Oystercatchers on the coast but an increase to five pairs by the 1960s. He reports a pair of Banded Dotterels but they're no longer there. He noted Blue Ducks on the lagoon and birds have recently been seen on a small creek down the coast though their stronghold is the Goulard Downs. There DOC have carried out stoat control and translocated a few birds to try to boost the population. Scarlett failed to record Little Penguins but reported that they were said to be found at the Kohaihai. With DOC trapping stoats along the track penguin numbers are hopefully increasing.

CHRIS PETYT



## FAR NORTH

There are 23 organisations in the Far North devoted to bird and habitat conservation and study on "public" land, and at least half a dozen formal and informal organisations devoted to the same cause on private land. As time goes by I'm meeting the stakeholders and learning the issues driving their efforts. These organisations are having an effect, and the effect often emerges in subtle ways. Kiwi are seen where they were rare or absent, Weka pop up in unexpected places, a black bird with a red/brown back flies in front of you on a routine five minute bird count, and on the same trip you are entertained by a Tomtit, its mate and a Grey Warbler. Project Island Song and its parent organisation, Guardians of the Bay, have worked with DOC and Northland Regional Council to convert each of the public islands in the Bay of Islands to predator free status, and have successively introduced new species to these islands. Rumours suggest a further introduction is planned in May 2015, when Whitehead and Saddleback may be released. Sir Paul Callaghan would have been pleased, and his vision of a predator-free New Zealand has certainly taken roots.

Moturoa Island is a privately owned island in the Bay of Islands. For over 30 years shareholders Drs CJ and Carol Ralph and Paul and Enid Asquith, and others, have worked with others to make the Island predator free and have released native birds on the Island. Kiwi, Morepork, Whitehead, North Island Robin, Banded Rail, and all the more common birds are visible and sometimes plentiful. Two attempts have been made to release Saddleback, but neither has taken hold. Further efforts are planned but given the avalanche of requests to DOC, the worthy efforts by other conservation groups throughout New Zealand, and the validation process required to ensure success, this request may be a lower priority.

During the summer CJ in partnership with Project Island Song and DOC, organises five minute bird counts on each of the islands in the Bay of Islands. There are seven well-defined tracks, two on Urupukapuka, two on Moturua, and one each on Roberton, Okahu, and Waewaerorea Islands. Over 50 species totalling 10,000 birds has been counted on these islands since 2009 season, including North Island Robin. Results are reported in the August and December 2014 issues of *Apteryx*. Progress in populating the islands is thus monitored. What has not been monitored but is of interest are the spill-over effects of these introduced

bird populations on to nearby locations. This is a project waiting to happen. While visiting Carol and CJ January 4th, we also did a census of Grey-faced Petrel burrows on Moturoa Island, and found burrows that had been inhabited this breeding season, some with live chicks. Paul Asquith, CJ and I went fishing and concurrently surveyed Red-billed and Black-backed Gull populations and nesting sites, visited and counted the Gannet nesting colony on Nine Pin, and counted a number of White-faced Storm Petrels and three New Zealand Storm Petrels in the bay. Results were reported on eBird. Talk about the probability of these birds nesting in the bay surfaced again, another project waiting to happen.

Far North OSNZ regularly undertakes wader surveys of three major sites and several smaller ones. This year Parengarenga has been particularly challenging, with weather cancelling two well-planned and attended surveys, and boat availability being a challenge on the third. Walker Island has been eroded to extinction, and the roosting sites of the birds in Rangaunu Harbour are currently a mystery. Adrian Riegen has the Kowhai Beach wader census and it is posted to eBird.

Alison Stanes' excitement at the breeding success of New Zealand Dotterel on Karikari Peninsula and elsewhere has been well circulated. "Flocking up" counts remain to be completed throughout the region.

Detlef arranged an oversubscribed pelagic on 5th January. Our sharp-eyed Australian visitor, John Rogers, spotted Cape Barren Geese for the first time in several years. Cook's and Pycroft's Petrels appeared in numbers after a two-year absence, and several New Zealand Storm Petrels, two Grey Ternlets, Salvin's, Shy and Wandering Albatrosses and the normal shearwater contingent added to the day. CJ and Mike Szabo hauled in their quota of skippies and everybody went home well pleased, including the three Australians who had flown in from Sydney especially to make the pelagic trip. Results were reported in *Apteryx* and on eBird.

Many Far North Birds New Zealand members chipped in to report on the Red-billed Gulls in the area as part of the Red-billed Gull census. Carol Davies did a lot of research through old issues of *Notornis* to set expectations of where Red-billed Gulls were likely to be found on the Islands. The Mangonui group including Anthea Goodwin and John Haines did a sterling job reporting on new nesting sites and abandoned old sites. While the

fixed wing aerial survey of the Three Kings Islands is separately reported in this issue, the four-day Cavalli Islands/Cape Brett/Whangamumu sailing census in Pete's catamaran won't be forgotten in dinner table stories, nor will Susie Lindauer's survey of some of the Bay of Islands sites.

The annual migration of cruise ships, backpackers, Aucklanders and warmth-starved Kiwis to the Far North is tapering off, and the Far North birders who fled south to escape the onslaught are returning home. Detlef is due back from the Subantarctic soon, Bruce is back from the Heaphy Track, others have returned to reclaim their houses from visiting relatives, and I am back from a week on the Miranda Field Course: thanks for a great experience Kevin, David, Ray, Anne, Charmaine and the crew. - LES FEASEY

## SOUTH AUCKLAND

After a summer as a mostly absent RR it's not easy to work out what's been going on. In our area the Red-billed Gull colonies are on the Coromandel Peninsula and outlying islands, well away from most of our active members, but Wendy Hare has checked out the old mainland sites, just one of which is now occupied, although she did find another, and Rob Chapell of DOC has given some intelligence about the island colonies. There seem to be fewer birds but so far the known colonies are all near the places the earlier ones were reported.

We managed two more bird walks in the Auckland Botanic Gardens in January but we are still learning the trade. Scheduled for the afternoon we were a bit worried about what we might find but the first was remarkably productive. The second, on a hot dry January day, was every bit as miserable as expected - even Song Thrushes and Blackbirds were hard to find on the parched lawns. Although the participants seemed very good humoured we'll trust our own knowledge and hold our ground a bit more firmly in future.

Although the breeding season started well at Port Waikato the net result was poor. Six Banded Dotterel nests were found from three pairs and all of them failed. There has been no protection in place for them but this will change next season. Only one New Zealand Dotterel nest was found and it too failed but three extra pairs and two new breeding sites were found between the Port and Limestone Downs. Two of these pairs have produced chicks. The Caspian Terns that seemed to like painted dummies that the local people put out in the spring were not seduced into amorous intent this season. In fact there is no indication that they bred at all locally. The wild weather and perhaps some exuberant visitors do not seem to have made things easy this season.

There was an interesting discussion about Shining Cuckoos at our February meeting. Tony Habraken reported an excited flock of five birds gathered in a tree giving an odd churring call in the first week of January. From the meeting we heard young birds were still being seen fed by Grey Warblers but few people were hearing song, although there was one report from the end of January. Calls are still being heard by some members, one reported on the day of the meeting (10/2). This must be getting very close to migration time. Bruce Parry also pointed out a large decline in the number of Skylarks on farmland at Aka Aka in recent years but no one else was able to comment.

Miranda continues to attract good birds. Particularly welcome has been one, sometimes two Eastern Curlews which have not regularly graced the shores there for some years. Other birding highlights of the summer have been two Black-tailed Godwits, two Great Knots, a Marsh Sandpiper, three Red-necked Stints, five Curlew Sandpipers (but once 12!), six Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, three Pectoral sandpipers, a Little Tern and a White-



▲ The hide at Miranda (by Les Feasey)



▲ Kowhai Beach shorebirds (by Les Feasey)



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

winged Black Tern. For the lucky participants of the field course a Greenshank showed up on the Stilt Ponds as a one day wonder. Also Black-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns nested successfully on the shell bank. The Manukau has been quieter, perhaps the most notable bird being a Wandering Tattler that seems to have made Kidd's Shellbanks home for quite a few years now. – IAN SOUTHEY

### BAY OF PLENTY

It has been a fairly sparse summer for birds in the Bay of Plenty, with the usual suspects of Kaka and Glossy Ibis passing across the desk in the past few weeks creating a sting in the tail for this period. Kaka were seen on Mount Maunganui on Waitangi Weekend, competing with space on the overcrowded mountain with half of Auckland... A Glossy Ibis revisited Little Waihi on 10th February; always a welcome sighting. Little Penguin monitoring continues to check the penguins post *Rena*, and recently-hatched juveniles are continuously being handed to local bird rescue organisations. Other species handed in recently have been a Little Shearwater and a curious juvenile Black-backed Gull which had a beak deformity of such magnitude it was hard to recognise. The recognisable normal gull bill was extended by two thirds by what looked like a bird of prey beak attached to the end; quite remarkable to behold. There will be a talk on these birds and other unfortunates in our April evening meeting in Tauranga.

Common Diving Petrels are still getting regularly munched by a commuting domestic cat on Leisure Island/Moturiki. Summer ambassadors and public education are being tried by the local wildlife trust (Mauao Area Wildlife Trust). Grey-faced Petrels on Mount Maunganui have had no study this season, and advocacy is the main thrust of the project currently, with Kiwi Conservation Clubs from Tauranga and Rotorua booked in for the next season. A permit is being sought to continue handling and monitoring as I write. A recent publication entitled *Birds of Omokoroa Peninsula* has been helping locals north of Tauranga to identify their backyard shorebirds, whilst the publication of *Motiti Blue* and the *Oil Spill* has spread the news, via a well-received children's book, about a particular penguin during the *Rena* oil spill. – PAUL CUMING

### TARANAKI

November beach patrols in our region yielded nothing of interest other than masses of by-the-wind-sailors washed up on the beaches. Sightings in November included records of Long-tailed Cuckoos from three different locations, including one that flew into a house window. The concerned rescuer decided to take it to the vet to get it checked out, but part way into the journey it escaped its box. The driver pulled over, opened the door and the bird made its escape. A Falcon was seen in a tree near to a house and on one occasion it was dining on an introduced passerine. The long staying Waiongana White Heron was last seen in late November and a Fiordland Crested Penguin was seen at Tapuae Beach just west of New Plymouth. Eleven Royal Spoonbills were recorded at Urenui.

For those who think birds have little brains think again. A cunning Blackbird was seen several times entering a local fruit shop with customers who activated the automatic doors, then exiting with a grape or two in its beak.

December's field trip was to Matakai Park in the middle of an urban area at Oakura south of New Plymouth. The vegetation is a mixture of native and exotic, with a wetland through the middle. There was also a mixture of birdlife including Tui, New Zealand Pigeon, Kingfisher and introduced species. Also in December a few small flocks of South Island Pied Oystercatchers

were seen flying up the coast and Banded Dotterel started to return. A new pair of Variable Oystercatchers at Waiongana hatched and fledged two offspring; the first for six years. Up to three New Zealand Dotterels were also around at Waiongana, and as a Christmas bonus a Whimbrel was there on the 25th (and my camera was safely tucked away at home). Once again this year there have been very few migratory wader sightings around the Taranaki coast.

The now traditional Beach, Birds and BBQ was held at Waiongana on a fine but breezy January day. I am trying to convince members that we should start at 6.30am and not 1.30pm, but nevertheless a good range of birds were recorded, including the semi-resident Royal Spoonbill pair, two New Zealand Dotterels and up to thirty Banded Dotterels as well as a range of introduced passerines. Freshly-made pikelets were devoured on our return and the BBQ was, as ever, expertly cooked. I had a couple of beach wrecks for the members to identify, which after some measuring and delving into books were revealed as two Grey-faced Petrels, which are the first I have picked up here. A small odd-shaped egg proved far more difficult, but after some wild and totally ridiculous guesses it was identified as a dove egg. How it came to be on the pavers at our house remains a mystery.

Summer arrived in full force in January and members got out and about, apart from Carol Keight, who doesn't need to as she had, amongst other avian visitors, three New Zealand Pigeons in her garden eating tree Lucerne leaves, a pair of Tui hawking insects and feeding three fledglings, a Fantail with a pure white tail and resident Pukeko with their second brood of four chicks. On the few occasions he was home Barry Hartley watched Kingfishers feeding juveniles in a palm tree, when he wasn't home he saw six New Zealand Dabchicks at the Inglewood oxidation ponds and somehow managed to count the 300 Paradise Ducks on the ponds there, and further afield 600 at the Opunake oxidation pond.

The Variable Oystercatchers and New Zealand Dotterels at Sandy Bay on the South Taranaki coast had a reasonably successful breeding season with three pairs of oystercatchers producing five juvenile between them and the New Zealand Dotterel at least one juvenile.

DOC surveyed the Red-billed Gulls on the Sugarloaf Islands and counted approximately 500 gull nests on the five islands, as well as 50 White-fronted Tern nests. A Kaka was seen and videoed in a private garden just to the north of New Plymouth. The Saddlebacks and Whiteheads at Lake Rotokare have settled in well and the former especially can usually be seen and heard – just look for the fantails that seem to accompany them. Julie and I visited Potaema Bog on the eastern slopes of Mount Egmont/Taranaki and were spellbound by the antics of three vocal and very confiding Fernbirds. Also along the track in were three Riflemen.

– PETER FRYER

### HAWKE'S BAY

Vagrant waders are not often recorded in Hawke's Bay. However during the November wader count, a Marsh Sandpiper was found in the upper Ahuriri Estuary. The bird was identified by John Berry and later photographed by Tony Wall. Other highlights from the November census were four Australasian Bitterns in one section at Ahuriri and a particularly large Royal Spoonbill count for summer with 92 at Ahuriri, many in full breeding plumage. It may be worth keeping a close watch on this area next year to check for nesting.

A couple of members visited Miranda the first weekend in December and stayed over at the Shorebird Centre. A highlight was the Eastern Curlew which showed well on the shellbanks at

times. Also present on the Stilt Ponds were both Sharp-tailed and Pectoral Sandpipers, giving us an excellent opportunity for comparing the distinguishing features of these two similar species.

The February field outing to Lake Opouahi was enjoyed by a small group, just five of us. The warm overcast conditions were perfect for viewing. One, or possibly two, Fernbirds were heard as soon as we reached the jetty area, and one was seen in flight. We continued on beyond the lake to the wetland area where several birds were heard. However brief glimpses of several in flight at various times was all we managed. The best views were obtained back at the jetty where we watched a bird follow a path from the reeds to a scrubby area on the bank. It appeared to have something in its bill on each occasion and followed the same route several times, stopping off along the way giving pretty good views. It was possibly feeding young but the area wasn't accessible and we didn't want to create a disturbance. On the way home we stopped briefly at Ahuriri where we found one or two of the godwits were starting to colour up into their breeding plumage.

There seems to still be interest in the Plumed Whistling Ducks. They were still at Anderson Park in early February. – IAN SMITH and MARGARET TWYDLE

### MANAWATU

An Arctic Tern sighting in mid-November was enjoyed by a small number of people, but it was the presence of up to two Whimbrel for a time during November that caused the most interest locally. Otherwise typical waders have been resident at the Manawatu Estuary over the summer period.

Significantly, however, have been the changes to roosting patterns of Bar-tailed godwits during high tide. There has been some attention lately about numbers of birds at the Manawatu Estuary and disturbance levels there. There are some major issues at the estuary, and at the moment many godwits are flying 20 km down the coast to roost over high tide at the Ohau Estuary, adding 40 km flying to their daily activities; far from ideal. This was observed clearly during the recent wader count where flocks of birds flew in from the direction of the Manawatu Estuary to Ohau, raising initial numbers of 30 birds by over 100 additional birds there during the high tide.

In mid-February Phil Battley had a meeting with DOC, local councils (Horizons and Horowhenua District), local interest groups (including the Manawatu Estuary Trust and the kite boarding company that operates near the river mouth) and members of the estuary management group. Phil summarised his take on the issue, which is that the fundamental problem is a lack of safe, undisturbed roosting space. Birds traditionally roost at two places: the sandspit, and the area near the bollards to the west of the tidal flats. The sandspit has grown steadily closer to shore, and over the past decade has become covered in large driftwood to the point that much of it is bordered by wood. Birds can only walk up onto the top right at the end or in one other 10-m wide space. The channel behind it is now sandier and easy to walk across, and over summer kids play there a lot, kayakers come up, and oblivious people walk up and disturb the birds. The bollards area has changed shape slightly and birds now roost on the unprotected side, where people can take dogs, vehicles etc. This is also where the Black-backed Gulls roost, and godwits and knots are uneasy around that species, and are readily disturbed. There is also inadequate signage around the estuary and along the path adjacent to the spit.

Phil showed examples of the disturbances that have been recorded, which includes people, people with dogs, birdwatchers, bird photographers, harriers, gulls, boats, kite boarders, etc. Kite boarders have had the finger pointed at them



by locals, and Phil agreed that waders hate the kites, but it was encouraging that the local company does all they can to stay well away from the flats, and have a rule they tell newcomers that if they can see the bollards they have gone too far. However, other people also kite board there and may not be aware, and the problem is mainly the people who can't handle the conditions and get hauled upriver against their will.

Phil made three practical management recommendations, all of which met general approval and are being taken on board by DOC and the councils. First, the spit needs to be cleared of as much driftwood as is possible. That should encourage waders to roost there more readily. This will be a big job and the logistics will need to be explored fully, but this should be the primary management action. Second, the bollards could be moved 100 m to the west. This would have minimal impact on recreational activities, but would put more of a buffer between the birds and people. Third, improved signage should more clearly state that birds roost here at high tide and they should not be disturbed.

Overall, it was a very positive meeting that should result in positive steps being taken to manage the roost sites for waders. Birders also have their part to play, by birding responsibly and avoiding disturbing birds. Photographers are a prime example, as they will spend 10 minutes crawling close to birds to get a decent shot, then stand up to walk away and flushing all the birds as they do so. We all know the knees may have cramped up while making those shots, but we need to be prepared to put the same effort into exiting unobtrusively as we put into sneaking up.

Jesse Conklin will be back early March for an 8th year of departure monitoring of godwits, and will likely be having to split his efforts between the Manawatu and Ohau Estuaries. If anyone manages to check the Ohau estuary in March, do keep an eye out for colour-banded or flagged godwits. A small number of them are resident or regular there, but if you are there on a rising tide you may have flocks coming in from the Manawatu Estuary. Band reading can be very productive as birds will generally be out on flat clear sand, sometimes even on the ocean beach. Feel free to email any bands you see to [p.battley@massey.ac.nz](mailto:p.battley@massey.ac.nz) - PHIL BATTLEY and CRAIG STEED

## WAIRARAPA

2014 finished with the customary dinner and contest for the Big Bird Cup; including its base it stands 115 mm high. The teams are North of the Waingawa vs South of the Waingawa. This time we began and ended with general bird knowledge and in between contestants were asked to identify New Zealand birds from photos, recorded calls and nests and to identify parts of a bird on a drawing of a stereotypical passerine. The outcomes were intriguing, with much sturdy discussion going into each answer. North won the cup and our dog has the Dunnock nest on the sideboard as it's her hair lining the nest. Her home was moved just as Mrs D started building and the combination of events made a fascinating backyard study.

The first field trip of the year was a walk right around Boggy Pond, but with substantial time in the hide and a brief look at the most accessible part of Wairio wetland. No Bitterns or Spotless Crakes were encountered, but 23 other species were. We have pointed out to DOC that the hide is not what it might be because the Raupo is beginning to obscure the view and hope that this will soon be remedied. For visitors, it can be a rewarding area if you are patient and take powerful enough binoculars or a scope if the wind is in your face, because then the birds are mostly quite some way off on the sheltered side of the water. Pond doesn't mean something you could throw a stone across.

Also, treat even the official maps warily if you want to walk all the way round. Reality and the piece of paper do not agree. There comes a point where you have to climb some hot wires (cold the day we were there) and take to a paddock, though it's not hard to work out where the road is.

We have held our AGM and despite it being well attended no positions required election speeches and secret ballots. Are you astounded? More to the point we worked on how to establish databases of people in the community, e.g. coastal run-holders whom we can contact for information when there is a survey going on. Given our long rugged coast, largely inaccessible to the public, it actually adds up to less than twenty, perhaps no more than a dozen, farms and they have big paddocks.

It's not hard to plan a lively year. We have new members who, typically for this region and perhaps Birds New Zealand are not young, but we are far from downcast. We have a great range of species and so many fine sites to visit them in.

Finally, bad news/good news. The Black-billed Gulls gave up on the Henley Lake site. Human and rat pressures became too high and the district authority could not become organised enough to help. Falcon family picnics in Masterton's QEII Park are fewer but they are around. On the bright side, the New Zealand Dotterels at Riversdale Beach, despite some setbacks including Masterton District Council inertia about dogs and vehicles on the beach, exceeded the national breeding average. Yellow-crowned Parakeets are definitely on the comeback trail in our end of the Tararua. Many have been heard and seen around Mountain House, and three of us saw and heard one at lower altitude a few days ago near the Atiwhakitu Stream.

- ROBIN LIST

## WELLINGTON

For the first time a New Zealand Dabchick was observed in Zealandia in November 2014. The single adult bird takes to 41 the number of native/endemic species that have been recorded in the sanctuary since 1993. The intriguing questions raised by the appearance of a dabchick at Zealandia are where did it come from and will it be followed by others to establish a breeding population? At certain times of the year individuals of the species range over quite large distances from their place of birth. Since 2005 dabchicks have established and bred on the Pencarrow Lakes and in 2013 a pair appeared at a duck pond in Upper Hutt. Both these locations are a significant distance from other locations holding this bird. On the Kapiti Coast there are large populations of dabchicks and in 2014 flocks of up to 70 and 30 birds were recorded at the Pharazyn Reserve and Otaki Sewage Ponds respectively.

In January a celebratory picnic was held on Mātū/Somes Island to mark the end of eight years of research on the Little Penguin. Many Wellington OSNZ members participated in this project which was initiated by Graeme Taylor (DOC) with assistance from Reg Cotter and Ros Batcheler. Subsequently Mike Rumble played a major role in running the project. The initial study showed that on Mātū/Somes Island, flipper tags had no observable adverse effects on little penguins. The more recent study revealed good numbers of birds, high fledging rates and what appears to be a growing population. The island currently supports over 600 penguins, with the majority of birds using nesting boxes that were established as part of the study. - GEOFF DE LISLE

## NELSON

In November, 15 people covered the area between Westhaven Inlet and Delaware Bay for the spring wader census. A total of 33,500 birds were counted, 86% migratory and 14% endemic. Migratory species were higher in number compared to the long term

average of 25,000 and endemic species were lower compared to long term average of 5,000. Several less common shorebirds were recorded from Farewell Spit: Lesser Sand Plover, Red-necked Stint and Pacific Golden Plover. Bar-tailed Godwit numbered just under 10,000, Ruddy Turnstone numbers were high and Red Knot numbers were exceptionally high. A total of 11,692 birds were counted. The last year with such a high count was in 2008. Whilst every year we expect a steep decline in numbers, Farewell Spit seems to attract a significant portion (11%) of the overall flyway population. Two Red Knots of the subspecies *piersmai*, the highest arctic breeders from the New Siberian Islands, were recorded in meticulous dark red breeding plumage.

Terns have exercising Nelson/Tasman OSNZ members. In December Willie Cook and his team continued banding Caspian Terns chicks on the Shell banks in the Waimea estuary. After suffering badly in their 2013 breeding season, 2014 was much more successful with 70 chicks banded in December. An adult carcass found with a band showed the bird to be 17 years old. Two Gull-billed Terns were photographed on Farewell Spit and five White-winged Black Terns were reported from the Wakapuaka Wetlands, probably a first for the area. Finally on the tern front Ingrid Huetzler saw 210 Black-fronted Terns flying low above Lake Sedgemere (Molesworth) on the evening of 10th December 2014; a number exceeding her previous sightings at the site.

Reports of the spread of Weka continue to come in but, also of interest is video footage, taken as part of OSNZ members Robin and Sandy Toy's work for the community group Friends of Flora, showing Weka harassing Great Spotted Kiwi in their nest burrows. Weka seem to return to the Kiwis' nests many times eventually provoking the Kiwi into chasing them off, in broad daylight. One Weka was such a nuisance the Kiwi had to chase it off five days out of a 10 day period, and in one particularly persistent period, six times in 90 minutes. Video clips taken over several weeks have shown adult Weka 'introducing' their chicks to the Kiwi's nest. No footage of Weka breaking Kiwi eggs or taking Kiwi chicks has been captured, although broken eggs have been found following abandoned nesting attempts. Weka could potentially have broken these eggs before or after the Kiwi abandoned or caused the adult Kiwi to break its own egg by accident. Friends of Flora have posted a compilation of a Weka harassing a particular Kiwi nest and posted it at

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=888726041137504&set=vb.393395000.670613&type=2&theater>. Despite this interference, a Kiwi chick successfully hatched at this particular nest.

Probably the most exotic recent report from our region has been a report of Common Koel from Abel Tasman National Park. Ken George, who reported the bird, is very familiar with the species from observations over many years in the Australian Top End, around Kakadu and the North Queensland tropical rainforests, most recently a few weeks prior to the Abel Tasman report. Ken reported that the Abel Tasman Common Koel called clearly for about two minutes, about 200 metres away in fairly dense bush and added that "even by Australian bird call standards, it's a distinctive and characteristic call". The call included the normal sequence of four or five rising notes, followed quickly by the distinctive 'wurra wurra wurra'. Tantalising! Other unusual Aussie sightings include four Australian Wood Ducks in Redwood Valley, including two juveniles. - ROBIN TOY

## MARLBOROUGH

Spring and summer have seen us once again helping with Claudia's Black-billed Gull banding project. Birds were banded on the upper Wairau River near Rainbow Station, on a couple of



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

occasions. For the first banding day some Nelson members came to help. Again we thank them and say it is a nice way to stay in touch with our neighbours. We had a small group go back to the site just after Christmas to band some chicks that were too young during the first visit.

We also banded Black-billed Gulls on the Wairau River near Renwick, which made for a short drive for those in town. After banding we had a picnic lunch in order to relax and socialise with our Nelson friends who joined us again.

In December we had a barbecue, hosted by Sue and Brian Bell as a wind up for the year and to replace our usual December meeting. We had a good turn-out and, with such good weather, a lovely afternoon.

We are continuing with a project to count Black-fronted Tern movement on the Wairau River with weekly counts of one hour from a set location. It has been interesting to see the change in numbers and behaviour as the season has progressed.

We began our monthly Grassmere counts again in January with a small group, as many were still away on holiday. We delighted in seeing 21 Caspian Terns with at least five downy chicks and a large flock of 82 Banded Dotterels. After the count we went to Lake Elterwater to, again, look for the Hoary-headed Grebes which we had heard were still being seen there.

We did spot one, but as it was at the far side of the lake and swimming with a couple of juvenile Australasian Crested Grebes it was particularly difficult to identify. – DIANNE JOHN

### CANTERBURY

The summer wader count at Lake Ellesmere was a good ending to 2014. Eleven wader species were seen, and a total of nearly 2,000 waders. Highlights from the count included a Black-Tailed Godwit, in the LII pools, and a Spotless Crake in the Lower Selwyn Huts area. Afterwards, counters enjoyed a delicious potluck lunch.

The sighting of a Grey-Tailed Tattler at the Ashley Estuary made an exciting start to 2015 for Canterbury birders. A possible Franklin's Gull was seen at McCormack's Bay, and many birders have been out looking for it. Nobody has had any luck yet, and the sighting has not been confirmed. Australasian Bitterns have been repeatedly seen at Bexley and Travis Wetlands, and also at Charlesworth Reserve and the mouth of the Avon River. Hopefully this is a sign that they are settling into the area. The first ever sighting of a Pectoral Sandpiper at Travis Wetlands was reported in December. Gull-billed Terns continue to be spotted around Lake Ellesmere, with six seen at Kaituna Lagoon in November. Also of note were a pair of White-winged Black Terns that were seen breeding in the Mackenzie Basin. Sadly their nest was unsuccessful.

For the third year in a row, the water level at Lake Ellesmere is really low. The exposed mud is from deep in the lake, meaning there is very little invertebrate food in it for the waders to eat. However, the low lake level means there are many safe areas left for Royal Spoonbill, White-fronted Tern and Caspian Tern colonies. While there is not yet any indication of the breeding success of the Caspian Terns and Royal Spoonbills, the White-fronted Terns have had a successful breeding season and have fledged many young. While it is a difficult balancing act, it is to be hoped that the lake can be lowered enough for birds to have dry areas to breed and for young fish to have access while still keeping enough mudflats for the wader species.

– ELEANOR GUNBY

### OTAGO

Monthly Indoor Meetings have covered a variety of interesting topics during the year. We finished the year with a celebratory supper following an engrossing talk by Francesca Cunningham on her conservation work on the Galapagos Islands. Franny has been developing and actioning plans to save the Mangrove Finch from extinction. We heard first hand of the trials and tribulations and the exhilaration of success of her work to harvest eggs and captive rear chicks before returning them to the mangroves on Isabella Island.

Otago received its share of rarities this summer. An immature White-winged Black Tern frequented Tomahawk lagoon through November and December. A White Heron was seen at Tomahawk and also Hawksbury Lagoon. An Arctic Tern was seen at Aramoana and large numbers of Hutton's and Fluttering Shearwaters have been out at sea.

The Royal Spoonbill colony at Wainono Lagoon, South Canterbury fledged at least 40 young. And the most exciting of all was seeing a Glossy Ibis

sitting on a nest, first seen 1st January, and then a changeover of sitters occurring in the evening of 22nd January. This is the first breeding record for Glossy Ibis in New Zealand. Also present at Wainono Lagoon were two Australasian Crested Grebes (first record for summer), three sandpipers, probably Sharp-tailed, along with about 80 Banded Dotterels, as well as the usual wealth of waterbirds. Three small flocks of South Island Pied Oystercatchers flying in V formation passed by purposefully going north, possibly migrating. Four Black Stilts were seen at All Day Bay, just south of Oamaru early in January.

Australasian Crested Grebes are flourishing on Lake Wanaka. Last year, John Darby began putting in place floating platforms at the Wanaka Marina so grebes could use them for their nests. Two years ago there was just one pair. Now there are seven pairs and they have produced 27 chicks this summer, with five eggs still to hatch. – MARY THOMPSON

## Bird News

*This feature contains news of sightings that have not received official acceptance by the Records Appraisal Committee of Birds New Zealand. Period covered: 1st September 2014 to 28th February 2015.*

The two **Plumed Whistling Ducks** that seem to have become a permanent feature at Anderson Park, Taradale (Hawke's Bay) stayed throughout, though there weren't many reports and some observers missed them. Undoubtedly an escape, a drake **Mandarin Duck** was at Lake Rotoiti (Nelson) from mid-October onwards, moulting into strange eclipse plumage during its stay. There was a minor influx of **Chestnut-breasted Shelducks** with one at Miranda (South Auckland) on 7 and 8/11, an impressive 14 on Derry Castle Reef, Enderby Island (Auckland Islands) 12/11, and a long-staying female in the Manukau Harbour at Mangere (Auckland) from 26/12 to 10/2. Four untwitchable **Australian Wood Ducks** spent over a month on a farm near Mapua (Nelson) from mid-December to 21/1. Of the teals a **Chestnut Teal** was at Little Waihi (Bay of Plenty) on 18/1, and slightly out-of-range **Brown Teal** were on the mudflats next to Island Road, Mangere with one on 1/1, four on 5/1 and one on 11/2. The **Hoary-headed Grebes** reported in the previous bird news continued to be seen at Lake Elterwater (Marlborough) with three present until 9/9, then two until 18/1, and one on 12/2.

Remnants from the major 2012 invasion into northern New Zealand, two **Australian Pelicans** at Port Albert (Kaipara Harbour) on 30/12 were the only ones reported. Three **Brown Boobies** were seen in the north, mostly associating with Australasian Gannets as usual, with one near Robertson Island (Bay of Islands, Far North) on 21/12, one in the Muriwai gannet colony (Auckland) from 9/12 to 22/2 and a different individual on Horuhoru Island (Hauraki Gulf) in mid-February.

Two independent reporters alerted New Zealand Birds Online of a possible **Pacific Heron** at Oteakeke in the Waitaki Valley (Otago). Two long-staying **Little Egrets** were seen on the Kaituna Lagoon section of Lake Ellesmere (Canterbury) from 18 to 21/10 and one was still there on 29/11. Another record probably of a long-staying individual was that of the one on the Manukau Harbour at Mangere between mid-October and 6/11. One of the Lake Ellesmere birds may have wandered a little further east to Takamatua on Akaroa Harbour (Canterbury) where it was seen on 30/10. Others were seen on the Invercargill Estuary (Southland) on 18/12 and 5/1 and the Manawatu Estuary on 24/2. **Glossy Ibises** were seen throughout the period in the Wairau Lagoons area near Blenheim, with a maximum of five birds present from 18/2 to 28/2. They were probably also present at the underwatched Wainono Lagoon (South Canterbury) throughout the period, as the first recorded breeding occurred there this year, and three birds were present (probably one male and two females). Other long-stayers were the two at Little Waihi from at least 7/12 to 7/2 and maybe the same two in the Ohiwa Harbour (Bay of Plenty) seen on 17/10. A possible **Yellow-billed Spoonbill** was reported from near Tarras (Otago) on 20/2.

The Waihopai Valley Road (Marlborough) **Black Kite** was reported on 8/9, but was probably present throughout the period as it is now over 14 years since it first appeared there. A possible **Australian Hobby** was seen flying over south-eastern Christchurch on 23/12.





❑ Dusky Woodswallow on Stewart Island by Satoshi Kakishima.



❑ Mandarin Duck by Amber Calman.



❑ Brown Booby at Muriwai by Aaron Harmer

Fewer than usual vagrant waders seem to have been reported this spring and summer. The only report of a **Great Knot** was of one at Miranda on 31/1. **Sanderlings** were seen on the Ashley Estuary (Canterbury) with one present from early January to 10/1, one was at Greenpark Sands (Canterbury) on 12/2, three were at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 14/2 and two were on Farewell Spit (Golden Bay) on the February wader count. Two **Little Whimbrels** were found on Auckland's wild western fringe at Whatipu on 23/1, both staying until 3/2 and then one seen on 11/2. A **Black-tailed Godwit** graced the Miranda shore probably throughout the period (with two present on 9/9). Others were at Maketu (Bay of Plenty) with one on 6/9, Mangere (two on 12-14/9) and maybe the same bird at the adjacent Ambury Farm Park on 12/12. A bird that was probably this species was on Greenpark Sands on 29/11.

Described as elusive a **Wandering Tattler** was seen on a few days between 28/9 and 9/2 in Ohiwa Harbour. Another at Kidd's on the Manukau Harbour was present throughout but not at a site with public access. Less elusive, at least when it wasn't feeding down in creeks, a **Grey-tailed Tattler** was seen at the Ashley Estuary between early January and 12/2. Well inland a **Common Sandpiper** was on the Oreti River near Lumsden (Southland) on 20/12 and 22/12. Miranda briefly held a **Common Greenshank** on 22/11, providing good practice for the field course participants also present on how to write an Unusual Bird Report. Also at Miranda a **Marsh Sandpiper** was present throughout the period of this report. Other reports of the species concerned an individual on the upper reaches of Ahuriri Estuary (Napier) from 22/11 to 3/12, and on the Invercargill Tip Lagoon (Southland) one on 2/2, with two present from 7 to 23/2. The sole report of a **Terek Sandpiper** was one on the Catlins River Estuary (Otago) on 16/11.

The only **Grey Plover** reported was one on Farewell Spit during the February wader count. The southward march of **New Zealand Dotterel** down the North Island reached its climax on 24/11 when two were seen on the Wainuiomata River Mouth. Is the South Island next to be colonised by the northern subspecies? A **Lesser Sand Plover** was seen on Farewell Spit during the November wader count. Awarua Bay held another on 14/2.

A possible **South Polar Skua** was seen on a crossing of Cook Strait on 16/1. A small number of **Pomarine Skuas** were seen this summer with two off Kaikoura (Canterbury) on 13/12, one in the Hauraki Gulf on 13/1 and one off Kaitorete Spit (Canterbury) on 26/1. A brief view of a possible **Franklin's Gull** in the Avon-Heathcote Estuary (Christchurch) was reported on 27/1.

Maybe wandering birds from their last influx a **Gull-billed Tern** was at Clarks Beach (South Auckland) on 16/9 and one at the Invercargill Tip Lagoon in late January was joined by others to become three from 16 to 21/2. Regarding the remnants of small population that made Lake Ellesmere home six were on Kaituna Lagoon on 29/11, two were on Greenpark Sands on 31/12 and two were on Kaitorete Spit on 1/1 and with one there on 29/1. There seems to have been an influx of **White-winged Black Terns**, and for the second year running the species bred, unsuccessfully, this time on a river in the Mackenzie Basin (Canterbury), where an unpaired bird was also present (in a different locale) in addition to the breeding pair. Other records from outside the general mid-Canterbury area, where the species is seen semi-regularly, were one at Tomahawk Lagoon (Dunedin) from 9/11 to 1/12, one on Maketu Spit on 5/12, becoming two on 13/12 and three on 23/12, one at The Pinnacles (Wellington) on 12/12, one at Miranda from 16/12 to 31/1, one in Bluff Harbour (Southland) on 17/1, and one on Farewell Spit on the February wader count. Summering **Arctic Terns** were seen off south-western Banks Peninsula (Canterbury) with one on 18/1, one was on Kaikoura Peninsula on 13/12, one was on Aramoana Mole (Otago) on 6/12, two were off Stewart Island on 9/11, and one was at the Manawatu River Mouth (Manawatu) on 19/11. Maketu held a **Common Tern** on 12/10 and 27/10, and another or the same bird was down the coast at Thornton Beach on 19/10. Others were at the regular site of the Manawatu River Mouth from 9/11 to 28/11, and at Ruawai (Northland) in mid-January. The long-staying **Crested Tern** was at the Waipu River Mouth (Northland) until 15/1, but few reports of it were received despite (or maybe because of) the influx of holidaymakers in that part of the world.

Surely an escape a **Galah** was seen flying over eastern Christchurch on 3/2. Surprisingly there were two **Oriental Cuckoo** reports, with one possibly this species seen in early January at Mangamanu Farm Park near Kaikoura, and one at Lake Poteriteri (Fiordland) on 12/1. What was possibly an **Australian Koel** was heard calling for two minutes on Pigeon Saddle Track, Abel Tasman National Park (Nelson) on 25/1. Campbell Island was the rather chilly home to a **Fork-tailed Swift** on 2/12.

A first for New Zealand a **Dusky Woodswallow** was found and photographed by two Japanese visitors on Golden Bay Road, Halfmoon Bay (Stewart Island) in late September. The only other vagrant passerine report was of two **Tree Martins** on The Snares on 11/11. Sources: Birding NZ, Birding-NZ Email group, regional roundups.

❑ Little Whimbrel at Whatipu by John Woods.



❑ Mandarin Duck in eclipse plumage by Amber Calman.



❑ Oriental Cuckoo at Lake Poteriteri by Stephen MacDonald.







## ***Birds New Zealand***

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