

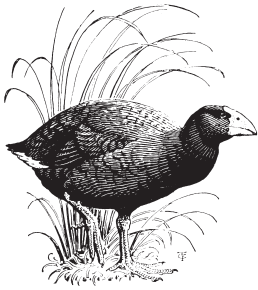


No. 9 March 2016

# *Birds New Zealand*



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



# Birds New Zealand

||||||| NO. 9 MARCH 2016 |||||

## QUOTE

“The wind sails the open sea, steered by the albatross”  
From the poem “Wandering Albatross”

By Chilean Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)



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## COVER IMAGES

Front cover: **Rock Wren, Fiordland.**  
Photo by Craig McKenzie.

Back cover: Top: *Hakawai melvillei* pair. Painting by Derek Onley. © Museum of Canterbury. Bottom: **Otago Shag trio** (juvenile at left with pied and dark bronze adults). Painting by Derek Onley.

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We welcome advertising enquiries. Free classified ads are available to members at the editor's discretion.

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. or the editor.



# President's Report

## President's Report

This is my first report for 2016 and I hope that everyone had good birding over the holiday period, and that you have entered your data into eBird so that it can be used in the future.

Already this looks like a busy year for the Council continuing on from the initiatives developed during 2015. There is an additional Council meeting in March, so if there are any issues that members want to be considered these should be made known to me as soon as possible.

## Birds New Zealand Magazine

As advised in the previous report there is now a new editor of the magazine. This will be Michael Szabo's first issue as editor and I know that he is excited to take up his new role. I also know that Nick Allen is enjoying his freedom, spending time with his family in Auckland when he would normally be putting this magazine together in Christchurch.

I would urge members to support Michael and provide copy of interesting events and activities in your region or specialist articles about birdwatching spots or birding activity.

## Notornis Editor

As I have previously notified, the present editor of *Notornis*, Dr Jim Briskie, has been looking to wind down his involvement. Over the Christmas period I have been approached by a suitable candidate and, following a decision of Council, we have decided to appoint Dr Leigh Bull as the editor. Leigh and Jim have worked out a system of one phasing out while the other phases in over this year so that there will be no noticeable changes in the short-term.

Leigh is based in Wellington and works for Boffa Miskell, a large consultancy firm, but there will be more details about her background in future editions. This is an exciting trend and, as far as I know, Leigh will be the first woman to be appointed as *Notornis* editor.

## Council Changes

Stefanie Grosser, one of our younger Council members, has accepted a full-time position back in her homeland of Germany and has therefore resigned from the Council. Stefanie has instigated the start of student involvement in Council activities and we hope that this will continue without her guidance. I am impressed at the quality of students that are currently studying at university and this becomes obvious at the scientific days attached to the Annual General Meeting. I believe it is essential that we encourage the students to become members so that we can all gain from their knowledge.

As would be seen from the previous edition of the magazine, nominations are currently open to fill the vacancies on Council and we hope that we can ensure that the Council is full to enable the workload to be shared.

## Australasian Ornithological Conference

At the end of November 2015 I attended this conference in Adelaide, representing the Society. There were a number of Society members present at the conference and some presented papers which were well received. The attendance by New Zealanders, however, was less than desirable and I believe that members would benefit from attending these events in the future. It is likely that the next conference will be in Melbourne in 2017. Keep your eye open for announcements and mark your diary at that time.

The Society provided travel assistance to Josie Galbraith, one of our student members, to enable her to present at this event. Her presentation generated much discussion among the Australians.



■ Colin Miskelly and David Lawrie scanning with their spotting scopes.

## 10th Australasian Shorebird Conference

The 10th Australasian Shorebird Conference will be held in Auckland on Saturday 1st October and Sunday 2nd October at UNITEC Institute of Technology. Details of this event are posted on the OSNZ website and I would encourage as many members as possible to attend. It is virtually essential to attend for anyone interested in shorebirds.

## eBird Data

Over the holiday period I have been transferring all my life time birding records from a programme I had been running called 'Bird Base' into eBird New Zealand. The transfer process has created some anomalies as the programme to transfer the data had some differences in the names of birds, which has created some issues. Finding the same spots in eBird New Zealand has also created some difficulties.

However, the benefits of having the information in a publicly-accessible database are already apparent. Some of my early records of the distribution of birds have been challenged by the eBird checkers because several species have now disappeared from areas where they were quite common in the 1960s and 1970s, which shows the value of long-term data sets. I would therefore encourage all members to transfer old data from notebooks into eBird New Zealand to increase the pool of knowledge and to enable mapping of changes that have occurred.

## Beach Patrol Cards

Ian Armitage is in charge of a project to convert all the beach patrol cards from the hard copy data to digital format. Ian has provided reports in the past and will do so again in the future. However, a recent update is that well in excess of 16,000 cards have now been entered into the electronic database with some of Ian's helpers having great input. Kim Gouldstone entered 4,420 cards, Ros and Derek Batchelor entered 3,112 cards, and Lloyd Esler entered 3,017 cards. There are also a number of other helpers who had impressive tallies.

This data-checking is something that anyone can do from any area as long as you have access to a computer. If you are interested in helping, contact Ian at your earliest opportunity.

## Introduction to another young birder - Oscar Thomas

My name is Oscar (15), and I've been enthusiastically birding and photographing since I was introduced to birdlife by my primary school teacher (Sonya Galbraith) in 2010, who was also one of the first Tiritiri Matangi members. Outside of

school, I recently became a guide on Tiritiri Matangi, from which all the proceeds go back to the island and its conservation. The Kōkako is my favourite species, followed by Matuku (Australasian bittern) and Pūweto (Spotless crane). In October last year, my Mother and I helmed the North Island Kōkako campaign for Forest and Bird's annual 'Bird of the Year' competition, to help raise public awareness for New Zealand's unique species as a whole.

We were lucky enough to finish with 1,814 votes, second only to Miranda's esteemed Bar-tailed Godwit with 1,957 votes. Kaka was third, another 900 votes behind the Kōkako.

Growing up as a birder, I only find it difficult to get out and about as often as the birds. I'm trying to resist dragging somebody out to Ohiwa to see a stunning Oriental Plover in breeding gear, for example, as well as not yet being eligible for a driving license (four months to go!). Although I live in Auckland, we are lucky enough to have Kererū, Tūi, Riroriro (Grey Warbler), Ruru and Pipīwhararua (Shining Cuckoo) among the species in our garden. I try to catch up with all the birds that show up around Auckland, the latest being a Broad-billed Sandpiper on the Manukau Harbour (I also only just joined the Society, sorry I'm late!). My New Zealand life list is now 126 and counting!

I'd also like to thank bird photographers Rod Morris and the late Geoff Moon, the late Don Merton, and all the Kokako monitors who I know for inspiring me, and for their important work.

You can see my bird photographs on Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kokakola11/>



### Annual General Meeting Weekend

It would appear that the organisation of the Annual General Meeting and Conference Weekend in Napier is well advanced. The registration forms are available online or can be obtained from your local regional representative.

I would urge people to register early as that gives the organisers an opportunity to plan numbers and make the necessary arrangements.

I look forward to meeting as many members at that event as possible as that is really the only opportunity we have to get together as a collective.

DAVID LAWRIE, President



## AOC Student Support

Birds New Zealand offers travel grants to assist postgraduate research students from New Zealand present their findings at the Australian Ornithological Conference. Applicants need to be Birds New Zealand members. In return, the successful applicants will be expected to write a short report on their conference experience for publication in *Birds New Zealand* and/or submit an article to *Notornis*. See the Birds New Zealand website for further details under the Funding section.



## Library 'round robin' system

The Birds New Zealand library receives the *Stilt* (Journal for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway) and *Tattler* (Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways and Australasian Shorebirds 2020 Project). Members with an interest in shorebirds who would like to subscribe and receive these publications through the library's 'round robin' system can order a two-year subscription as a cost of \$10. To arrange a subscription please contact Hon. Librarian Heather Rogers via email: [osnzlibrarian@aucklandmuseum.com](mailto:osnzlibrarian@aucklandmuseum.com)

## Editorial

I hope you will enjoy this issue of *Birds New Zealand*, my first as editor. Some of you may recognise my name from my years as editor of *Forest & Bird* magazine, or from before that when I wrote news stories and features for *New Scientist*, *New Zealand Geographic*, and the *Sunday Star* (before it was the *Sunday Star Times*). More recently I was the principal author of *Wild Encounters* (Penguin Books NZ), a site guide to discovering New Zealand's unique birds and marine wildlife, and I contributed 50 species accounts to New Zealand Birds Online, the digital encyclopaedia of New Zealand Birds.

In the time since I graduated in the late 1980s I have worked as a writer and editor, including in a variety of roles for BirdLife International, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand, Pew Charitable Trusts and Greenpeace New Zealand. I also have a passion for birds and have greatly enjoyed travelling around New Zealand over that time and discovering more about them.

Among the highlights for me have been visiting Whenua Hou/Codfish Island to work with the Kakapo Recovery Programme, helping to control invasive pests near a population of Northern Brown Kiwi and Brown Teal in Northland, and marveling at the sight of a pair of Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses during their flight display on Campbell Island while on a writing assignment that took me there.

Living with my partner and our three children on the Cook Strait coast in Wellington, next to Island Bay Marine Reserve, is also important to me. We chose to live here because it is a great place for us to live and a great place to watch seabirds, such as the local New Zealand Little Penguins and the various albatrosses that we sometimes see flying past.

I do hope you will find the items and articles in this and future issues to be interesting and topical. For my part, I am excited to be taking on my new role as editor and looking forward to producing a compelling magazine that reports on the important work of Birds New Zealand and its members, and topical developments in ornithology and bird conservation.

I also want to thank Nick Allen for his advice and help during the transition over the past few months, and all those of you who contribute to *Birds New Zealand*.

MICHAEL SZABO, Editor



# Birds New Zealand AGM & Conference 2016

The 2016 Birds New Zealand Conference and AGM will be held in Napier, Hawke's Bay, at the Museum Theatre Gallery, Marine Parade, during Queen's Birthday weekend 4th-6th June 2016 as follows:

## Friday 3rd June:

6pm-7pm Registration (Te Pania Hotel, 45 Marine Parade, Napier)

## Saturday 4th June:

8am-9am Registration (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
9am-9:10am Opening of Conference (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
9:10am-3:40pm Science Presentations (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
3:40pm-5pm AGM (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
6:30pm-9pm Informal dinner (Te Pania Hotel)

## Sunday 5th June:

8:30am-10:30am Workshops (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
**Workshop One** – Triangulating Australasian Bittern (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
**Workshop Two** – Basic use of GPS in the field (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
**Workshop Three** – Herbert Guthrie Smith (Napier Museum)  
10:30am-11am Morning Tea (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
11am-5pm Science Presentations (Museum Theatre Gallery)  
6:30 pm Conference Dinner (Masonic Hotel, 2 Tennyson Street, Napier)

## Monday 6th June:

8:30am-4:30 pm Field Trips (final details tbc Sunday 5th June):  
Boundary Stream/Lake Opouahi (8am -4:30pm)  
Clive Wetlands (9am-12:30pm)  
Ahuriri Estuary (9am -12 noon)

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

## Nominations for Regional Representatives 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 Nelson 7040) on 31st July 2016. The nomination 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 2017 year.

## Donations

We thank the following members for their generous donations to the Society: Peter Howden; DM Stacy; Lance Pickett; Geoff Harrow; Ted Kirk; Janet Thorp; AD Latham; Gregory Moorcroft; Philip Munns; Ian Sutherland; Simon Chamberlin; Dan O'Halloran; PM & JL Sager; William Cook; Marianne Power; Gwynyth Norman; Florence Gaud; Betty Seddon; Steve Braunias; J Bendell; Denise Poyner; V & P Palmer; David Roxburgh; John Troost; Bruce Mackinlay; MG Hill; Jillian Hanna; C John Ralph; Graham Hunt; Francie Beggs; Geoff de Lisle; Anthony Carey; Roger Day; Lois Wagener; Jan Walker; Colon O'Donnell; NJ Andrews; Ruth Crockett; David Crockett; Environ Research Ltd; David Pye; Shona Smith; Sharon Alderton; Kath Varcoe.

## New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members: Zoe Battersby (Marlborough); Martin Berg (Overseas); Russell Cannings (Waikato); Murry Cave (West Coast); Guliema Dowrick (Bay of Plenty); Nyree Fea (Wellington); Keiko Hashiba (Hawke's Bay); Katherine Hay (Waikato); Rebecca Julia Hohnhold (Auckland); Andrew John (Marlborough); Leigh Joyce (Auckland); Thinus Knoetze (Wellington); Lianne Kooiman (Southland); Darren Lees (Wellington); Scott Lewis (Canterbury); Vanessa Mander (Canterbury); Thomas Mattern (Otago); Mark Maultby (Wellington); Archie MacFarlane (Hawke's Bay); Jeanette McGuire (Overseas); Joy McLiver (Bay of Plenty); Sophie Mephan (Nelson); Jeremy Painting (Auckland); Hamish Spencer (Otago); Michael Szabo (Wellington); Kaye Turner (Waikato); Andrew Turvey (Wellington); Kristel van Houte (Waikato); Shae Vickers (Auckland); Mahina Walle (Auckland); Aaron Thompson (Auckland); David Hunter (Auckland); Kenny Rose (Canterbury); Alec Milne (Canterbury); Andrew Fidler (Nelson); Janice McKenna (Nelson); Rowena West (Wellington); Douglas Begg (Wellington); Cheryl Walton (Auckland); Leigh Percasky (Manawatu); Peggy Burbank (Hawke's Bay).

## 10th Australasian Shorebird Conference

The 10th Australasian Shorebird Conference will be held at UNITEC Institute of Technology in Auckland on Saturday 1st October and Sunday 2nd October. There will be two days of presentations covering a wide range of subjects relating to shorebird biology and ecology in New Zealand and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The conference will be followed by field trips to a variety of good shorebird sites around Auckland on Monday 3rd October. More details regarding registration will appear later in 2016. Anyone interested in presenting a paper or poster at the conference should contact Phil Battley: [P.Battley@massey.ac.nz](mailto:P.Battley@massey.ac.nz)

## Birds New Zealand Youth Camp 2016

The Youth Camp will be held at the Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre over ANZAC weekend, 22nd to 26th April. If you are a student in Year 10 or above and keen to join the camp, please contact Andrew Styche, RR of Birds Waikato: [astyche@doc.govt.nz](mailto:astyche@doc.govt.nz) or Ray and Ann Buckmaster: [weaves@clear.net.nz](mailto:weaves@clear.net.nz)





▲ North Island Kokako. Photo Cheryl Marriner

## Rangitoto Station and Mangatutu Forest after 20 years of pest control

Rangitoto Station (NZ Native Forest Restoration Trust) and adjacent Mangatutu Ecological Area (DOC) are located in northern Pureora. The station comprises regenerating bush, rank pasture and planted areas while Mangatutu is an unlogged native forest of tawa and giant podocarps.

In 1995 Laurence Gordon discovered a remnant population of North Island Kokako in the Mangatutu that had survived because of pest control operations. DOC Te Kuiti subsequently established that the North Island Kokako population here consisted of 29 birds. Laurence made an appeal for volunteers via Forest and Bird to which we responded and later that year we led an OSNZ Auckland party into the area.

The prospect of saving North Island Kokako captured the imagination of Howick Tramping Club and a forest management arrangement was organised between the club and DOC Te Kuiti. The enthusiasm and work of the members resulted in a network of tracks being created and marked through the forest to reach over 900 bait stations that are serviced between August and December each year.

In the past few years Auckland Tramping Club have joined the arrangement and are servicing bait stations in the neighbouring Tunawai forest area where another remnant North Island Kokako population was found. The three areas now combine to provide a superb refuge for North Island Kokako. The last formal census done by DOC established that there were 109 pairs in the Mangatutu, but given the elusive nature of the birds, and the fact that the Tunawai population was not counted, it is very likely the total North Island Kokako population in the combined area is closer to 200 pairs.

Although all this effort is aimed at North Island Kokako recovery, the benefit to the wider bird population is also apparent. Every year the volunteer work reduces the rat numbers to less than five percent at a time when North Island Kokako and most other bird species in the forest are breeding, and the beneficial effect of that is now very obvious.

Alongside the remnant North Island Kokako a few Rifleman must also have survived but were not seen in the forest for several years. Now you can expect to see them most times you venture into the forest. Yellow-crowned Parakeets were few and far between but are now recorded daily. Whiteheads are everywhere and it's no coincidence we are recording more Long-tailed Cuckoos. North

Island Robins, New Zealand Tomtits, New Zealand Pigeons, Tui and Bellbirds are also thriving.

Between 26th and 30th December, Sharen and Mike Graham carried out a number of bird counts on Rangitoto Station and in Mangatutu. The records are all on eBird but a checklist of the 33 species recorded follows with the numbers from four of these counts. These will give the reader a good idea of the extent of the benefit to other bird species from this North Island Kokako recovery work: California Quail: 1+1; Pheasant: 1+3; Swamp Harrier: 2+2+2+1; NZ Pigeon: 5+8+5+15; Shining Cuckoo: 2+2+1; Long-tailed Cuckoo: 1+6+1; NZ Falcon: 1; Morepork: 1+1; Sacred Kingfisher: 1; Kaka: 1+2; Yellow-crowned Parakeet: 2+8+2; Rifleman: 4+2; Tui: 10+28+25+32; Bellbird: 5+25+10+20; Grey Warbler: 2+5+3+6; Whitehead: 6+14+27+30; North Island Kokako: 2+1; Australian Magpie: 2+3+2; NZ Fantail: 1+1+1+2; NZ Tomtit: 2+12+1+1; North Island Robin: 1+6+9+10; Welcome Swallow: 6+3+1; Fernbird: 1; Silveryeye: 5+12+2; Blackbird: 4+6+2; Song Thrush: 4+2+1; Common Starling: 2+3; Dunnock: 3+2; NZ Pipit: 1+1+1; Yellowhammer: 2+3+1+4; Chaffinch: 4+6+2; Redpoll: 6+8+1; House Sparrow: 4+2.

MIKE AND SHAREN GRAHAM

## King Shag census results published

The total population of the endemic New Zealand King Shag is larger than previously estimated, according to a new study conducted by Rob Shuckard, David Melville and Graeme Taylor in 2015 using aerial 3D photography, and published in *Notornis* (December 2015, Vol 6, Part 4), the journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

The survey of 13 breeding sites and four roosting sites in the Marlborough region recorded 839 individual birds, including 187 pairs, compared to a previous survey conducted by boat between 1992 and 2002 which estimated 645 individual birds, including 102-126 breeding pairs. Despite the larger revised population size, the species remains Nationally Endangered.



▣ Black-fronted Tern. Photo Wildlife Management International.



▣ Black-billed Gull. Photo Wildlife Management International.

## Call for colour-banded Black-billed Gull and Black-fronted Tern sightings

Birds New Zealand members are being encouraged to keep an eye out for colour-banded Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns. Both species are being banded as part of two ongoing monitoring projects being carried out on a number of rivers in the Marlborough and Canterbury regions.

Black-billed Gulls are being banded on the Wairau, Clarence and Buller Rivers as part of an ongoing study being carried out by Wildlife Management International (WMIL) staff member Claudia Mischler, with the assistance of Marlborough Birds New Zealand members. "By colour-banding the chicks that fledge from colonies on these rivers each season, we're hoping to keep track of juvenile survival and recruitment rates in local populations of this nationally endangered species" she says. "We're also hoping to build a better picture of where the wintering grounds of Marlborough's Black-billed Gulls are".

Each banded gull has been fitted with a large coloured leg band inscribed with an alpha-numeric code, with the colour of the band corresponding to the river on which that particular bird has been caught and banded. Birds carrying white bands have been caught at breeding colonies on the Wairau River, while birds carrying yellow and red bands were banded on the Clarence and Buller Rivers.

Another research project looking at the breeding success of Black-fronted Terns on the upper Clarence and Acheron Rivers is being carried out by WMIL staff and jointly funded by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Environment Canterbury. The aim is to test a novel combination of intensive predator control and habitat management in the vicinity of Black-fronted Tern colonies, in order to improve breeding success.

Black-fronted Tern chicks that fledge on these rivers are being fitted with either coloured bands or flags, each of which is inscribed with a unique two-letter combination. As with the Black-billed Gulls, terns that fledge on the Clarence or Acheron Rivers are being fitted with yellow bands or flags. In addition, a number of terns have also been banded on the Wairau River in previous years, and have been fitted with white bands or flags. Black-fronted Tern bands in particular can be a difficult to read due to their smaller size and the birds' short, stubby legs.

If you don't have a spotting scope, another easy way to read the band is to take a good-quality digital photo of the bird, then use the optical or digital zoom function on your camera to zoom in and read the band's two-letter code from the photo.

If you are lucky enough to spot one of these banded or flagged birds on your travels, please record the band colour and number, and report the location and date of your sighting.

Band sightings can be emailed to Claudia Mischler (gull sightings) [Claudia@wmil.co.nz](mailto:Claudia@wmil.co.nz) or Nikki McArthur (tern sightings) [Nikki@wmil.co.nz](mailto:Nikki@wmil.co.nz)

NIKKI MCARTHUR



▣ Rock Wren in the hand. Photo by Bruce Robertson.

## Rock Wren marked by climate change

A new study describing the genetic structure of the endangered New Zealand Rock Wren has identified a deep north-south divergence in the species' South Island range centred at Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, which the authors say is a strong signature of past climate change.

The study, authored by Kerry Weston and Bruce Robertson from the University of Otago and published in *Molecular Ecology* (Sept 2015, Vol 24, Issue 8), also found that the level of genetic divergence between the northern and southern lineages is similar to levels separating the North Island and South Island species of New Zealand Robin and greater than that separating North Island Kokako and South Island Kokako.

The authors say these findings are consistent with the 'glacial refugia' hypothesis, which proposes that populations of species living around two million years ago during the extensive glaciation of the Pleistocene era were restricted in isolated refuges.

The study also shows that dispersal among northern Rock Wren populations is more restricted than among southern Rock Wren populations, indicating increased fragmentation in the northern region of the Rock Wren's range. The northern Rock Wren also exhibit lower genetic diversity, increasing their vulnerability to disease and changes in their environment.

Given this deep divergence between northern and southern Rock Wren lineages, the authors say it is important that each lineage be considered as a separate unit in future conservation management strategies in order to conserve their full genetic variation - the implication being that as the climate rapidly changes, Rock Wren will need to retain as much genetic diversity as possible if they are to have more potential to adapt.





▲ New Zealand Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor*, Hauraki Gulf. Photo by Terry Greene. Crown © Department of Conservation *Te Papa Atawhai*



▲ Australian Little Penguin *Eudyptula novaehollandiae*, Otago coast. Photo by Craig McKenzie.

## New Zealand and Australian Little Penguins are two distinct species

A new DNA study describing the genetic structure of Little Penguins has discovered that New Zealand and Australian Little Penguins are two distinct species and not the same one, as previously believed.

The study, conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Otago and University of Tasmania and published in the scientific journal *PloS ONE* (December 2015, Vol 10, Issue 12), found that the two lineages are distinguishable based on genetic, behavioural and morphological features. For example, the Australian species had subtle differences in body and cranium size, and colour.

"We found a very strong pattern, where New Zealand has its own distinctive genetic group that is clearly very different from the Australian penguin populations," says Birds New Zealand Council member Dr Stefanie Grosser, who carried out the study as part of her Otago PhD project.

Similar to their human counterparts, the two species also seem to have developed their own "accents". Other researchers have previously shown that their calls differ and that female Little Penguins prefer the calls of males of their own species.

"You could say the Aussies like hearing 'feesh', while 'fush' sounds better to Kiwi ears," Dr Grosser jokes.

"The recognition of unique Little Penguin species on both sides of the Tasman highlights the importance of managing and conserving them separately," she says.

"This research highlights that there is still much to be discovered about our region's unique wildlife," says Professor Jon Waters of Otago University, who was involved in the study. "The new recognition of endemic species – unique to our region – is crucial for managing our natural heritage."

## Little Penguins on the Otago coast arrived from Australia

Another new DNA study has discovered that the Little Penguins found on the Otago coast are a surprisingly recent arrival from Australia.

The study was conducted by Birds New Zealand Council member Dr Stefanie Grosser as part of her PhD research, led by Professor Jon Waters from Otago's Department of Zoology, and published in *The Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* (February 2016, Vol 283, Issue 1824).

The new study analysed ancient DNA from the remains of over 100 Little Penguin bones from pre-human times as well as archaeological deposits and museum skins.

Dr Grosser says previous studies had concluded that the Australian species has been in New Zealand for hundreds of thousands of years. However, the new genetic study indicates that the Australian species arrived in this part of New Zealand much more recently.

"Amazingly, all of the bones older than 400 years belong to the endemic New Zealand species," she says. "Our results clearly show that the Australian Little Penguin colonised Otago very recently, between 1500 and 1900 AD, apparently following the decline of the endemic New Zealand Little Penguin, which was hunted by early human settlers and introduced predators."

The Australian sub-population appears confined to Otago. DNA analysis from other colonies, such as Wellington, Kaikoura and Banks Peninsula, turned up only the New Zealand lineage.

"Many of New Zealand's bird species have suffered at the hands of people. The really exciting thing about these findings is that they show how quickly nature can respond to human impacts," says Professor Waters, who was involved in the study.

The study was funded by the Marsden Fund and the Allan Wilson Centre.

## First NZ successful breeding record of Glossy Ibis

A recent fledgling Glossy Ibis was photographed in the Royal Spoonbill colony at Wairau Lagoon, Blenheim, on 8th December by Jane Chelius. The following month Will Parsons photographed three juvenile Glossy Ibises with two adult birds at Wairau Lagoon on 2nd January. They were seen again in the spoonbill colony on 14th January. This is the first confirmed successful New Zealand breeding record of Glossy Ibis. No chicks or fledglings were observed from the Glossy Ibis nest reported at Wainono Lagoon, Canterbury, in January 2015.



▼ Photo Will Parsons.



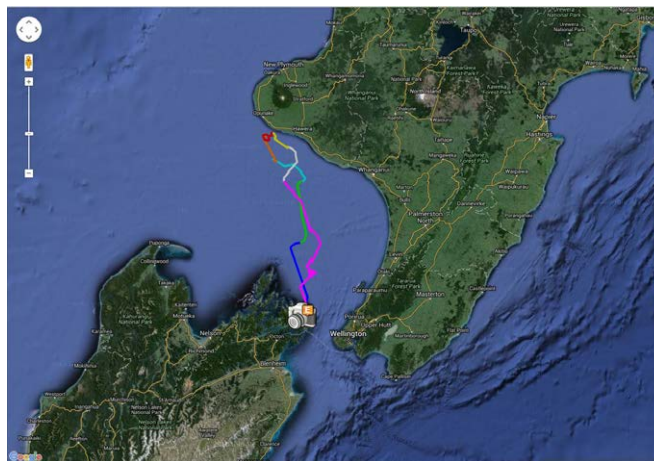
# From Motuara to Taranaki – Little Penguins swim up to 170 km

During the incubation period in September and October 2015, Te Papa seabird researcher Tim Poupart deployed miniature GPS loggers on Little Penguins nesting on Motuara Island in Marlborough. Their trips were a great surprise, with most birds travelling north of the Marlborough area to the waters offshore from Taranaki. Taking between five and 15 days away from the nest during the incubation period, adult Little Penguins alternate their shifts so that one bird stays to keep the eggs safe and warm, while the other is at sea feeding. Many of the birds tracked went to similar locations to the one shown on the map, while a few stayed near to Motuara Island during their trips at sea. A team of Te Papa seabird researchers and research interns have been studying the at-sea movements of Little Penguins from breeding sites in Wellington and Motuara Island using GPS loggers since 2014.

SUSAN WAUGH

Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand

Source: <http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2015/11/02/little-penguins-do-big-swims/>



▲ Foraging trip completed by a Little Penguin from Motuara Island (shown with the camera symbol on the map) in Marlborough during incubation. This bird spent 10 days at sea. Astonishingly, the bird went to Taranaki and returned a distance of approximately 170 km, spurning nearby waters of Cook Strait and Marlborough Sounds for feeding. Image: Google Earth, © Te Papa.

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## Otago Shag and Foveaux Shag described

A new DNA study describing the genetic structure of Stewart Island Shag has discovered that it is made up of two distinct species, recognised as Foveaux Shag and Otago Shag. Foveaux Shag occurs in the Foveaux Strait and at Stewart Island, and Otago Shag occurs at the Otago Peninsula, Oamaru and the Catlins.

The study, conducted by a University of Otago-led team of researchers and published in the *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* in February 2016, found that the two species are distinguishable based on genetic and morphological features.

"We found a very distinctive pattern where shag populations from Otago differed from those around Foveaux Strait and Stewart Island in terms of DNA, body size, breeding time and the proportion of pied and dark bronze plumage variations within the population," says Dr Nic Rawlence of Otago University, one of the study authors.

"Scientists have suspected that these two formerly unrecognised species were different as far back as the 1800s, but we have not had the genetic or analytical tools to address this question until now."

The Stewart Island Shag was classified as nationally vulnerable. There are fewer than 2,500 Otago Shags and approximately 2,000 Foveaux Shags, with both species being quite separated.

The study also found the two species may not even be sister species and that the Otago Shag's lineage was more closely related to the endemic Chatham Island Shag.

"New Zealand is home to more shag species than anywhere else in the world. This discovery emphasises yet again how special our bird fauna is on a worldwide basis," says University of Otago Professor Hamish Spencer, who was also a member of the study team.

The study was funded by the Marden Fund and Allan Wilson Centre, and included team members from Canterbury Museum, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Otago Museum, the Natural History Museum in London, and the Museum National d'Historie Naturelle in Paris.



▲ Foveaux Shag *Leucocarbo stewarti* (upper) and Otago Shag *Leucocarbo chalconotus* (lower).

An earlier DNA study led by University of Otago researchers found that mainland populations of Otago Shag originally occurred along the east coast of the South Island, north to Cook Strait, but were almost wiped out after humans arrived in New Zealand.

"There was a loss of more than 99% of their population size within 100 years of human arrival. The once heavily-hunted mainland populations of Otago Shag now occupy only a fraction of their prehistoric range, having never really recovered," says Dr Rawlence.

The earlier study suggests that the mainland populations of Otago Shag survived on just a few rocky islands off the South Island's east coast. In contrast, Foveaux Shag appears to have been little affected by humans.

# The birding bounty of South Australia

The Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC) was back across the ditch this year, with birdos from Australia, New Zealand, and further afield descending on Adelaide like Galahs on a wheat field.

The conference was held at Flinders University, with its lovely park-like grounds complete with resident Koala. The organisation committee did a wonderful job of putting together a varied and interesting scientific programme. There was a fantastic array of plenaries, symposia, and talks, with an encouraging contingent of students. Once again the AOC has proved a valuable and friendly forum for academic discussion and learning, particularly for the students.

It was alarmingly clear from the talks that birds in Australia are under fire – in both the figurative and literal sense. A number of papers at the conference presented valuable, long-term monitoring data indicating that many Australian woodland species are in decline. One key concern which is (thankfully) absent in New Zealand is the current regime of “controlled” burnoffs, which is aimed at reducing the risk of large bushfires.

Habitats and birds are not able to recover sufficiently between fires, placing them under increasing pressure. The impacts of these artificially frequent fire events operate alongside other threats that are more familiar to us here in New Zealand, such as habitat loss from land use change and invasive species, as well as the increasingly extreme effects of climate change such as drought.

But of all the bird taxa in Australia, it is the shorebirds that are exhibiting the steepest declines. In an excellent plenary, Judit Szabo presented data indicating shorebirds are in big trouble, identifying threats at northern hemisphere breeding and stopover sites as the main drivers. These, of course, are serious threats to New Zealand’s migratory shorebirds as well.

There is ongoing work to investigate the specific threats at stopover and breeding sites, particularly in the Yellow Sea region, which will hopefully lead to positive conservation measures. Although these threats are outside Australia and New Zealand, Judit stressed that it was our responsibility to save shorebirds and push other nations to protect vital habitats.

In addition to the excellent science being presented, there was also plenty of networking and fun to be had among such a great bunch of people. And, most importantly, there was much birding to be done. Field trips to woodland and wetland habitats, including the lower lakes near the Murray River mouth, revealed a great diversity of bird species for the Aussie-bird novices such as me, but also a few notable species for the local birdos too. A few highlights for me were the Owlet-nightjar, Diamond Firetail, Freckled Duck, and Latham’s/ Japanese Snipe. In all, it was a wonderful conference with stimulating discussion and memorable birding experiences. I look forward to the next AOC, in Geelong, Victoria, in 2017!

JOSIE GALBRAITH



▲ Australian Owlet-nightjar.  
Photo Josie Galbraith.



▲ AOC 2016, Adelaide. Photo Josie Galbraith.

## Extinct shorebird species described in Otago

Fossil bone remains of a previously unknown shorebird species have been found and identified near St Bathans in Central Otago, dating from 19-16 million years ago when most of New Zealand was covered in subtropical forests.

The new study, published in the *Journal of Systematic Palaeontology* (October 2015, Vol 13) by a team of New Zealand and Australian-based scientists including Canterbury Museum researchers, confirms that the ancient shorebird fossils belong to an ancient group which had been thought only to comprise the Australian Plains-wanderer and South American seedsnipes.

The new species, *Hakawai melvillei*, has been named after New Zealand ornithologist David Melville to honour his efforts in the conservation of migratory shorebirds, and has been described as a

“missing link” in the evolutionary history of southern shorebirds (see painting, lower half back cover). Lead author and Canterbury Museum researcher, Dr Vanesa De Pietri, says that the team were excited to discover that the fossil shorebird was not a typical wader, but more like an ancestral Plains-wanderer, with some seedsnipe-like features.

The Plains-wanderer and seedsnipes are unusual among shorebirds as they have adapted well to living on the land.

“We’re happy to have found a fossil bird that provides a key morphological link between the two groups. The discovery of *Hakawai melvillei* has confirmed our thinking that the ancestors of the Plains-wanderer and seedsnipes were wading birds, like most other shorebirds. It has also confirmed previous research I’ve undertaken, with colleagues, that the

Plains-wanderer and seedsnipes evolved their terrestrial habits independently.”

The new discovery sheds light on evolutionary processes at work when Australia and New Zealand were part of the southern supercontinent of Gondwana. *Hakawai melvillei*, the Australian Plains-wanderer and the South American seedsnipe are all thought to have originated in East Gondwana.

Canterbury Museum Senior Curator of Natural History and study co-author Professor Paul Scofield says: “*Hakawai melvillei* probably became endemic to New Zealand. Over millions of years, the Plains-wanderer has efficiently adapted to Australia’s changing landscape – from forests to sparse native grasslands. Unfortunately due to the loss of its natural habitat, it is now one of Australia’s most endangered birds”.



# What is the Plains-wanderer?

What bird looks like a long-legged quail, but is not? Answer: the Plains-wanderer, an endemic wader of riverine plains grasslands in Australia. It is the sole member of an entire family, the *Pedionomidae*, and most closely related to the *Charadriiformes*, the family that contains South American seedsnipes and all other wading bird species.

Female Plains-wanderers are up to 19 cm high with a yellow bill, black-and-white collar, rufous breast patch, and cryptic quail-like plumage elsewhere. In comparison, the drab buff males are 15 cm high with white streaks and blackish spots on the head, neck and lower body.

Curious to find out more about this enigmatic “shorebird in quails’ clothing” I went in search of them with ornithologist Philip Maher of Australian Ornithological Services, who has been banding them and leading night tours to find them for over 30 years. Plains-wanderers are best seen after dark because their cryptic plumage makes them almost impossible to find during daylight, so I met him in Deniliquin, NSW, early one November evening and we drove in his 4WD into the seemingly endless fenced paddocks of sparse grassland where a few of them still breed.

At our first stop we see a trio of Emu and then an Australian Pratincole, another shorebird of the grasslands with strikingly long legs. When the pratincole takes off it looks like a tawny tern with stilt legs with its buff-brown plumage and long, pointed sickle-like wings. It lands by a flock of Banded Lapwings, a smaller relative of the Spur-winged Plover, yet another shorebird of the grasslands.

With sunset approaching we drive on further through multiple gates to where he saw a pair of Plains-wanderers recently. Once darkness falls we set out slowly with the headlights on, roof-mounted spotlights pointing outwards on both sides, and a powerful handheld spotlight that Philip carries in his right hand and holds out of his window. After 15 minutes he stops the car and quietly says “there they are” and directs his spotlight at them about ten metres ahead. They are smaller and even more quail-like than I expected. The larger female is sitting on the ground with the smaller male standing close by.

He whispers that he suspects the female has found a new mate, which explains why she was calling so strongly on previous nights. Her other mate is probably sitting on a nest, he adds. Both birds remain still in the spotlight until the female puffs up her throat and gives a repeated call that Philip describes as “booming” – which it is, but much quieter than a bittern. Then, after taking some photographs, he turns off the lights and we drive slowly back to the gate.

On our way back to the main road we drive past some endemic Inland Dotterels. “They’re not unlike NZ Dotterels”, he comments – which they are, only slightly smaller. Then we see a male Little Button-quail with two chicks. He says it’s incredible that they are breeding during such a bad drought year. It is, he says, the driest he has seen it here in over 30 years. Just after passing a mob of Red Kangaroos a feral Red Fox runs in front of the headlights, prompting him to add that the invasive Red Fox also preys on Plains-wanderers.

The combined effects of habitat loss, overgrazing, drought, and invasive predators mean that the Plains-wanderer and its endemic grassland habitat are now listed as critically endangered. None of us will ever see a living *Hakawai melvillei*, but I feel privileged to have seen it’s closest living relative. But with the droughts getting worse, the clock is ticking for them.

▣ Regent Honeyeater. Photo Angus Hogg.



▣ Plains-wanderer. Photo Philip Maher/Australian Ornithological Services

## Regent Honeyeater news

Australia’s rarest and most threatened songbird is the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater. Video surveillance cameras mounted above its nests have only recently documented how some Australian native species – and even the introduced House Sparrow – may be significant predators of their precious eggs.

Last year PhD researcher Gemma Taylor filmed a native marsupial, a Sugar Glider, jumping onto a female Regent Honeyeater at night as she incubated her eggs, and then eating the eggs. She also filmed an introduced House Sparrow destroying a Regent Honeyeater’s eggs and an Australian Magpie taking a Regent Honeyeater nestling. Nest predation by these two bird species – both widespread abundant introduced species in New Zealand – had not previously been identified as a threat to the Regent Honeyeater.

Another PhD researcher, Ross Crates, reports seeing another Australian endemic bird, the Pied Currawong, taking a Regent Honeyeater chick from one of his study nests in the Capertee Valley, New South Wales. A total of five chicks have been lost to predators this season but only one predation event was observed, prompting him to install surveillance video cameras over four nests as part of his research into the “Conservation and Ecology of Regent Honeyeater”.

Regent Honeyeaters were classified as critically endangered in July 2015 after the total population was estimated to be just 400 individual birds, down from the previous estimate of 1,200. The latest annual survey in their Capertee Valley stronghold, in October-November 2015, recorded just 50 birds in Capertee National Park and 30 birds on adjacent privately-owned land.

Despite records of “immense” numbers in the 1800s, Regent Honeyeaters are estimated to have declined by more than 80% over the past three generations (24 years), driven primarily by drought, historic habitat loss to make way for agriculture, and greater competition with other native species, particularly the ‘native invasive’ Noisy Miner.

These aggressive native miners have benefitted from habitat fragmentation, urbanisation, and plantings of millions of fast-growing eucalypts adjacent to farmland as shelter belts. The trees provide low quality habitat that usually lacks an understorey, making it easier for Noisy Miners to drive out other songbirds. Noisy Miners are considered to be such a problem for Regent Honeyeaters that they were shot in Chiltern National Park in Victoria last year to control their numbers in an area ear-marked for captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters to be released into.

MICHAEL SZABO





▣ Crimson-rumped Myzomela. Photo Archie MacFarlane.



▣ Melanesian Kingfisher. Photo Phil Gregory.

## The Solomon Islands – Sunbirds and Treeswifts

Words and Photographs by Archie MacFarlane

I donned my best birdwatching hat, slung my binoculars over my shoulders, and grabbed three weeks worth of malaria tablets before leaving for a birdwatching tour of the Solomon Islands. The Solomons has an impressive list of 289 bird species which far exceeds the number found in each of the surrounding island groups of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and the Bismarks. Many of the 76 endemic species are spread over a diverse range of islands and I would only have six days to visit a few of them, so I set myself a goal of seeing all the endemic white-eye and monarch flycatcher species on the four islands I would visit.

I arrived in the capital, Honiara, on the island of Guadalcanal, on a sunny September day and soon met Brendan Mautoa from the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau who was to be my knowledgeable and friendly guide, and who is, like me, a keen birder. Our first destination was the north-western island of Ranongga, via an internal flight to the adjacent island of Gizo, and from there we caught a local 'sea taxi' to Ranongga.

After a two-hour crossing we were greeted by local guides at the beach where we soon saw a brightly-coloured pair of Olive-backed Sunbirds. Encouraged, we set off and stalked our way through a mix of lowland tropical forest and pineapple plantation until we heard the unmistakable shrill call of a flock of endemic Ranongga White-eyes. After observing these dainty dark-faced, bright yellow-green birds we continued on our way, pausing regularly to watch

some of the larger species, such as the glossy black Singing Starling, White-bellied Cuckooshrike, and the grey and green Island Imperial Pigeon.

From Ranongga we made another two-hour crossing, this time to Hambere homestay on the island of Kolombangara, where we looked for the flightless and much sought-after Roviana Rail. After a thorough search it remained sought-after, but we were compensated for our efforts by the flocks of Cardinal Lory and fruit bats that we saw.

Next morning we hiked 1,400 metres up to "Professor Camp" at the top of Kolombangara volcano in the hope of seeing the rare Kolombangara Leaf Warbler. En route we travelled through a number of farms and villages, until we met the three local guides at the last village who helped us find Blyth's Hornbill, Glossy Swiftlet and Common Kingfisher.

Unfortunately, much of the area we walked through next had been logged, which is why most Blyth's Hornbills are now found on the smaller islands and around populated areas, having lost their primary habitat. After we passed the logged area the birds became more numerous with new sightings including the colourful Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove, and Mackinlay's Cuckoo-dove.

We reached "Professor Camp" after an eight hour walk and found it to be a destination for the more intrepid birder where few other tourists venture. The guides set to work constructing a camp for the night while I admired

the incredible vista from the top of the volcano and the Crimson-rumped Myzomela that flew in to feed on a nearby flower. We renewed our search for the Leaf Warbler in the morning, but once again it eluded us. Slightly dispirited we broke camp and began the return walk down to the homestay. Just as the weather cleared the birds came out and during our descent we saw large numbers of brightly-marked Kolombangara Monarch, White-capped Monarch, and Coconut Lorikeet, as well as good views of the large white Solomons Cockatoo, bright green Finsch's Pygmy Parrot, and the local Island Thrush. Importantly for me, we also found Kolombangara White-eye and Solomons White-eye.

After a rest at the homestay we set off later in the day to check the local pastures for Roviana Rail, but once again drew a blank. I met visiting birdwatcher, Frank Lambert, back at the homestay and he told me that he had seen Roviana Rail in the area and managed to collect audio recordings of its calls, which certainly helped boost morale.

I met him early the next morning to try a fourth time. We set off as planned but once again it looked like my luck was out. Then, after two hours and several false alarms, we finally spotted a Roviana Rail! But now we were running out time and I needed to catch the boat to nearby "Fat Boys" Island with Brendon. Despite making haste, we managed to spot several new species on our way back to the homestay, including Moustached Treeswift, Eclectus Parrot, and Crested Cuckoo-dove.



After taking the 'sea taxi' across to the island we found the accommodation to be more luxurious at Fat Boys Resort and soon spotted another of my target birds, White-capped Monarch. Later on we travelled by boat to nearby Kennedy Island where future US President John F. Kennedy was stranded after his torpedo boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer during the Second World War. This is a good place to snorkel around the reef but Brendon and I opted to go fishing nearby and each caught sizeable fish.

Next stop was Gizo to look for the Gizo White-eye. We soon saw one - much to my surprise - while we were walking down the main street. That evening the resort's chef cooked up our day's catch and we ate in a setting where we could have fed the sharks from our table!

Next day we flew back to Honiara and, after a brief tour of local museums, we headed to the botanical gardens, which was a pleasant place to spend some time birdwatching, although the only new species I saw there was the endemic Duchess Lorikeet. From there we drove to a site where Brendon had previously seen a pair of Solomon Islands Sea Eagles building a nest. We staked out a spot to watch from and shortly before dusk the eagles arrived.

On the way back to the car he mentioned that the elusive Woodford's Rail was meant to be present in the area. Just after this, a small rail ran onto the track just a few metres ahead of us, which turned out to be a Woodford's Rail! Then I looked up and saw a second one bathing in a nearby puddle. This was an exceptionally good ending to the day.

The next was the last of the tour. After meeting a local guide in the morning we went to Mt Austin, which is a half-hour drive from Honiara, and resumed our search for more endemic birds. This was an excellent choice because it ensured that the tour ended on a high note, with sightings of Ultramarine Kingfisher, Chestnut-bellied Monarch, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Oriole Whistler and Long-tailed Myna.

Returning to New Zealand I reflected on my time in the Solomons. It was certainly an adventure and a truly



▲ Roviana Rail. Photo Phil Gregory.

authentic experience. I had seen 53 bird species that were all new to me, including spectacular species of hornbill, pigeon and rail, and had succeeded in seeing most of my target species.

On the negative side, logging is ongoing and likely to result in the decline of species dependent on old-growth forests, such as Blyth's Hornbill, but on the positive side local authorities are beginning to recognise that increased nature-based tourism - including birdwatching - has the potential to provide alternative sources of income.

So if you are looking for an intrepid birdwatching adventure in the South Pacific and want to help develop the local economy in a more sustainable way, I would highly recommend a trip to the Solomon Islands. The longer you are there, the better your chances will be of seeing more birds. You also need to bear in mind that the coolest, driest and least humid time to go is July-September. Just don't forget to take binoculars and a camera!

*Archie MacFarlane's tour was organised by the Solomon Islands Visitor Bureau.*

*For more information on visiting the Solomon Islands see: [www.visitsolomons.com.sb](http://www.visitsolomons.com.sb). See also: [www.facebook.com/visitsolomonislands](https://www.facebook.com/visitsolomonislands). Email Archie MacFarlane: [aet44@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:aet44@uclive.ac.nz)*



▲ DOC rangers with chick. Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai

## Bumper breeding season for Kakapo

Kakapo are having a bumper breeding season with over 100 eggs laid and 24 chicks recorded so far from all three breeding sites: Anchor Island in Fiordland, Codfish Island/Whenua Hou off Stewart Island, and Little Barrier Island/Hauturu in the Hauraki Gulf. This is the first time that Kakapo have been recorded breeding on Anchor Island in the 26-years since the Kakapo Recovery Programme was established.

Among the 37 females known to have mated is Kuia, one of three siblings that have the unique genes of their father, Richard Henry, who was the last Kakapo from Fiordland until he died in 2010. "All eyes are now on Kuia's genetically precious eggs", said Department of Conservation (DOC) Kakapo operations manager Deidre Vercoe. "We hope that Kuia's offspring will help maintain genetic diversity in the population".

Mating activity was first recorded this season by electronic monitoring devices that all adult Kakapo carry in a small transmitter placed on their back. These transmitters each contain a sensor that records the time and date of any mating activity. Each day the transmitter relays the information using radio telemetry so that DOC staff know when mating has occurred and, therefore, where and when to commence nest management operations.

## Fairy Tern breeding news

Seven pairs of New Zealand Fairy Terns were recorded breeding this season with eggs laid at four sites: Papakanui Sandspit, Mangawhai Sandspit, Waipu Sandspit and the seldom-used Te Arai Canal Mouth site. A total of four chicks were fledged. Following fledging more than half of the total New Zealand Fairy Tern population was recorded at the post-breeding flocking site at Te Arai Canal Mouth on 23rd January and 12 birds were seen at Papakanui Sandspit the following day.



▲ (Left) Blyth's Hornbill. Photo Archie MacFarlane. (Right) Moustached Treeswift. Photo Archie MacFarlane.

# Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary to protect seabirds

Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September, Prime Minister John Key announced the creation of a 620,000-square-kilometre fully protected marine sanctuary in the Kermadec region to be designated the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary.

The new sanctuary will cover 15% of New Zealand's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), an area twice the size of New Zealand's total landmass and 50 times the size of our largest national park in Fiordland. The new sanctuary will create a no-take zone that prohibits all fishing and mining out to the 200 nautical mile limit of the EEZ from Raoul Island in the north and L'Esperance Rock in the south. The announcement followed a long-running campaign for a Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary by Pew Charitable Trusts, Ngati Kuri, Forest and Bird, WWF-NZ and Greenpeace New Zealand.

The five Kermadec Islands and the ocean around them are an important area for seabirds. Up to six million seabirds breed at the islands each year with 10-15 million seabirds foraging within the wider Kermadec region. A total of 42 seabird taxa have been recorded in the Kermadec region ranging from wandering albatrosses and great frigatebirds to storm petrels and diving petrels.

A total of 14 seabird species breed at the Kermadec Islands. The islands are also the key breeding site for three New Zealand endemic seabird species – Kermadec Petrel, White-naped Petrel



■ White-naped Petrel. Photo Brent Stephenson/Wrybill Tours

and Kermadec Storm Petrel – and have the largest population of Black-winged Petrels in the world. The Kermadecs are also the only breeding site in New Zealand for Wedge-tailed Shearwater, White-bellied Storm Petrel, Red-tailed Tropicbird, Masked Booby, White Tern, White-capped Noddy, Common Noddy and Sooty Tern.

All of the Kermadec Islands no longer have introduced invasive mammals such as rats, pigs and goats following pest eradication by the Department of Conservation (DOC), which means that seabirds are now able to return to their former numbers. Prohibiting all forms of fishing in the Kermadec region means that albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters will no longer be killed there as fisheries bycatch, as occurred previously.

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## Globally important areas for New Zealand's birds

The Important Bird Area Programme (IBA) is global in scale and more than 12,000 IBAs have been identified worldwide using standard, internationally recognised criteria for selection. To have such sites recognised as IBAs provides objective endorsement of their global importance. Adding the New Zealand component to the global IBA assessment fills a vital piece of the puzzle in our understanding of the critical sites for bird conservation worldwide. Birds New Zealand members have played a key role in providing ornithological information for the programme to identify 210 important sites for New Zealand's seabirds in four reports that are available on Forest and Bird's website at: <http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/important-bird-areas>.

Why start with seabird species and not our other special bird species such as the kiwi species, when elsewhere in the world, the general approach has been to look at all bird populations and identify IBAs on that basis? In New Zealand, where seabirds make up over half our endemic and native bird species, identifying IBAs for seabirds first and foremost recognises New Zealand's rich and diverse seabird fauna.

New Zealand has more seabird species threatened with extinction than anywhere else in the world and the highest number of breeding seabird endemics in the world (36 species), which is seven times higher than in second-placed Mexico (5 species). More than one-third of all seabird species are known to occur within New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), including species breeding outside the region, and we have approximately 14 million pairs of breeding seabirds.

In New Zealand to date we have identified 141 sites of global significance for seabirds on land, and 69 in the marine environment (marine IBAs). This site-based approach presents a mosaic of locally identifiable sites that meet global criteria. Taken as a whole, the network of 210 sites provides a comprehensive overview of New Zealand's seabirds, including a greater understanding of seabird distribution, temporally and spatially – on land (breeding sites/colonies, moult and roost sites) and at sea. Taken individually, or in regional sets, we can

all work together to ensure the conservation values of these globally important sites are retained.

We can all play a role. Birds New Zealand and Forest and Bird encourage members to become involved with IBAs in your home patch by downloading the online IBA resources and sending the links to interested people, finding out where the IBAs are in your region (remember there will be more IBAs to be identified), championing the value of your IBAs to local people and government, talking to people in your community, joining an existing team or join with others to create a local IBA support group or a larger regional group, observing and monitoring an IBA, using social media to let others know about what you are seeing there, volunteering for pest control and re-vegetation projects in an IBA, advocating for conservation using the global values of IBAs as a key argument (Forest and Bird is already doing this through regional planning processes), and helping ensure your local site has adequate legal protection.

An integral part of any conservation management programme is monitoring. Population data needs to be kept up to date. Not only does monitoring help identify the need for particular conservation actions; we can also estimate their success. Importantly, particularly with long-term monitoring, we can also discover trends which may assist in better planning of future conservation management. This is important as we grapple with the impacts of climate change and other current and potential future threats to birds.

The IBA network for New Zealand will only be complete when sites are identified for all groups of birds. Birds capture peoples' imaginations. They and their habitats are also indicators of other biodiversity. While ecosystems have increasingly taken priority in conservation management planning, iconic and highly threatened bird species (and we have no shortage of those) can help build the sort of broad support we need to protect critical habitats. We all can play a role.

CHRIS GASKIN

*Chris was contracted by Forest and Bird to coordinate the Important Bird Areas Programme.*





### FAR NORTH

In terms of Far North branch activities since the last issue, we conducted a couple of Kowhai Beach wader surveys, visited the 'kiwi grounds' a few times, and got up very early to see North Island Kokako at Mataraua Forest. We visited the Royal Spoonbill colony at Unahi Road and saw Cattle Egret, White Heron and Reef Heron. We also saw a Laughing Kookaburra, a rare visitor at Mangonui – a place renowned more for fish and chips than rare birds.

The Three Kings Islands aerial survey took place after weather cancellations, splutters, and mis-steps, and the highlight of the trip was flying over Parengarenga Harbour, Rangaunu Harbour, and Kowhai Beach where we got some great wader photographs from the air.

Outside of our region we had interesting trips to Teal Bay to see Pateke (Brown Teal), Waipu Estuary to see New Zealand Fairy Tern, Waro Lake to see New Zealand Scaup, and Bream Head, where we tried to find Bellbird.

Back in the Far North we completed the Red-billed Gull survey in the Bay of Islands on 17th December with a grand total of 1,630. The January 2016 pelagic trip with Detlef Davies turned up many storm petrels, including up to four NZ Storm Petrels, a fair ration of *Pterodromas* that included three Black-winged Petrels, and a dark phase Pomarine Skua. After CJ Ralph's gentle prodding we conducted the annual Bay of Islands bird census. The North Island Saddleback released in March and May of the previous year reproduced, and the first two we saw on Urupukapuka Island were juveniles. We also counted Whitehead on Robertson Island, a 2015 translocation site where they seem to be taking hold. – LES FEASEY

### NORTHLAND

Our speakers during the last quarter included Hilton Ward, who showed us footage from his 'trail camera' located by the Matata Boardwalk that crosses an estuarine wetland in Ngunguru which included the nocturnal movements of Australasian Bittern, Banded Rail, Pateke/Brown Teal and Fernbird, and Tony Beauchamp, who gave a talk on the diet of Kukupa (NZ Pigeon) and Tui in a 22-hectare study area on Kawai Island between 1992 and 2008.

The November 2015 wader count was conducted on the North Kaipara Harbour on an extremely high tide, but despite this all of the counts in the area recorded very low numbers. Two calendar months later over 300 Pied Stilts were counted near the water's edge on another high tide by Metcalf Road, Tinopai.

Following easterly storms in early January a beach patrol was conducted on 7th January covering 8.5 km between the Ruakaka and Waipu Rivers. This produced 45 birds of 14 species, including one suspected of being a New Zealand Storm Petrel, which I have sent to Canterbury Museum for identification.

The largest breeding colony of Red-billed Gulls in the Northland area is located inside the perimeter security fence of the Marsden Point refinery. Due to recent construction work there we are not able to access the colony, but refinery staff have counted over 3,000 birds present at any one time and advise that most are nesting pairs.

At the end of December, 17 Kukupa (NZ Pigeon) were seen feeding in the Moreton Bay fig tree at Pahi on the Kaipara Harbour. A month later these birds had all moved on.

Four members helped with the monitoring of the New Zealand Fairy Terns that nested on the Waipu Sandspit where two chicks have reached the fledging stage. Another two fledging stage birds were seen at Mangawhai Sandspit. These juvenile birds are learning to feed themselves by watching and copying their parents on the eastern Ruakaka, Waipu and Mangawhai Rivers where they hover

and dive for their food (mainly small fish) before heading off to the Kaipara Harbour on the western side of the island for the winter.

On 26th October 2013 we counted 45 Little Shags roosting and nesting among some dying mangrove trees on Lake Kai Iwi, north-west of Dargaville. A return visit on 27th December 2015 revealed that only three birds were left at the colony and there was no sign of nesting. We will now try to locate where the others have moved to.

– JANET SNELL

### AUCKLAND

There have been a good number of bird counts and sightings in the Auckland region over the past three months. In late November, a number of wader censuses were conducted within the region. Numbers of Arctic migrant waders counted on the Kaipara Harbour on 28th November included: 11,000 Lesser Knots, 17,000 Bar-tailed Godwits, two Far Eastern Curlews, five Red-necked Stints, four Sanderlings, and one Great Knot plus 22 Little Terns and 12 New Zealand Fairy Terns. The next day, one Grey Plover and one Greater Sand Plover were seen by Gwenda Pulham and others at Papakanui Spit. At the Mangawhai/Te Arai Wader Census, a total of 14 bird species were recorded breeding including colonies of Caspian Tern, Pied Shag, Little Shag, Red-billed Gull, and Southern Black-backed Gull, and 15 New Zealand Fairy Terns with two active nests.

Our December patrol of Muriwai beach was a good one for the birds, with – very unusually – no beach wrecked birds found at all! Live birds included sightings of Caspian Tern and New Zealand Pipit. A pair of Variable Oystercatchers had a nest with two eggs north of the Rimmer Road access to the beach which may have been the result of the extensive predator control at Papakanui Spit, resulting in an expanding population moving south into new territories.

Breeding colonies of Black-billed Gulls (in association with large White-fronted Tern colonies) occurred at three Kaipara Harbour sites this summer: Papakanui Spit, Big Sand Island and Rat Island, where there was also a colony of Caspian Terns but no evidence of the Red-billed Gulls that had previously nested there.

Of the seven breeding pairs of New Zealand Fairy Terns recorded nationally, six pairs laid eggs at three sites: Papakanui Spit, Mangawhai Spit and the seldom-used site of Te Arai Canal Mouth. There was no breeding at Pakari River mouth this season. Four chicks fledged from the six pairs that nested.

Te Arai Canal Mouth is a popular post breeding flocking site for New Zealand Fairy Terns with 23 individuals (more than half the total population) recorded there on 23rd January and a total of 12 different individuals recorded at Papakanui Spit on 24th January.

Auckland's population of non-beach breeding New Zealand Dotterels continues to fluctuate according to the available number of construction sites, new subdivisions, fallow land and grazed sites. Airfields are popular with nests recorded at Ardmore Airfield, Auckland International Airport and Whenuapai Airbase. Chicks are known to have fledged from Albany Industrial Precinct, Point England grazing paddocks, Auckland International Airport and at a burnt out vacant lot in the centre of Onehunga!

In mid-December, Mel Galbraith and a student group visited Motu Kaikoura, off Great Barrier Island, to undertake bird counts. Large numbers of Banded Rail were observed on the island and many of these had chicks. With the eradication of feral deer from the island, a recovery in the vegetation was noted in the mainly Kanuka forest, with many *Tarairie* and *Pseudopanax* seedlings with seed dispersal likely from the local Keruru (NZ Pigeon) population. A total of four Morepork nests were noted, with – very unusually – two located on the ground, which may be the result of a very low rat presence index of just only four percent.

On 22nd January, 80 Pateke (Brown Teal) were released at Te Henga Wetland in the Waitakere Ranges. Radio transmitters were attached to 20 of these birds and early observations have noted that these new birds are exploring their new habitat. Hopefully they will settle in over this winter to breed there next summer.

Other notable bird sightings in the Auckland region include two juvenile Brown Boobies at the Muriwai Australasian Gannet colony and the successful breeding of New Zealand Dotterels at Hobbs Beach on Tiritiri Matangi Island. The rarest bird was, however, a fantastic Japanese Snipe seen in January alongside the Causeway Road Canal to Puketutu Island in the Manukau Harbour. This bird was a real stunner for those lucky to see it!

– IAN MCLEAN

### SOUTH AUCKLAND

Most of the Red-billed Gull colonies in the area are on the Coromandel Peninsula which is distant and difficult to get to, so our survey was a bit of an epic. During November Noel Knight covered most of the Coromandel Peninsula by road while Tony Wilson tidied up the south-east. Particular thanks are due to Ted Kitching who managed to persuade Brian Owen to sail around most parts of the area without roads and most of the islands in the inner Hauraki Gulf, with Ian Southey on board to help count.

Unfortunately the weather stopped us covering the islands off the eastern peninsula with DOC but local fisherman, Adam Clow, managed to cover Shoe and Slipper Islands so we did okay. Very few White-fronted Tern colonies were found, even in traditional colony sites. Perhaps they were running a bit late this season? A better surprise was a Brown Booby with Australasian Gannets on Motutakapu Island off Coromandel.

On the larger harbours this season we have been treated to a nice run of rarer Arctic migrant waders including a Broad-billed Sandpiper and Wandering Tattler on the southern Manukau, a Japanese Snipe at Mangere, Little Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, and two Black-tailed Godwits, and two Pectoral Sandpipers at Miranda. A New Zealand Shore Plover was found at Karaka in early February having been present last year until spring. Maybe the others that were present will return too.

At Port Waikato we helped with Karen Opie's restoration project again. The Caspian Tern decoys once again failed to elicit any amorous intent from the local flock and were well blasted by black sand.

From the local three pairs of Banded Dotterels, five nests were found with two chicks reared from one of them. It may not seem much but these are the first chicks reared at the Port for some years.

The six adults and two fledglings were colour-banded by Karen and Tony Habraken and have since moved away. Please keep an eye out for them.

New Zealand Dotterels are still battling on with chicks from three nests there and on beaches to the south, and are due to fledge about mid-February.

We have continued with periodic bird walks at the botanic gardens over the summer. Although people turn up for them in varying numbers, the birds don't always behave. Even by mid-morning when it is deemed acceptable to run these walks the birds have already had enough of the hot and humid summer weather and retreated to the shade.

– IAN SOUTHEY

### BAY OF PLENTY/VOLCANIC PLATEAU

Our Red-billed Gull surveys have found plenty of nests in hard to reach places, the Port of Mount Maunganui log export terminal being our main source of nests with over 470 found there.

The Port of Tauranga dredging sand pile summit was another tricky spot, with 60 or so nests, and the remaining 41 on a near-inaccessible clifftop on Moturiki Island (Leisure Island). At least these were on public land. A revisit to the colony in February caught a few pairs re-laying eggs.

Blue Ducks were a featured bird for Conservation

Week 2015, so it was fitting that we had the Whio as a topic for our February 2016 talk. Forty-five people attended Andrew Glaser's presentation. The DOC Biodiversity specialist also trains up bird dogs to track Whio, making for an interesting evening. The Mauao Grey-faced Petrel colony produced 30+ chicks this summer with 26 of them being banded. The last chick remained until mid-January, a risky delay as the mountain was once again the victim of arson by fireworks. No petrels were recorded as casualties this time. The star bird in the area this summer was Tim Barnard's January find of an Oriental Plover at Maketu. All other records in the region pale into insignificance compared to this one, except perhaps the white Australasian Harrier seen near Katikati the same week. - PAUL CUMMING

## TARANAKI

As a wet winter and spring started to release its grip on Taranaki, members shook off the winter blues, dusted off their binoculars, and got out and about. Bill and Rosemary Messenger got as far north as their bach at Mokau, where they watched a New Zealand Falcon on the lawn busily plucking an unfortunate Blackbird. Upset at the invasion of its privacy the falcon took its meal and moved to the property next door.

The monthly outing up the Mangorei Track recorded 14 species including both species of cuckoo (heard), Whitehead, Bellbird, Grey Warbler and seven Rifleman that capped an excellent if tiring field trip.

With the assistance of a boat and skipper on loan from DOC, Barry Hartley has been out photographing nesting Red-bill Gulls on the islands in the Sugar Loaf Marine Protected Area as part of the national survey. He recorded 1128 birds and 166 nests from the seven islands and the seaward side of Paritutu Rock.

We received a report of "strange ducks" on the Naumai Park pond at Hawera so Kay Rodbard went to track them down and sent her photographs around for identification. Ron Lambert using Google identified them as Cayuga, a domesticated duck breed, which left us wondering if they have been deliberately released there as Naumai Park is an urban area.

Leigh Honnor from the Taranaki Biodiversity Forum made a couple of presentations to us during the year and was keen for us to join up with the many other groups that constitute this regional forum. After a general discussion it was agreed that we had nothing to lose and everything to gain as it costs us nothing to join. A motion was duly passed and I am to be both the Birds New Zealand and the Rapanui Grey-faced Petrel Trust representative at the forum meetings.

As is traditional with the final meeting for the year it ended with a supper. The field trip to Barrett Lagoon was held on a cloudy day so the four of us in attendance had a quick trip around before the rain set in. We saw 30 species including 270+ Canada Geese, Mallards with assorted ducklings, and a pair of NZ Scaup with two scauplings. Tui and Common Myna were the most numerous land birds with one Common Myna seen feeding at flax flowers with a patch of yellow pollen on its head. None of those present could recall having seen a Common Myna doing this previously.

Christmas arrived early at Waiongana on the 19th with a Whimbrel seen in the company of three Ruddy Turnstone and a Lesser Knot. Ruddy Turnstone was once a frequent visitor here but they are now rarely seen. There was a Cattle Egret in a paddock behind the beach with ten White-faced Heron. The Ruddy Turnstone stayed around for a few days but the Whimbrel disappeared. A few small flocks of South Island Pied Oystercatcher were seen flying up the coast and a Pied Shag was around for a while.

The Whimbrel returned in January in time for the annual Beach, Birds and BBQ, and the six of us who ambled down to the beach got a good view of it, along with six New Zealand Dotterel back again for summer. Banded Dotterel have started to return including a banded bird that was back again for the thirteenth year. We speculated as to what Aussie birdwatchers would call a banded Banded Dotterel (*a banded Double-banded Plover?* Ed). We wandered home for rounds of pikelets and jam, convivial conversation and another excellent BBQ for which the chef earned himself a Michelin star.

There was a good turnout for February's meeting; the summer weather had us out and about. Barry went down the South Taranaki coast and at Sandy Bay counted 22 Banded Dotterel but reported a poor breeding season for Variable Oystercatcher and New Zealand Dotterel with a nil result for both species. In North Taranaki the Black Stilt and ten Pied Shag were back at Mokau, and members were still hearing Shining Cuckoo, Long-tailed Cuckoo and Tui. Marie and Helen had been to Taupo visiting the Botanical Gardens where they saw a variety of birds at a bird bath including adult and juvenile Redpoll, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Tui, Bellbird and New Zealand Tomtit. At the Motuopa marina down towards Turangi we saw White Heron, White-faced Heron, New Zealand Dabchick, Coot and cootling, Scaup, Shag species and Black-billed Gull, making it a 'must-check' spot next time we are passing through.

The Messengers have a pair of New Zealand Pigeon at their home which was heard calling to each other. One of the birds was later seen being chased by an aggressive Tui.

The outing along the Puniho track on the western flanks of Mount Taranaki was held on a fine warm summer day, but there wasn't a great variety of birdlife with a Long-tailed Cuckoo seen and heard and some Tui around. The audibly challenged, who made up the majority of the party, probably missed other birds. - PETER FRYER

## HAWKE'S BAY

The most interesting recent sightings were of a New Zealand Shore Plover that was seen briefly at Ahuriri Estuary, Napier, in early December, and a Chatham Petrel that was seen and photographed by international birders on 12th January, "a bit over 100 nautical miles east of Hawke's Bay". Although DOC does a lot of translocation work aimed at improving the breeding success of this species on the Chatham Islands, sightings at sea are rare, especially west of the Chatham Islands.

At an evening meeting Emma Williams gave a further update on her Australasian Bittern monitoring project. The males fitted with transmitters are currently dispersed from the study breeding area of Lake Whatuma at Waipukurau. It was agreed that local members would undertake weekly checks over a set route using transmitter locating gear in order to provide more location data than Emma is able to obtain on her own.

Hawke's Bay RR Bernie Kelly has been spending a lot of time in preparations for the New Zealand Bird Conference and Birds New Zealand AGM to be held in Napier over Queens Birthday Weekend, Saturday 4th June to Monday 6th June 2016. Other branch members will be assisting him over the next few months with a view to ensuring a successful conference in sunny (even in winter) Hawke's Bay. Come and join us then! - IAN SMITH

## WANGANUI

The unsettled and often wet weather experienced during spring and early summer dampened some planned activities, notably a visit to our nearby mainland sanctuary, Bushy Park. That will happen in the coming months. Meanwhile, the birds there got on with their lives regardless. Hihī have had a relatively good breeding season, with 39 fledglings being colour-banded from 11 successful nests to date. That was partially offset by the failure of a further nine nests, however, most of them second

or third breeding attempts. Another five chicks fledged from at least three nests in undiscovered natural cavities. One of these fledglings was caught and colour-banded. Two other nests are still active. North Island Saddlebacks and Robins also appear to have had a successful season, with numerous juveniles being seen and heard. All this suggests that the rat incursion experienced a year ago has been successfully contained. Five audits, carried out at four to six week intervals since late July 2015, have shown no signs of rats but still too many mice.

Gordon Park, an isolated 12-hectare forested scenic reserve near Whanganui, also produced some interesting records. An adult black-phase New Zealand Fantail was seen in November 2015, preceded by sightings of perhaps the same bird in January 2015. This was followed by sightings and photographs of an apparent juvenile in January 2016, suggesting successful breeding there. In mid-January 2016 a North Island Robin attached itself to a group of volunteers doing weed control. From photographs taken at the time it appears to be a young male (not a juvenile).

The only previous record of this species at Gordon Park was in March 2014. We assume that these are dispersing birds, although from where is unclear. The nearest block of forest, a pine plantation with some remnant native bush, is 1.5 km away, while the nearest known established populations of North Island Robins are at Kitto's Bush, 13.5 km away, and Bushy Park, 19 km away, across the Whanganui River. Do small pockets of this species survive elsewhere nearby?

The other easily accessible forest patch in the district, Waitahinga, inland from Bushy Park, also has a resident population of North Island Robins as well as numerous Whiteheads (Popokatea), seen and photographed by Ormond Torr in January 2016, and heard by Peter Frost a month later. This population also attracts the attention of Long-tailed Cuckoos, heard by Ormond and seen and sound-recorded a year earlier by Peter. It is an area that would repay further investigation.

Bar-tailed Godwits and Lesser Knots returned to the Whanganui estuary in mid-October. A group of 22 godwits photographed by Paul Gibson showed many of these birds with orange staining around the base of their bills. Phil Battley says that this is iron staining from sediments on their Alaskan feeding grounds. Not only does this illustrate graphically just how deep the birds probe when feeding but, as Paul noted, signals clearly their connection to the Arctic where they had been feeding just over a week before and the incredible non-stop journey that they make to reach New Zealand.

As in previous years, most of these early arrivals moved on elsewhere, to be replaced later by birds relocating from other sites. The best example of this is a flagged male, AJD, which for the previous seven seasons has arrived at Foxton Beach from the Arctic, spending a few weeks there before moving to Whanganui for the rest of summer before migrating northwards in late March. This year has been no exception, with AJD being seen at Foxton Beach in late October, before coming in mid-November to the Whanganui estuary with 18 others for its eighth season here.

Finally, Lynne Douglas reported Common Starlings carrying green grass leaves into their nest (the previous year they had used vine leaves). The grass was later identified as cockfoot, *Dactylis glomerata*, and cutty grass, *Carex* spp. This led to an interesting email discussion on the possible function of this behaviour, specifically the possibility that hairs on grass leaves (or aromatic compounds in the tissues of other plants) could trap or deter mites. Common Starlings in particular, being cavity-nesters, are renowned for having mites (and spreading them to roofs). Perhaps when the burden gets too high, they are forced to take counter measures. It is a topic that deserves more study.

- PETER FROST



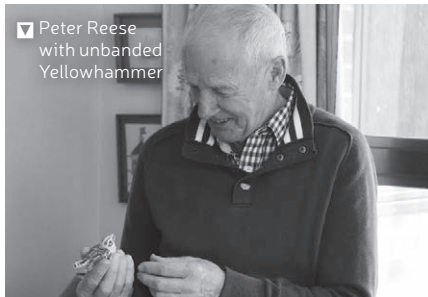
## WAIRARAPA

The Wairarapa Branch is looking forward to 2016 as a year in which we meet new, informative speakers and take field trips to new and interesting places. Early in the year we will be going out to the coast at White Rock where the complex geology alone is of interest. The Red-billed Gulls will have finished nesting, but the lagoon and shore there should produce a good number of other species. Another trip already planned is to explore an area of farmland where there are good hedges and that meets native bush on one side. The interaction of native and exotic species will be of particular interest there.

Through the summer the RR has been engaging with DOC about maintaining an adequate level of visibility from the Boggy Pond hide near Lake Wairarapa. Despite the generally dry conditions, water levels are high and so we have some of the best views of raupo in the country. While DOC appreciate the problem and would like Birds New Zealand to solve it, we favour a team approach. We will get there.

At the same time a committee member is talking with the local Trustlands Trust - which operates a small hydro scheme - about the wellbeing of its dam environment and the implications for local bird life. We could do worse than take up the avian part of a longitudinal monitoring project of the whole environment. - ROBIN LIST

## WELLINGTON



After 22 years living in Wellington, Peter Reese has migrated back to the South Island. During his stay in the capital, Peter has made a major contribution to ornithology and the local branch of OSNZ (Birds New Zealand). Most notably, in July 2000, Peter began "Banding at the Zoo". This programme became a Mecca for those wanting to learn mist-netting and bird banding. The number of people attending the banding sessions over the years runs into the hundreds and a valuable body of data on passerines in the Wellington region has been accumulated as a result of this banding programme.

Furthermore, a number of keen birders developed their interest in birds through attending Peter's banding sessions. Some of the attendees were school children who were most appreciative of getting hands-on experience with birds under the Peter's watchful tutelage. Mist-netting and banding activities will now continue in Wellington under the management of Matu Booth.

Peter has also been involved in many other local projects, including surveys, monitoring bird populations and translocations. He is an excellent photographer of birds and examples of his photographic skills can be seen in numerous publications, including New Zealand Birds Online.

Members will be able to follow Peter's South Island activities through his banding blog: <http://wgtnnzbanders.blogspot.co.nz/>

You can also read about him in "Meet the Photographers of New Zealand Birds Online": <http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2013/11/25/meet-the-photographers-of-nz-birds-online-2/>

- GEOFF DE LISLE

## MARLBOROUGH

We have continued with our weekly Black-fronted Tern counts on the Wairau River for the second

year, the aim being to document seasonal patterns of tern activity within the river system. The Black-billed Gull project is also running well, with more chicks banded in early summer. Claudia Mischler is always very pleased to hear about sightings of the banded gulls throughout the country, some travelling quite large distances.

Marlborough had many cold fronts come through during the spring and early summer, resulting in variable fledgling success at the different colonies. These sweet little birds choose quite exposed nesting sites, often on river islands. All of the rivers in Marlborough, Canterbury and the West Coast were flown, and photographs taken of the colonies to assist in getting more information on how many birds are nesting, and on which rivers.

Our long-term surveys on Lake Grassmere occur most months, creating a great opportunity for many people to get to see a lot of species, and also be involved with the national wader counts. Over the spring we were treated to Wrybills, Banded Dotterels, Bar-tailed Godwits, Ruddy Turnstones, a Red-necked Stint, and in November, seven Royal Spoonbills, as well as the many more common species.

The Red-billed Gull survey presented the opportunity for people to get out along the coast and see these really cool birds on their nests. We encountered some interesting nesting spots, some with many nests packed quite closely together.

The New Zealand Dabchicks spotted by some members on Taylor Dam were another treat in Marlborough this spring. - HEATHER DAVIES

## NELSON

Birds New Zealand members have been involved in several surveys over the last quarter. In November, a series of 5MBC was performed in the Flora Stream area of Kahurangi National Park. It is now 11 years since these counts were initiated. This latest count showed little change from previous years, which is reassuring given the numbers of mustelids that afflicted this forest after the beech mast.

During October and November a team including Birds New Zealand members surveyed various wetlands within Abel Tasman National Park with the main objective being to find out more about the distribution of key wetland species such as Fernbird, Banded Rail, Marsh Crake, Spotless Crake and Australasian Bittern. The surveys included a search for footprints, playback/listening, and the use of three acoustic recorders programmed to record a total of six hours around sunset and sunrise. Results from the acoustic recorders are awaited.

The top of the South wader census was performed at the end of November, involving 20 counters. Just over 31,000 shorebirds of 16 species were recorded, 83% of them migratory. South Island Pied Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwit and Lesser Knot numbers were average. Interesting northern hemisphere migrant species recorded included Pacific Golden Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Red-necked Stint, Whimbrel, Grey-tailed Tattler, Sanderling, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Grey Plover. Farewell Spit was particularly challenging with 35 km winds but despite the tough conditions the count went well and included a Lesser Knot from the Amur Region in Russia.

Willie Cook spotted a Cape Gannet (*Morus capensis*) on Farewell Spit in early January. This bird, with a longer gular stripe and an all-black tail, was among several thousand Australasian Gannets (*Morus serrator*) and has since been confirmed as breeding with an Australasian Gannet.

Urban New Zealand Falcons have also been entertaining with the U3A birding group reporting one in Queens Gardens, Nelson, feeding on ducklings from the park pond and another distracting golfers on the Motueka golf course.

The Waimea River and estuary have turned up a Black-fronted Dotterel, a Gull-billed Tern and a White-winged Black Tern. Black-fronted Terns have also nested successfully. However, as in recent years, Black-fronted Terns attempting to nest near the Motueka Bridge were unsuccessful. - ROBIN TOY

## CANTERBURY

November was the month for terns in Canterbury with an Arctic Tern and a Common Tern found at the Ashley Estuary, an Antarctic Tern spotted at Kaitorete Spit, and a possible Little Tern seen at Birdlings Flat. In early December a White-winged Black Tern was found at the Ashley Estuary.

Terns aside, there have been plenty of other interesting sightings. A pair of Chestnut-breasted Shelduck was discovered at Sandy Point on 16th November, with many local birders getting good views and photographs of them. On 7th December, two Australasian Bittern fledglings were found outside Travis Wetlands, with one of them even making its way into a nearby garage - an odd behaviour for this usually reclusive species. After time in the care of experienced Christchurch bird rehabilitator Jackie Stevenson, Peter Langlands and Emma Williams arranged for the two birds to have trackers attached prior to being released at Te Rauakaaka Wetland at the mouth of the Waimakariri River.

Our final two field trips of the year took place in November. First up was the annual Ashley River survey on 14th November. More than twenty volunteers participated including many OSNZ members, which was good to see. The numbers of Wrybill, Banded Dotterel, Pied Stilt and South Island Pied Oystercatcher were as expected but the numbers of Black-billed Gull and Black-fronted Tern were lower than normal. Hopefully this is just variation and not part of a downwards trend. The second field trip was to Lake Ellesmere for the Summer Wader Count on 28th November. Just one Wrybill was seen, with most presumably still on the braided rivers. Of the Arctic migrant waders, 47 Red-necked Stilts and 32 Pacific Golden Plovers were counted, along with 11 Lesser Knots, four Curlew Sandpipers and two Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. As expected, Bar-tailed Godwits were the most numerous of the Arctic migrant waders with a total of 181 birds spotted.

The last evening meeting of 2015 began with a tasty pot luck dinner. Ron Nilsson gave an interesting talk about the early conservation work that done with Black Stilt, then led a discussion about the pros and cons of introducing this species to the Ashley River area. We shall watch with interest the progress of this proposal.

- ELEANOR GUNBY

## OTAGO

During the summer many of our birders are away so there is not so much to report on the local scene. A female hybrid Black Stilt has been present for several weeks in Andersons Bay near Dunedin city feeding actively and then roosting on the man-made roost that was put in place in about 2008. This roost has made the inlet more bird-friendly and is now regularly occupied by gulls, Black Shag, Little Shag, Variable Oystercatcher, Spur-winged Plover, ducks, and - in summer - Pied Stilts. On rare occasions the roost can be loaded with juvenile Spotted Shags which have chased small fish up the harbour, making for a spectacular sight.

We have now completed three seasons of our Sinclair Wetland Survey. During the summer survey at the end of January everyone had fantastic close-up views of Fernbirds feeding, rather than the usual fleeting view when a Fernbird pops up to check us out! The survey line picked up a total of 32 species seen or heard, compared to six species in the winter and 19 species in spring. Nearly every five minute count on Ram Island also recorded one or two Fernbird/s. This is the first count when Tui and Brown Creeper were also recorded there. This is also the first time Paradise Shelduck were seen on the ponds - probably preparing to moult.

A return visit was made to Wainono Lagoon to check on the Royal Spoonbill colony. Twenty-three nests were seen but only seven appeared occupied and only four chicks were seen. This was well down on last year's total of about 30. There were also four Little Shag nests with five young at various stages.



There was, however, no sign of Glossy Ibis this year.

We are always pleased to spot birds that are rare for Otago; this summer these included Chukor and Cirl Bunting.

— MARY THOMPSON

### **SOUTHLAND**

Notable sightings during the last quarter included a juvenile Grey-headed Albatross seen by Matt Jones during a Stewart Island pelagic trip in early November and a Brown Quail seen in a garden in Manapouri, reported by Neil Robertson.

The resident Red-crowned Parakeet showed up at Lloyd Esler's property in Otago and was heard again at the scenic reserve in early January. Lloyd also reported this species during his bird

counts at Bluff Hill and Omaui.

The Marsh Sandpiper was back at Pleasure Bay lagoon on 8th, 9th and 19th November, and a Black-fronted Dotterel was reported by Glenda Rees at the Mataura River, Mataura, on 14th November.

Brent Stephenson spotted an Arctic Tern near the Stewart Island ferry terminal at Bluff on 18th November and an Antarctic Prion during a Stewart Island pelagic. Russell Cannings saw a Little Black Shag in Milford Sound on 21st November, possibly a first for this location, and Neil Robertson saw two Greater Sand Plovers at the head of Awarua Bay.

Stewart Island has been a bit of a hot spot for White-throated Needletail over the years and another was seen over Horseshoe Bay on 27th November. A quick evening visit to the head of Awarua Bay on 2nd December proved fruitful for

Phil Rhodes and Pete McClelland with three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers seen, the first report of this species here for a number of years. What was thought to be a male put on a mating display which was something neither of us had seen before. To cap off the evening we also had good views of two Sanderling.

Wynston Cooper had a good start to the year when a visit to Waipapa Point turned up a Brown Skua, two Arctic Skua and a Common Tern. Wynston, Neil Robertson and Shawn Herron also reported a Greater Sand Plover, Wrybill and Lesser Sand Plover at Awarua Bay.

Our latest beach patrol finally came up with some decent finds with three Little Penguins, a Mottled Petrel, a Sooty Shearwater, and a couple of sets of wings.

— PHIL RHODES

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## **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 2015 to 29th February 2016.*

Eighty **Yellowhead** were transferred from Chalky Island to Coal Island in Fiordland on 15/9. The next month, another 80 were transferred from Anchor Island to Eglinton Valley (Southland) on 16/10.

Thirty-two **North Island Kokako** were transferred from Mangatutu Ecological Area and Mapara Reserve to Maungatautari, the Hunua Ranges, and Ark in the Park in the Waitakere Ranges, between August and October.

Fourteen years ago the **Hawaiian Crow** was declared extinct in the wild. This year in Hawai'i 12 captive-bred birds are to be released into the wild, starting in September.

### **Short Reports**

A pair of **Australian Wood Duck** near Mapua was seen with four ducklings in November. The pair was reported again on 12/3 with 4 juveniles on a pond at the Playhouse Cafe off Westdale Road, near Mapua. This is the first New Zealand breeding record for this species. The two long-staying **Plumed Whistling Ducks** at Anderson Park, Taradale (Hawke's Bay), were there throughout, but there was no sign of them breeding. A pair of **Chestnut-breasted Shelduck** found on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary (Canterbury) on 16/11 was seen intermittently in December, but there was also no sign of them breeding, although a solo male was seen at Lake Ellesmere among a large flock of Paradise Shelducks on 14/2. A female **Chestnut Teal** was seen at Little Waihi on 1/1, but there was no sighting of a male bird. The

pair of **New Zealand Dabchicks** found on Taylor Dam (Marlborough) on 14/9 was photographed there with three chicks on 21/12, only the second South Island site where breeding has occurred in recent years.

A **Grey-headed Albatross** was seen off Kaikoura on 28/10 followed a week later by another bird off Stewart Island on 3/11. This heralded an impressive run of southern seabirds with an **Antarctic Fulmar** seen off Kaikoura on 31/10, 3/11, 11/11 and 29/11, a **Wilson's Storm Petrel** seen off Whitianga on 7/11, a **Soft-plumaged Petrel** seen off Kaikoura on 15/11, an **Antarctic Prion** seen off Stewart Island in late November, a white morph **Southern Giant Petrel** photographed over Nicholson Trench in Cook Strait on 19/12, and 2 sightings of **Campbell Albatross** off Kaikoura on 4/2 and 27/2. A rare sighting of **Chatham Island Petrel** at sea was one photographed on 12/2 approximately 100 nautical miles east of Hawke's Bay.

Further north, a **White-naped Petrel** and up to 6 **New Zealand Storm Petrels** were seen in the Hauraki Gulf on 11/2. Three more New Zealand Storm Petrels were seen in the Gulf over 19/12 and 10/12, and up to 4 New Zealand Storm Petrels, 3 **Black-winged Petrels** and a dark phase **Pomarine Skua** were seen off the Bay of Islands on 11/1. A single Pomarine Skua was also reported in the Firth of Thames (30/11), one off Waikanae estuary (19/12), and one off Little Waihi on 3/1, followed by 3 seen in the Bay of Plenty on 18/1. An unusual record of **Grey-faced Petrel**

was an injured bird found in a warehouse in Hamilton on 21/1. Another injured seabird, a rarely seen **White-tailed Tropicbird**, was rescued from Orewa Beach on 24/2 and taken into care, but succumbed overnight. In Kaikoura an unusually large flock of 88 **Arctic skuas** was reported roosting on the sea opposite the Whalewatch booking office on 28/2.

A duo of **Brown Boobies** was seen at the Muriwai Gannet colony on 6/12, followed by two singletons reported there on 24/1 and 14/2. Elsewhere, one was seen at Black Reef rocks below Cape Kidnappers (Hawke's Bay) on 14/1, one at Motutakapu (Gannet) Island off Amodeo Bay, Coromandel Peninsula, on 7/11, and one in the Firth of Thames on 30/11. A rare record of **Cape Gannet** was the one found on Farewell Spit on 17/12 that was later reported breeding with an Australasian Gannet in early January. After several months without any sightings in the area, 8 **Australian Pelicans** were reported flying near Dargaville on 24/2. And at the other end of the country, an unusual all-white **Spotted Shag** was repeatedly seen in Otago Harbour during January and February.

A fledgling **Glossy Ibis** was seen at Wairau Lagoon (Sewerage Farm) near Blenheim on 8/12. The following month, 3 juvenile birds were photographed at Wairau Lagoon with two adult birds on 2/1. This is thought to be the first confirmed successful New Zealand breeding record of this species. Two Glossy Ibises were also reported at a high tide roost at the Ashley River estuary (Canterbury) on 19/1, and another 2 at Little Waihi (Bay of Plenty) on 29/12.

After a dearth of sightings for several months, the Renwick **Black Kite** was seen again on 24/10 and 21/11. A pair of **New Zealand Falcons** that bred at





▲ 1) White-tailed Tropicbird, Orewa, photo Alison Hunt. 2) Broad-billed Sandpiper, South Manukau, photo Ian Southey. 3) Japanese Snipe, photo Bartek Wypych. 4) Oriental Plover, Ohiwa, photo Tim Barnard. 5) Terek Sandpiper, Foxton, photo Paul Gibson. 6) Australian Wood Duck pair with 4 ducklings, near Mapua, photo Willie Cook. 7) Antarctic Fulmar, Kaikoura, photo Gary Melville/Albatross Encounter. 8) Grey-headed Albatross, Kaikoura, photo Gary Melville/Albatross Encounter.

Te Ahumairangi Hill, formerly known as Tinakori Hill, close to downtown Wellington was seen regularly over summer.

Vagrant wader highlights this spring and summer included an **Oriental Plover** found at the main Ohiwa Spit (Bay of Plenty) on 16/1 that stayed until the end of February, a **Japanese Snipe** found in the channel to Pukutoto Island near Mangere treatment ponds on 5/1 that stayed until 15/1, a juvenile **Broad-billed Sandpiper** found at South Manukau Harbour on 26/12 that stayed until 8/2, a frustratingly elusive **Little Whimbrel** seen at Miranda intermittently between 21/12 and 30/1, and a rather flighty juvenile **Terek Sandpiper** seen fairly regularly on the Manawatu Estuary at Foxton between 5/12 and 8/2. A Terek Sandpiper was also seen between the Wairau and Opawa Rivers (Marlborough) on 24/1 which appeared to be different to the Foxton bird.

Two **Grey Plovers** and a **Sanderling** were seen at Farewell Spit, and a **Great Knot** at Papakanui Spit, on 28/11. The next day a Grey Plover and 4 Sanderlings were seen at Papakanui Spit. **Greater Sand Plovers** were seen at Papakanui Spit on 29/11, Awarua Bay (Southland) on 11/1, and Otamarakau (Bay of Plenty) on 19/1, while **Lesser Sand Plovers** were seen at Lake Ellesmere (Canterbury) on 28/11, Awarua Bay (Southland) on 11/1, and Little Waihi (Bay of Plenty) on 18/1.

There was a **Wandering Tattler** at the Mercury Islands on 7/11, one at South Manukau Harbour on 26/12, and one at Little Waihi on 22/1, while the only **Grey-tailed Tattler** was the one seen at Lake Ellesmere on 28/11. There was a **Marsh Sandpiper** at Pleasure Bay (Southland) from 8/11 to 19/11, another at Miranda from October to January, and one at Little Waihi on 22/1. A "group" of Marsh Sandpipers was also reported at Johnson Point Road by Waipu Estuary (Northland) on 24/1. Four **Curlew Sandpipers** were at the Ashley River (Canterbury) on 28/11, as were an impressive 47 **Red-necked Stints**. A Curlew Sandpiper was also at Miranda on 12/2. A trio of **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** reported at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 2/12 was the first record of this species there for a number of years.

Sightings of **Eastern Curlew** and **Whimbrel** were widespread during the period with one Eastern Curlew at Foxton from 13/9 for several weeks, one at South Head lagoon on Kaipara Harbour on 20/9, one in Whangarei Harbour on 20/9, one at Ashley Estuary between 5/11 and 9/12, one at Miranda on 12/12 and 15/12, and regular sightings of 2 birds at South Manukau

Harbour between October and January.

There was one Whimbrel at Whangarei Harbour on 20/9, 3 at Big Sand Island on 29/9, 2 at Ngunguru Estuary (Northland) between early November and February, 3 at Mangere on 4/12, 2 at Ashley Estuary between 5/11 and 9/12, one at Waikanae Estuary 17/12 and 19/12, one at Waiongana (Taranaki) on 19/12, 5 at South Manukau Harbour on 26/12, one at Waituna on 2/1, one at Maketu 10/1, and one at Miranda on 12/2.

A long-staying **Hudsonian Godwit** was at Miranda between October and February. A singleton **Black-tailed Godwit** was seen at Pahurehure Inlet, Papakura, on 21/2, another at South Manukau Harbour on 26/12, and then 2 at Miranda on 10/1, and on 27/2 and 28/2. A **New Zealand Shore Plover** was briefly seen at Ahuriri Estuary (Hawke's Bay) in early December and a juvenile **New Zealand Dotterel** was seen on the Ashley Estuary in early November, and again in December. Four New Zealand Dotterels were reported breeding at Riversdale Beach (Wairarapa) on 1/11 with 4 chicks seen subsequently. A further 4 adult birds were seen there on 30/12 and one was reported at Pencarrow Head by Wellington Harbour entrance on 6/1, the first record there since 1998.

An **Arctic Tern** was seen near Bluff ferry terminal on 18/11 shortly before another was seen at the Ashley River on 24/11. There was no shortage of **Common Tern** sightings. One was seen at the Ashley River estuary in November, one at the Waikanae River estuary on 29/12, one at Otamarakau (Bay of Plenty) on 11/1, and one at Foxton on 31/1 and 16/2. A flock of "approximately six" **Gull-billed Terns** in adult breeding plumage was reported at the Kaituna Lagoon end of Lake Ellesmere on 29/11 and a singleton at Waimea Estuary (Nelson) on 4/1. There was a **White-winged Black Tern** at the Motueka River on 14/10, 23/10 and 3/11, one at Waimea Estuary in late October, one on the Waimakariri River on 3/11, then 4 on the Waimakariri River during December, one at Ashley Estuary on 7/12 and 10/12, and one at Maketu on 23/12, 2/1, and 10/1. A sizeable flock of 22 **Little Terns** was reported at Big Sand Island on 28/11.

Undoubtedly an escape, a **Superb Parrot** was seen between Whatawhata and Hamilton (Waikato) on 19/10, and a rare sighting of **White-throated Needle-tail** over Horseshoe Bay, Stewart Island, was reported on 27/11.

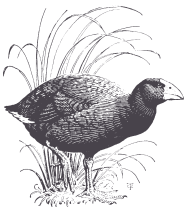
Sources: *Birding NZ, regional roundups, DOC.*





▲ Above: *Hakawai melvillei* pair. Painting by Derek Onley. © Museum of Canterbury.

▼ Below: Otago Shag trio (juvenile on left with pied and dark bronze plumage adult birds). Painting by Derek Onley. © Derek Onley.



## **Birds New Zealand**

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