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Birds New Zealand



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



Birds New Zealand



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

COVER IMAGE

Front cover: **Red-footed Booby**, Muriwai gannet colony, January 2017.
 Photo by Matthias Dehling/New Zealand Birds Online.

Birds News



1. Cox's Sandpiper, Lake Ellesmere. Photo by Mike Ashbee. 2. Shy Albatross (at left). Photo by Geoff De Lisle. See page 7 for reports on these two birds. 3. Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross (at right) and Buller's Albatross, Forty Fours (Chatham Islands). Photo by Dave Boyle. 4. Asiatic Dowitcher, Motueka Sandspit. Photo by Steve Wood. 5. Erect Crested Penguin, Kaikoura. Photo by Mike Ashbee. 6. Antarctic Prion, Cape Saunders. Photo by Matthias Dehling. 7. Wilson's Phalarope, Westshore Lagoon, Napier. Photo by Phil Battley. 8. Red-necked Stint, Lake Ellesmere. Photo by Mike Ashbee. See page 18 for details of sightings of birds 3 – 8.



▣ This Laughing Gull found by David Riddell near Opotiki on 23rd December is the first New Zealand record of this North American breeding species. Photo by Colin Miskelly, New Zealand Birds Online.



▣ Birds New Zealand members (L-R) Gwenda Pulham, Tim Lovegrove, Oscar Thomas, Trina Smith, Ian McLean, Ian Southey and Chris Thompson with Meredith Fountain at the "Goodbye Godwits" event in Ambury Park in February. Photo by Jacqui Geux.

President's Report

Birdwatching Summer

It has been an eventful summer for birdwatchers (and 'twitchers'!!) as there have been a number of rare birds scattered throughout New Zealand. There has been the first New Zealand record of Laughing Gull found in the Opotiki area, a Red-footed Booby at Muriwai, a Wilson's Phalarope at Napier, an Asiatic Dowitcher at Motueka Santspit, a Cox's Sandpiper at Lake Ellesmere, and – among others – a Tree Martin at Bromley oxidation ponds (photos on front cover, page 2, page 3 and page 15). While I personally have only seen the two of these birds that have been present in the upper North Island, all members would have had the opportunity to at least see one of these really unusual birds. The early reporting system that now operates via word of mouth and online platforms such as New Zealand Birds Online, New Zealand Birding Forum and Facebook give opportunities for 'twitchers' who are keen to chase unusual birds in various locations around the country – in some case, within minutes of a bird being seen and photos posted online. What these records indicate is the value of members posting photographs online of any bird that they are unsure about, as several of the identifications have been made from photos posted via online forums or social media. Taking photographs, however, does not take away the responsibility to also take detailed written notes of what is before your eyes as photographs can sometimes distort certain aspects. Some of these sightings also show the value of checking 'unlikely' spots. One of the aspects that can increase interest in bird observations is that very unusual birds such, as these, can appear anywhere.

Youth Camp Donation

Recently the Society was gifted a reasonably large donation from Kim and Jenny Morrison to go towards a fund to help support the Youth Camp Programme that the Society recently re-initiated. It is intended that this donation will be used to support the camps but the Society will still seek other funding sources from present funders because of the level of interest in this programme. The generous support from Mr and Mrs Morrison is really appreciated because it shows that the work the Society's Council is embarking on is in the right direction. This year's Youth Camp is being held in Northland and has been organised by Councillor Sharon Alderson in conjunction with Far North Regional Representative Les Feasey. The spaces on this year's camp are now largely filled but if there is still interest from qualifying young people please check the website for application details.

Annual General Meeting Weekend

The small Southland Region have organised a really interesting programme for the Annual General Meeting and Conference in Te Anau. While Te Anau is a little more difficult to access than

other major centres, the early registrations are indicating that there is good interest. Several of the field trips are already fully subscribed so I would urge people to take advantage of the early bird registration so that the organisers can make suitable arrangements for the numbers of people likely to attend. Check the link on the website for a registration form or ask your regional representative.

Australasian Ornithological Conference

This bi-annual conference is being held in Geelong just outside Melbourne in Australia from 8th to 11th November in 2017. I would urge members to take the opportunity to attend as it gives a wonderful opportunity to hear about the latest ornithological research on both sides of the Tasman, but more importantly to mingle with other people with similar interests. I know that I have developed good friendships with people that I have met at earlier events. More details for this event are posted on the Birds New Zealand website.

Librarian

Heather Rogers has been our voluntary librarian at the Auckland Museum for the past two years. Heather has done a wonderful job in computerising many of the records and streamlining the systems. She has also sifted through boxes of material that were cluttering the library area and disposed of unwanted material. Following calls for volunteers to take over this position, Trina Smith from Auckland has agreed to take on this role into the future. Heather has been showing Trina the various roles over recent weeks but the handover has now been completed. I would take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and thank Heather for her efforts. I also take the opportunity to welcome Trina to our team of volunteers that help keep the Society operating.

Regional Representatives

I have been made aware of some recent changes in Regional Representatives and these are noted on the website, but I bring these to your attention. Anne McCracken has taken over the position in Northland, replacing Janet Snell. Murry Cave has taken up the role in Gisborne/Wairoa which has been vacant for a couple of years. Steve Sawyers had re-activated the region but found that work had him away from home too much to continue. Kristin Ruwhiu has accepted the position in Marlborough replacing Mike Bell, who has also found that work is interfering with his pleasure activities. I welcome those three new representatives to our group and hope that members will give them full support because without regional representatives the regions do not operate. I would also thank the outgoing representatives who have provided time and energy into the position over the years. I am also mindful, however, that there are other regions where the representative wishes to stand down and I would encourage members to consider taking on the position. While it sounds onerous it does not need to be, because I know that you can delegate many of the activities to other members to spread the load. Without regional representatives, activities in the smaller areas in particular will not occur and you will lose so much of what makes being a member so important. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in Te Anau, but in the meantime have happy birding.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

Scarlett's Shearwater genetic study

A new genetic study by Museum of New Zealand Te Papa research scientist Lara Shepherd and vertebrate curator Alan Tennyson has found that the extinct Scarlett's Shearwater was closely related to the Hutton's Shearwater and Fluttering Shearwater. The new study, "DNA reveals the relationships of the extinct Scarlett's Shearwater", which is published in *Journal of Ornithology* (December 2016), says that the endemic Scarlett's Shearwater formed a strongly-supported clade with the two other endemic shearwater species, suggesting a radiation of similar-sized species in the region.

Scarlett's Shearwater was described in 1994 by Richard Holdaway and Trevor Worthy, but was only known from fossils and bone remains. Bone remains show that it was smaller than Fluttering and Hutton's shearwaters, and favoured wetter forests and highland regions as well as coastal sites within north-west Nelson and Buller.

The species' common name honours Ron Scarlett (1911-2002), the New Zealand palaeontologist who first recognised the distinctness of the fossil material later attributed to it. The species probably went extinct between 1600 and 1800 AD, most likely because of predation by Polynesian Rats or Kiore.

"Using our DNA sequences we estimated that Scarlett's, Fluttering, and Hutton's shearwaters began their trajectories to becoming separate species in the last million or so years. Major changes in climate during this time may have promoted their speciation," say the authors of the study.

"Our next challenge is to determine the past distributions of Scarlett's, Fluttering and Hutton's shearwaters. The bones of these species overlap in size making it difficult to tell them apart but our study shows that DNA can distinguish them. By sequencing DNA from shearwater bones from across the South Island we should be able to build a map of where each species used to occur."

Banding Office Update

In January the Banding Advisory Committee convened to review changes in the Banding Scheme since April 2016 and discuss the certification process and banding training. The Committee comprises representatives of the banding community, including species experts within DOC and representatives from universities, museums, Crown Research Institutes, the Birds New Zealand Banding Liaison Officer and Fish & Game. There may be an opportunity to meet members of the Committee during the Birds New Zealand Conference in June.

An exciting time lies ahead as we work towards a new Banding Database with an online interface. Instead of developing this from scratch we aim to adopt and adapt an existing database from another banding scheme – so watch this space! In the meantime, we welcome any feedback and suggestions on what the banding community would like included in such a development, and how best it can serve people who upload data, report bird bands or requesting banding records.

Sandy and I would like to thank everyone for their patience during the past few months while various aspects of the Banding Office were disrupted following the November earthquake. We were evacuated from Nokia House and so did not have ready access to bands and equipment, and were working from home or hot-desking on a remote log-in system resulting in additional challenges. The Banding Office has now moved back into Level 2 of Conservation House, and we are looking forward to unpacking boxes and settling into our normal office routine once again.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW



King Shag at Tonga Island. Photo by Stewart Robertson.

Is King Shag expanding its distribution range?

In recent years single roosting King Shags have been recorded in Abel Tasman National Park. The first record was 1st January 2015, involving a second year sub-adult on Motu-areronui or Adele Island (Abel Tasman Eco Tours, UBR 2015/40). The most recent record from the same site was a juvenile on 6th October 2016. Previously, only two single records of King Shag have been reported away from the species' distribution area; one from Wellington Harbour on 14th July 2002 (Ben Bell, UBR 54/02) and a sub-adult reported on 30th October 2011 at Kaikoura.

In the same period there were another six records of King Shag in Abel Tasman NP. While it seems likely that the last three records (24th September 2016 – 6th October 2016) involve the same juvenile, a total of five different individuals (juveniles, sub-adults and an adult bird) is the highest number ever recorded beyond the species' known distribution range in the Marlborough Sounds. King Shags from Abel Tasman NP are mingling with Spotted Shags on exposed seaward rocks, most regularly at Adele Island. The single adult record was from nearby Tonga Island.

The nearest King Shag colony to Abel Tasman NP is Rahuinui Island, west of D'Urville Island. In 2015, 75 birds were attending this colony with 22 nests. It seems very likely that the Abel Tasman NP birds originate from this colony. Where a distance of 60 kilometres is beyond the normal range between colony and feeding habitats, the Abel Tasman NP records may indicate a post- and pre-breeding distribution beyond the known colonies. Regular 'post breeding roosting' has been recorded North of Croisilles Harbour at Pahakorea Point since 1997 (R. Schuckard pers. com). The maximum number recorded at this site was 14 on 4th October 2010. A number of feeding King Shags have also been recorded west of the entrance to Croisilles Harbour, between 2011 and 2016 (R. Schuckard pers. com).

STEWART ROBERTSON

A Tribute – Jim Wilson

It is with sadness that I report the unexpected death of Jim Wilson on Saturday 28th January 2017. Sincere condolences have been sent from Birds New Zealand to his family. Jim was a member of the Otago branch of Birds New Zealand for over 30 years. He was actively involved in banding hundreds of Silvereyes at his property in Wakari Road during the mid-1990s. He also initiated the banding of Tui and Bellbird (1999-2002). Last year one Tui that Jim had banded in 2002 was seen again, alive, making it the oldest documented Tui. In the 1980s Jim regularly counted birds on Hawksbury Lagoon and this inspired us to repeat the surveys in 2005-2010 for comparisons to be made. Jim was part of the original group that initiated the establishment of the Orokonui Ecosanctuary in Dunedin. When his health restricted his active field birding, he took on the task of Otago Regional Recorder in 2014, ensuring rare bird sightings were reported correctly. Recently he was the Otago Region moderator of eBird checklists.

Jim enthused many of us by passing on the pleasure he had from studying and watching birds. He will be greatly missed.

MARY THOMPSON (REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE)

Birds New Zealand Conference & AGM 2017

The Birds New Zealand AGM & Conference 2017 will be held in Te Anau during Queen's birthday weekend (Friday 3rd June to Monday 5th June 2017). The events will take place at the Distinction Te Anau Hotel and Villas (Lakefront Drive). A registration form is enclosed with this magazine and there is an online registration form on the website: www.osnz.org.nz

Friday 2nd June

18:00-19:00 Registration desk opens at Distinction Te Anau Hotel.

Saturday 3rd June

08:00- 09:00 Registration

09:00-09:10 Opening of conference

Scientific Day - 1

09:10 -15:40 Science Presentations

15:40 -17:00 AGM

18:30-21:00 Informal dinner at Distinction Te Anau Hotel.

Sunday 4th June

Scientific Day - 2

08:30-10:30 Workshops

10.30 - 11:00 Morning tea

11:00-17:00 Science Presentations

18:30 pm Conference Dinner at Distinction Te Anau Hotel

Monday 5th June

Field Trips 8.30 am-3.30/4 pm.

Nominations for Regional Representative 2017

Each Regional Representative (RR) serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, though incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms. Nominations for each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040) on **31st July 2017**. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a member of the Society. If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination, a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2017 year.

Donations

Kevin Parker; Anthony Carey; John Flux; John Troost; Ashley Cunningham; Peter Turner; Jan Roxburgh; Dan O'Halloran; Stan Emmens; Gregory Moorcroft; Lois Wagener; R H Smithers; B J Gill; FV R Gaud; B J McKinlay; Jillian Hanna; M Power; Mike Graham; Noel Knight; Kim & Jenny Morrison; Jill Hamel; Phillip Crutchley; Frank Godbert; Neil Andrews; Jenny Ross; Sandy Winterton; Katherine Chamberlain; D Stracy; Jean Fleming; Michael North; Jack Davidson; Sue Bell; Geoff de Lisle.

New members

Elizabeth Elliot-Hogg (Waikato); Heather O'Brien (Northland); Daniel Cocker (Southland); Beulah Wood (Auckland); Katherine de Silva (Wellington); Gilda Mildwaters (Auckland); Patricia Sheehan (Gisborne/Wairoa); Rebecca French (Manawatu); Melissa Arseneault (Northland); Michael Coote (Auckland); Karen Pratt (Hawera); Alan Luckman (Kaeo); Talia Hochwimmer (Auckland); Blair Rowe (Canterbury); Janet Burton (Canterbury); Michelle Bradshaw (Wellington); Peter Bradshaw (Wellington); Bryony Alden (Otago); Paul Town (Auckland); James Kinghan (Northland); Mandy Robertson (Auckland); Andrew Hawke (Wellington); Anne Gillanders (Canterbury); Henry Taylor (Bay of Plenty); Nina Robb (Franz Josef); Graeme Macann (Auckland); Lance Gravatt (Auckland); Jan Velvin (Auckland); Angela Guy (Canterbury); Russell-Orongo Bay Holiday Park (Far North); Deb Foster (Nelson); Natalie Forsdick (Otago); Maggie Evans (Otago); Samuel Scheibel (Otago); Francesca Cunninghame (Otago); John Ewan (South Auckland); Jennifer Burton (Waikato); Annette Taylor (Waikato); Adi-Grace Mooar (Waikato).



Dr Brian Gill awarded Associate Emeritus Medal

Auckland member Dr Brian Gill was awarded an Associate Emeritus Medal on 19th October by Auckland War Memorial Museum, where he was Curator of Land Vertebrates from 1982 to 2013.

Brian served elected terms on the councils of Birds New Zealand, Miranda Naturalists' Trust, and Auckland Museum Institute. Ten years as Chairman of the OSNZ Checklist Committee culminated in publication of a new *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand* (2010), and he received the Society's Robert Falla Memorial Award for service to New Zealand ornithology in 2010. He has published more than 120 technical papers and is the author of *New Zealand's Extinct Birds* (with Paul Martinson, 1991), *New Zealand's Unique Birds* (with Geoff Moon, 1999), *The Owl that Fell from the Sky* (2012) and *The Unburnt Egg* (2016).

Brian has pursued numerous research paths, including a long-time interest in migratory birds. The citation noted that his dedication to sound documentation and keen interest in the history of natural history will leave a lasting legacy for future researchers and those curious about collections.

Membership renewal

Members who have not yet paid their 2017 subscription are invited to renew **before 30th April 2017**. This can be done online at: www.osnz.org.nz/join-society/existing-members.

If you do not renew your subscription by that date, this will be the last issue of the magazine that you will receive. If you are not sure if your 2017 subscription has been paid you can log-in to check your membership account on www.osnz.org.nz or contact our Membership Secretary: membership@osnz.org.nz

Notornis update and thanks

With a lot of patience and assistance from Jim Briskie, the transition of the *Notornis* Editor role has now occurred between him and myself. As a Birds New Zealand member, I'd like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the huge contribution Jim made over his time in the role. I'd also like to apologise for the combined Sept/Dec issue at the end of last year, but this was due to a death in my family occurring around that time. Looking forward, I am working with Andrew Digby (DOC) about the possibility of producing a special Kakapo issue for *Notornis*.

Lastly, I would like to encourage all potential authors to submit your short notes and full papers to the journal. We are largely up to date with the processing of current manuscripts so are able to turn papers around reasonably quickly. Having attended the very successful Scientific Day last June I know that there is a lot of great work being done out there which would be perfect for *Notornis*!

LEIGH BULL, EDITOR, NOTORNIS

Fledgling ornithologists visit Maud Island

Seven members of Birds New Zealand visited Maud Island to monitor the Fluttering Shearwater colony at the end of the 2016/17 breeding season. Elizabeth (Biz) Bell, Sue Bell, Cathie Bell, Alexandra Phelps, Kristin Ruwhiu, Joseph Ruwhiu and Ruben Ruwhiu spent six days on the island to band any surviving shearwater chicks, build a new colony track, and help the Department of Conservation (DOC) with maintenance.

The Fluttering Shearwater transfer project dates back to the early 1990s when up to 100 chicks were transferred from Long Island, Queen Charlotte Sound, to Maud Island in the Pelorus Sounds, each year for five years. Brian Bell began this project as a way to train junior members of Birds New Zealand (Ornithological Society of New Zealand) in the methods of handling and supplementary feeding seabirds, and developing ground-breaking translocation techniques for burrowing seabirds. These techniques have now been used around New Zealand, including with Cook's Petrel, Common Diving Petrel, Fairy Prion and Hutton's Shearwater. Earlier checks on the colony in October and November recorded 16 breeding burrows and one burrow being visited by non-breeding birds.

The junior members had a great time sharing their experience with, and learning from, Piripi and Heeni Higgott, the children of DOC rangers Frank Higgott and Sue Caldwell. One night, I showed everyone Maud Island frogs, glow worms, giant weta and Moreporks. We also checked the Rifleman nesting boxes that the Bell family established as part of an early local OSNZ project. A number of the boxes had geckos and weta to amuse the children.

The colony track work involved working together to clear the long grass before benching the track down from the main ridge to the burrows. We also helped DOC with the biosecurity stations, grubbing thistles and clearing tracks in between the shearwater work and bird monitoring. Five minute bird counts recorded high numbers of Kereru, Tui, Bellbird, Grey Warbler, Silvereye and Sacred Kingfisher. A few New Zealand Pipits were seen and Australasian Gannets, Little Penguins and Fluttering Shearwaters were seen feeding in the bay.

Unfortunately when we checked the shearwater burrows we found that all the chicks had died, so we did not get to band any juveniles. Most of these had probably died after torrential rain in December, which flooded some burrows. A final burrow check on the last morning of the visit found three adults in them. A total of twelve individual adults were caught in the



■ L-R: Reuben, Joseph, Piripi, Heeni, Alex, Sue Caldwell (DOC Ranger), Cathie, Sue, Kristin. Photo by Biz Bell.

burrows over the entire season. The remaining burrows either had abandoned eggs or small chicks only whenever they were checked in October and November.

After a fantastic fun-filled five days we left the island on the Pelorus Mail Boat -which gave us the chance to view the island from the sea as the boat continued its mail run of the Pelorus Sound.

This trip was the first of a series planned for members, especially juniors, to visit Maud Island to learn more about the shearwater translocation project, improve the colony sites, and assist DOC with maintenance and monitoring. Any members interested in assisting with these visits, please contact Marlborough Regional Representative Kristin Ruwhiu (contact details via www.osnz.org.nz).

On behalf of the Marlborough Branch, Biz, Sue, Cathie, Alex, Kristin, Ruben and Joseph would like to thank Frank, Sue, Piripi and Heeni for their hospitality and company, DOC Waitohi/Picton Office for their assistance and support, and the DOC boat crew.

ELIZABETH BELL

An obituary for Brian Bell by Hugh Robertson and Colin Miskelly is to be published in the next edition of Notornis.

Taiko Trust history

The roots of the Chatham Islands Taiko Trust go back to Taiko Expeditions. A huge number of volunteers contributed time and resources to Taiko conservation over many years, without which the Taiko would not be with us today. David Crockett pulled together and led a huge team of volunteers. Taiko Camp grew up as a permanent base and is now the hub of major conservation efforts in south west Chatham Island. The Taiko Trust is keen to record this history, the story and images of those involved, the place, and the work. We are now investigating the possibility of publishing a book on the history of Taiko conservation, the species' dramatic rediscovery, and the hard work which has gone into bringing it back from the brink. The Trust Taiko is keen to here from any past Taiko Expedition/ Taiko Trust volunteers who are willing to share their photos, anecdotes or log books from their time on the Chatham Islands, especially photos of Taiko Camp and expedition members undertaking field work. If you are interested, please contact Mike Bell via mike@wmil.co.nz or 021 552768 or by post: Mike Bell, PO Box 607, Blenheim 7201.

South Island Takahē population reaches 300

The Department of Conservation's (DOC) Takahē Recovery Programme announced that the South Island Takahē population was more than 300 birds on the day that 26 of the birds were released into the wild in December. "From a low of 118 birds in 1981, the future is looking bright for the South Island Takahē with these young birds joining their one remaining wild population in Fiordland's Murchison Mountains," says DOC Takahē Ranger Glen Greaves. "The wild population holds the most valuable birds, in terms of genetics and the learned behaviours that allow them to survive in the mountainous habitat. The released birds are all fitted with transmitters, as are some of the resident birds, allowing us to closely track survival over the coming months."

The annual census completed in September 2016 estimated there was a minimum of 106 birds remaining in the Murchison Mountains. The Takahē Recovery Programme has also been working to create safe populations in predator-free locations across New Zealand, where there are now 200 more South Island Takahē - bringing the total population to 306.

Juvenile Kākāriki dispersal study

New research has examined the post-fledging movements of juvenile Red-crowned Parakeets or Kākāriki from the Zealandia fenced ecosanctuary in Wellington. The research investigated their dispersal patterns in an urban setting, potential drivers of dispersal, and assessed the birds' survival. To do this, radio transmitters were attached to 22 birds that had recently fledged from their nests, and tracked them daily for three to five months, until the transmitter battery was flat or the bird removed it and/or was killed.

Of these 22 birds, ten appeared to disperse permanently outside the sanctuary, while several others left occasionally to forage during the day. Many birds made exploratory movements in and out of the sanctuary several weeks before departing Zealandia for the remainder of the study. These birds primarily travelled to other areas of native forest such as nearby reserves, many of the same reserves frequented by juveniles in 2015. Totara, which fruits around February-April in Wellington, appeared to be an important food resource, as several of the birds targeted fruiting trees outside the ecosanctuary. However, Kākāriki are generalist feeders, and were also observed feeding on a wide variety of plants throughout autumn and winter.

None of the radio-tracked birds inside the sanctuary died during the course of this study; however, at least three birds that dispersed outside Zealandia were killed. Of those birds determined dead, the likely killers were a cat, a rat, and an avian predator. In 2015, two of the six birds that left the sanctuary were killed, one likely by a domestic cat, the other by an unknown predator. Therefore, while some birds are certainly surviving outside the sanctuary, without a greater amount of predator control Wellington could continue to lose a large proportion of its Kākāriki population. Additional predator control concentrated in the areas frequented by Kākāriki could help the successful establishment of these birds in Wellington. Given that Kākāriki appear to primarily target areas of native forest, creating corridors of native bush may be important to aid population expansion throughout and beyond Wellington.

This study was conducted under the supervision of Associate Professor Nicola Nelson and Dr Heidy Kikillus from Victoria University of Wellington, and Richard Gray from Zealandia Ecosanctuary. Special thanks to those who helped with fieldwork and supported the project, including the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, Wellington City Council, FH Muter Trust, EM Pharazyn Trust, Karori Sanctuary Trust, DOC, and the Jim and Margaret Collins Grant.

ELLEN IRWIN, MSC STUDENT VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

First NZ sighting of Cox's Sandpiper

The first New Zealand record of Cox's Sandpiper has been submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) with supporting photographs by Canterbury-based birder Mike Ashbee, who found and photographed the bird at Lake Ellesmere on 25th November 2016 (see photo on page 2). Mike posted a photo of the bird on "NZ Birding Forum" believing it was a Pectoral Sandpiper. Birds New Zealand President David Lawrie commented that it looked "strange" and asked if it could be a Cox's Sandpiper, a very rare hybrid between a male Pectoral Sandpiper and a female Curlew Sandpiper, two species that breed in the Siberian Arctic. Several others with expertise identifying Arctic waders concurred and the view emerged that it was a Cox's Sandpiper. Mike subsequently submitted his record to the Records Appraisal Committee.

These hybrid birds have only been seen about 30 times in Australia and once each in Massachusetts and Japan, according to Andrew Crossland, Christchurch City Council's project manager of wildlife management. Canterbury Museum's senior curator of natural history, Dr Paul Scofield, describes Cox's Sandpipers as incredibly rare: "There may be one or two alive at any one moment."



■ A gravel island created on the Waitaki River for Black-fronted Terns to nest on. Photo by Ann-Kathrin Schlesselmann.

New study to improve conservation of Black-fronted Tern

The Black-fronted Tern or Tarapirohe is in steep decline, currently listed as endangered. It faces a wide range of threats, particularly habitat degradation and loss, and predation. The complex interaction of these threats, together with the migratory habit of terns, poses a challenge to provide this small endemic bird with adequate protection and management.

Associate Professor Bruce Robertson and PhD student Ann-Kathrin Schlesselmann from University of Otago, with the support of the Department of Conservation (DOC), are currently working on analysing DNA obtained from over 500 Black-fronted Terns during the 2014-15 breeding season. The aim is to understand better how breeding colonies relate to each other and at what locations and scale management would need to be carried out to ensure the ongoing genetic diversity and connectivity of their populations.

No successful management techniques are currently available on a nationwide scale, though. Together with Environment Canterbury, the research team is testing a novel way to restore high quality breeding habitat for Black-fronted Terns through vegetation removal and the creation of bare gravel islands in places that are hard for predatory mammals to access. Given that one of the primary issues is the poor recruitment success of Black-fronted Terns, the aim of this project is to increase breeding success using the Lower Waitaki River as a case study. Several islands for Black-fronted Terns and other braided river birds were created last winter. Tern breeding success and the use of vegetated islands and clear islands by introduced mammals are currently being monitored in different parts of the river. These projects are supported by Environment Canterbury, DOC and the University of Otago. The results will allow us to make management recommendations on where and how to protect breeding areas and populations of this unique braided river tern.

ANN-KATHRIN SCHLESSELMANN

First New Zealand record of Shy Albatross

The first New Zealand record of Shy Albatross was accepted by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) in September. The bird was seen off Palliser Bay (Wairarapa) on 15th May 2016 by participants in a Wellington Branch pelagic trip and photographed by Wellington Regional Representative Geoff De Lisle. Geoff showed his photographs to Hugh Robertson who identified a Shy Albatross in one. Features that distinguish Tasmanian breeding Shy Albatross from New Zealand Subantarctic breeding White-capped Albatross are yellow at the base of the culmen and greyish bill colour. See photo on page 2.

Birding the Subantarctic Islands

Subantarctic Seabird Researcher Michelle Bradshaw represented Birds New Zealand on Heritage Expeditions' "Forgotten Islands of the South Pacific" birding expedition on board the Professor Khromov in December 2016.

New Zealand is often described as the 'seabird capital of the world' and it is the Subantarctic Islands that are the 'jewels in the crown'. Protected as Nature Reserves, they were listed as a World Heritage Area in 1998 for their "superlative natural phenomena". After departing Lyttelton the voyage south across Foveaux Strait towards The Snares Islands offered the opportunity for rewarding birding and there were always keen birders on the bridge to enjoy the impressive list of sightings. Ten species of albatross were seen during the trip, including Antipodean (Wandering), Grey-headed, Campbell's and Buller's, and many more southern seabirds made appearances at sea, including Mottled Petrel, Broad-billed Prion and South Georgian Diving Petrel.

Arriving at the Snares, the sea conditions meant that it was not possible to launch the Zodiac inflatable boats for closer views of the main island, but a few curious Snares Crested Penguins still delighted the birders on board with their porpoising past the ship as it made a few passes in the lee of the dramatic cliffs and rock stacks.

Next day we went ashore to explore Enderby Island in the Auckland Island Group where thousands of photographs were taken of its special birds, spectacular scenery, flowering megaherbs, and breeding New Zealand Sealions. This was our chance to see the endemic Auckland Island Shag, Teal, Snipe and Dotterel, and the special seabirds that nest on the island, such as Yellow-eyed Penguin and Light-mantled Sooty Albatross. We also saw some more familiar birds, such as Tui, Red-crowned Parakeet and New Zealand Falcon, as we walked and waded our way around the island, jumping puddles, fording streams, and wandering through the enchanted Rata forest.

Towards the end of the day the wind whipped the sea into spume and the williwaws danced across the surface as we set sail for Campbell Island. Among the smaller seabirds seen at sea were much sought-after species, such as Antarctic Prion,

White-headed Petrel, Black-bellied Storm Petrel, Subantarctic Little Shearwater and Antarctic Tern.

After arriving in Perseverance Harbour, expedition leader Rodney Russ briefed us all on the fascinating history of Campbell Island and explained our options for exploration: a Zodiac boat cruise, a walk along the boardwalk to Col Lyall saddle, or a longer hike on Mt Honey. The removal of feral cattle and sheep by the 1990s and the eradication of rats in 2001 have since resulted in a remarkable recovery of bird populations on the island. Sightings of the endemic Campbell Island Shag, Teal and Snipe vied with gamming Southern Royal Albatrosses, wallowing Southern Elephant Seals, and colourful fields of flowering megaherbs as highlights of the expedition.

The haunting call of a pair of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross in synchronised flight and the distinctive sweet musky smell of Northern Giant Petrels here brought back memories of the year that I spent as a field researcher on Subantarctic Marion Island (South Africa), and I gave a presentation for expedition participants providing a comparison of these two Subantarctic gems.

The voyage north, back to the mainland, provided another opportunity to forge new friendships and more time to marvel at the dynamic soaring of the albatrosses as they skimmed over the wild ocean. A total of 61 bird species was recorded over the eight days of the expedition, as well as Southern Elephant Seal, New Zealand Sealion, New Zealand Fur Seal and Southern Right Whale Dolphin.

Very few people have the privilege of birding in these southern latitudes and visiting New Zealand's special World Heritage Subantarctic Islands. I would highly recommend joining Heritage Expeditions for a birding adventure of a lifetime.

To request a free brochure from Heritage Expeditions, see the advertisement on the back cover for their contact details.

Tawaki tracked on 3,830 kilometre journey

In November 2016 Robin Long and Thomas Mattern from the Tawaki Project deployed satellite tags on 20 Fiordland Crested Penguins or Tawaki at Gorge River, South Westland. Since then more than 3,000 locations have been transmitted through Argos satellites. While some of the tags stopped submitting halfway through the birds' journeys - most likely because the penguins managed to preen them off their backs - there is still a number of Tawaki with tags that are actively transmitting.

In January 2017, one female penguin was recorded at a location that was 250-km from the colony where she started her at-sea journey more than two months earlier. At the furthest point during her 3,830-km journey she reached a location 1,370-km from the breeding colony. Yet this marathon journey is only a prelude to the three-to-four month long winter migration which Tawaki undertake after the annual moult in February and March. It is this migratory aspect of the species' marine ecology that the Tawaki Project plans to investigate in the coming season.

The Tawaki Project is a collaboration of University of Otago, Global Penguin Society, Department of Conservation and West Coast Penguin Trust, supported by the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2015.

THOMAS MATTERN





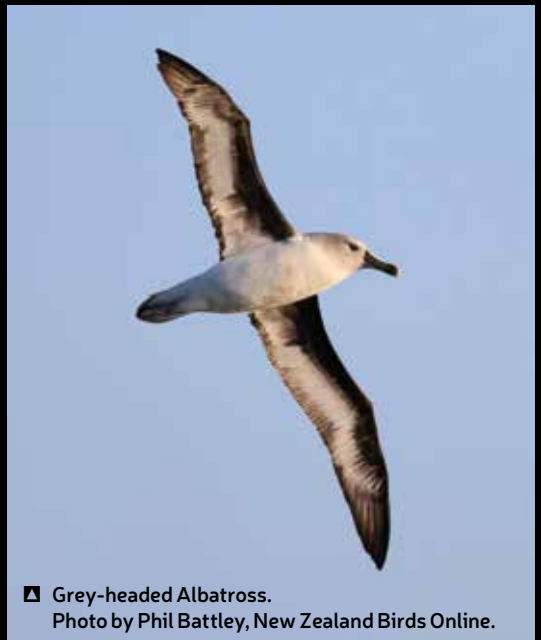
▲ Light-mantled Sooty Albatross pair.
Photo by Tony Whitehead,
New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Southern Royal Albatrosses gamming, Campbell Island.
Photo by Craig Mckenzie, New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Campbell Albatross.
Photo by Craig McKenzie, New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Grey-headed Albatross.
Photo by Phil Battley, New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Northern Giant Petrel.
Photo by Mark Fraser, New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Snares Crested Penguin.
Photo by Doug Gimesy, New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ The stunning Lilac-breasted Roller



▲ The beautiful Malachite Kingfisher



▲ Brian and Sue Bell on the Mokoro



▲ Paul, Biz, Brian and Sue on a walking safari

Bell-birding in Botswana and Zambia

Article by Elizabeth (Biz) Bell, Paul Garner-Richards, Brian Bell and Sue Bell. Photos by Elizabeth (Biz) Bell.

A 'bucket list' journey for Brian and Sue through the Okavango Delta in Botswana ending at Victoria Falls in Zambia was a fantastic excuse for Paul and Biz to join them on a 10-day Birdwatching Safari in April 2016. We travelled with "Desert and Delta Safaris" who took amazing care of us. Their guides were very knowledgeable and could identify every species and inform us on any aspect of a species' life history.

Our trip started in Maun, heading north to Xugana Island Lodge and then east to Camp Moremi, Savute Safari Lodge and Chobe Game Lodge by small aircraft, and then by vehicle and boat across the Zambesi River to our last stop at Tongabezi Lodge. Spending two days at each lodge was just enough time to enjoy the comforts and 'tick off' species in each area. Evening meals at the lodges didn't stop the birding opportunities with a Verreaux's Eagle Owl landing on a tree while we were having dinner, causing a flurry of camera activity.

Each lodge provided us with a guide for the duration of our stay and they quickly worked out that, although lions, elephants, giraffes and the other mammals were of interest, it was the birds that we were there to see. Connie, our "Chobe Angel" from Chobe Game Lodge, was brilliant and, despite the fact that we had the shortest game drive in history, she laughed at the way we were so happy after adding another 15 new bird species to our list so late in our trip, including Grey-crowned Crane, Black-chested Snake Eagle and Giant Kingfisher.

Watching the larger or more brightly-coloured birds was relatively easy, but detecting and pointing out the 'little brown jobs' to Brian and Sue caused great hilarity, especially when we described one bird as being "in a small shrub next to another

shrub". Finally, when the bird moved and Brian spotted it, he announced, "Oh there, in the tree, beyond the shrub, why didn't you say so!" After that, every description of a bird's location included the phrase "beyond".

The boat trips were also amazing, especially as we could ask the guide to "stop" at any point and they would halt and help us identify any birds seen. Kingfishers were a favourite. We saw six of the possible nine species during the trip. They were all stunningly beautiful, especially the Malachite Kingfisher with its bright barred turquoise and black crested crown and orange cheeks. One of the Xugana highlights was the Mokoro (canoe) Safari. Sitting low in the water and being pushed along by guides using poles was a relaxing way to see wildlife at water level. A tiny Painted Reed Frog was a special sight during this journey and one of the few amphibians that we saw.

Brian's highlight of all the boat safaris was "an excellent view of a Black Crake", prompting him to comment, "it was much bigger than our crake". The bird was flushed out of the reeds, leaping from lily pad to lily pad as we went on an afternoon boat tour. Biz spent much of her time trying to get a good photograph of an African Jacana. It took her two days and over 120 frames to get something that was good enough. And we were lucky to usually have the boat to ourselves.

Having the opportunity to wander around the Okavango Delta on foot was an amazing experience. Although it made our guides a little nervous, watching a herd of over 400 buffalo crossing the river from pool to pool then pass within 100 metres of us while we were on a walking safari was magic. This was another of Brian's favourite sights of the trip.



▲ The endangered Grey-crowned Crane

▲ Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill

▲ Black Crake

▲ Wattled Crane pair

▲ The photogenic African Jacana

The 'game drives' were a highlight for both mammals and birds. Lions, elephants, jackals, giraffes, zebras, antelopes, baboons - to name a few - were observed. One drive introduced us to the real Africa: a pride of Lions hunting giraffe while walking right past our open safari jeep, without even looking at us. Sue found it a bit nerve-racking, despite being told it was safe.

Views of a Leopard and cub resting in a tree were also breathtaking, but the most spectacular highlight was watching another lion hunt right in front of us: young lions of the pride targeting the oldest buffalo at the end of a large herd. Embarrassingly for the lions, a larger buffalo came to the rescue, and the lions ended up wandering off to sulk in the bushes. Wild Dogs tried to get into the action and were chased off by the lions, but Paul was very pleased to see his favourite African mammal.

Luckily the other guests on some of these drives were also keen birdwatchers and our guide managed to spot some vultures on the ground, Wattled Cranes displaying and interacting as a pair; an endangered Grey-crowned Crane (a reportable "UBR" for Botswana); and a Lesser Kestrel, a Palearctic migrant that was also a rare sighting for Botswana. We also saw a Kori Bustard. Although this species was voted the national bird of Botswana, we definitely would have voted for the stunning multi-coloured Lilac-breasted Roller in the original poll between the two species.

After the game drives it was pleasant to be back on the water cruising along the Chobe River. Evening cruises gave us wonderful views of elephants, crocodiles and Water Thick-Knees, and we all enjoyed seeing large numbers of White-fronted Bee-eaters coming into their nesting holes in the river bank. Another spectacular sight was a large dead tree festooned

with three species of swallow and martin. After they left hundreds of Carmine Bee-eaters replaced them: an incredible scene of action and colour.

Our main reason for visiting Zambia was to go to Victoria Falls. The water spray cloud could be seen rising up over the bush surrounds for miles and the majesty of the falls was breathtaking. Wearing waterproof ponchos, the spray crashed down on us like heavy rain as we walked around the track. Everyone felt that the Victoria Falls was an amazing sight, worthy of its World Heritage status.

We also cruised the fast-flowing Zambezi River where we saw more bee-eaters and had a good view of a White-backed Night Heron and its nest with a small chick in it. Hippos could be constantly heard and seen, including one that surfaced next to the boat in full threat behaviour - mouth wide open - startling us all, and causing a quick course correction for the boat. Our last game drive of the trip added more species to our list, including African Golden Oriole, Maribou Stork, African Black Swift, Trumpeter Hornbill and Southern Ground Hornbill, completing our 'collection' of all but the rarest of the hornbills.

We enjoyed spectacular sunsets at every lodge and, although April is not the best month for birding on the Okavango Delta (between September and February is recommended), by the end of our trip we had seen 178 bird species, three frogs, eight reptiles and at least 30 mammals. We missed seeing rhinoceros and hyena, and some of the birds, including Schalow's Turaco and Peel's Fishing Owl, but that will be an excuse to return in future.

It was a joy to have shared one of Brian's last birding trips to a place that he had always wanted to visit.



▲ Black Noddies (*minutus* subspecies)



▲ Masked Booby (*tasmani* subspecies) also known as Tasman Booby



▲ Grey Noddies (*albivitta* subspecies)



▲ White Terns (*candida* subspecies)



▲ Red-tailed Tropicbird



▲ Wedge-tailed Shearwater



▲ Black-winged Petrel



▲ Black Noddy in flight.
Photo by Duncan Watson,
New Zealand Birds Online

Birding Week on Norfolk Island 2016

Article and Photographs by Ian and Gwyneth Armitage

An opportunity to watch birds with the guidance of local experts, a delightful climate and a small friendly island community were the main reasons for joining the "Australia–New Zealand Birding Week" on Norfolk Island in November 2016.

The Norfolk Island Group is a globally important biodiversity hotspot and has been designated as an "Important Bird Area" by BirdLife International. The island group comprises Norfolk Island, Nepean Island and Phillip Island. The islands are summer breeding sites for thousands of seabirds, including Masked Booby, three species of noddy, White Tern, Sooty Tern, Red-tailed Tropicbird and Wedge-tailed Shearwater. It is home to the endemic Norfolk Island Red-crowned Parakeet (known locally as the Green Parrot), Slender-billed White-eye, Norfolk Gerygone and Norfolk Island Robin.

The annual Norfolk Island Birding Week is arranged and led by local bird experts, Margaret Christian and Derek Ball. Margaret is a well-known local ornithologist and publisher of her excellent book, "Norfolk Island... the birds". Derek runs the Wildmob Wilderness Conservation Group and leads "Island Arks Australia".

The Birding Week is well organised and provides opportunities to meet other birders. A delicious welcome dinner is provided, also an introduction to the island group and its fascinating history. They guide several walks in groups of no more than 15 people to seabird colonies and into Norfolk Island National Park, and an excellent presentation on the endangered Norfolk Island Red-crowned Parakeet is made by park staff. One guided night tour on the south and west of the Norfolk Island was to view the arrival of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters that nest in large numbers on headlands and coastal forest. Burrows are abundant, some beside the main road, so care is needed when driving at night as Wedge-tailed Shearwaters can appear at any time!

There was also plenty of time to use a rental car to explore the many little roads to various bays, forest reserves, headlands and into the Norfolk Island National Park, but one must remember to give way to cattle that have right of way as they graze the grassy road edges. A good time to explore is shortly after dawn when the air is still. It was early on our last morning that we were thrilled to see five Norfolk Island Red-crowned Parakeets in trees at a national park car park. This rare endemic subspecies is closely related to the New Zealand Red-crowned Parakeet but is considerably larger.

Usually the first seabird one becomes aware of after arrival is the conspicuous White Tern, often seen flying in pairs, and nesting mostly in the tall stately Norfolk Island Pine trees throughout the island. White Terns don't make nests, but simply lay their eggs on branches and being wet and sticky when laid the eggs become 'glued' to the branches. A good place to see them is in the 'Hundred Acres' Reserve, on the south coast. Large numbers of Black Noddies also nest in Norfolk Island Pine trees at the 'Hundred Acres' Reserve and often fly slowly, silently and delicately along pathways and through the forest – a fascinating sight to see. From various headlands in Norfolk Island National Park, including at the Captain Cook Monument, Red-tailed Tropicbirds are numerous, often flying and chasing in groups as they twist and turn above the ocean.

Red-tailed Tropicbirds nest under bushes and in small hollows on the coastal cliffs. Masked Boobies and Sooty Terns are common at sea and nest in various sites on the three islands. The Grey Noddy breeds in inaccessible crevices on coastal cliffs.

Walks through the numerous pathways in the picturesque forests of the Norfolk Island National Park are pleasant and almost always one is followed by the Norfolk Island Grey Fantail, often flying close to the ground. In the trees above, the loud and characteristic call of the endemic subspecies of Norfolk Island Golden Whistler reveals its presence and it is here that the Norfolk Island Robin is numerous. Silvereyes are common, also the noisy and conspicuous Crimson Rosella, introduced many years ago from Australia.

An adventurous highlight of the Birding Week was a one-day visit to Phillip Island, seven kilometres south of Kingston, the centre of local government and the location of the small pier and boat harbour. Visitors travel in a small fast boat, a trip lasting about 15 minutes, and get ashore by jumping from the boat onto a rock platform in a small rocky cove. Then the first part of the climb is up a steep cliff, climbing part of the way using a rope and small footholds in the rock face!

The tramp to the top of Phillip Island crosses bare eroded hills (a consequence of deforestation over 100 years ago) and provides great views back to Norfolk Island and of several nesting seabird species; Masked Booby, Grey, Brown and Black noddies, Red-tailed Tropicbirds and large numbers of Black-winged Petrels. The Grey and Brown noddies, and Red-tailed Tropicbirds are easily viewed at the rocky landing site on Phillip Island where they seem to be quite undisturbed by visitors. Black-winged Petrels are unusual among petrels in that they are active and vocal throughout the day calling with a high pitched 'whistle' as they fly up and down gullies, and were often seen to arrive and leave from their burrows. Several Kermadec Petrels and White-naped Petrels are nesting in the hibiscus forest on the upper slopes of Phillip Island, and always waiting for a passing meal is the Australian Kestrels that were seen by our group clinging to steep rock faces at the summit of this volcanic island.

Norfolk Island has a long and varied history, twice as a penal settlement, a place for resettlement of families from an overcrowded Pitcairn Island, an important military location in WW2, and nowadays for tourism. Several resident and migratory species can be seen on the well-kept grassland and wetlands near the 19th Century stone buildings and ruins which were the island's second convict settlement village. During our visit we often observed Ruddy Turnstones, Bar-tailed Godwits, Pacific Golden Plovers, White-faced Herons, Welcome Swallows, Sacred Kingfishers, Pukeko and Mallards.

The "Australia – New Zealand Birding Week" on Norfolk Island can be recommended; it has great birdwatching as well as being fun and relaxing, and it is an opportunity to enter observations into eBird. The 2017 Birding Week will be 17th – 26th November. For further details see: <https://www.norfolkislandtravelcentre.com/events/norfolk-island-bird-week>

Remote sensing and seabirds

In 2015 the biennial David Medway Scholarship provided financial support to study remote sensing of burrow-nesting seabirds as a method to investigate the relationship between seabird burrow density, seabird nutrient enrichment, and soil nitrogen and canopy level nitrogen on islands in the Mercury Island group. The study used an unmanned aerial vehicle-mounted sensor to collect high resolution images to evaluate canopy composition and the spectral reflectance signature of Pōhutukawa, in relation to seabird density. We also sampled and analysed soil and leaves from Pōhutukawa for total nitrogen and carbon:nitrogen ratios. We found a strong relationship

between seabird nesting density and soil nitrogen. However, our preliminary results indicate this relationship is not strongly transmitted to the canopy of Pōhutukawa. With these results in mind, our research continues to evaluate the spectral response of other island canopy species to seabird nutrient enrichment, and the topographic and environmental influences that might affect forest canopy reflectance. In the 2016/17 field season we will evaluate the emergent canopy species Māhoe and milk tree to compare the results of Pōhutukawa with and identify other species that may act as proxies for evaluating seabird nesting density changes over time. See www.osnz.org.nz for more details.

STEPHANIE BORRELLE, HOLLY P. JONES, BARBARA BOLLARD-BREEN
& DAVID R. TOWNS

Beach Patrol Scheme 2015 Preliminary Report

This report is based on 231 cards for 2015 received as at 31.8.16 (same number as 2014). Other numbers are: 262 in 2013, 324 in 2012, 352 in 2011, 315 in 2010, 385 in 2009, 381 in 2008, 403 in 2007). This shows a steady decline in the number of beach patrols carried out. In 2015 1,065 kilometres were patrolled (1,069 km in 2014, 1,388 km in 2013, 1,625 km in 2012, 1,846 km in 2011, 3,210 km in 2010, 4,470 km in 2009, 2,524 km in 2008 and 2,307 km in 2007). Dead seabirds found in 2015: 1,377 (1,388 in 2014, 4,851 in 2013, 1,924 in 2012, 57,920 in 2011, 3,266 in 2010, 4,763 in 2009, 3,906 in 2008, 3,786 in 2007 and 3,117 in 2006). There were no significant wrecks in 2015 and no especially unusual records, apart from the first beach patrol record of a New Zealand Storm Petrel. The largest wreck of a single species was of 500 juvenile Sooty Shearwaters on Mason Bay in May. The average recovery rate for the whole country is around 1.29 birds per kilometre compared with the 2014 average of 1.33. The highest average was in 2011 with 31 birds per kilometre as the result of a huge Prion wreck.

Birds recovered in 2015 (brackets indicate 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010 & 2009 figures): Royal Albatross 1 (0, 2, 1, 1, 2, 5); Wandering Albatross 3 (1, 5, 3, 5, 6); Shy/White-capped Mollymawk 9 (17, 18, 17, 25, 29, 40); Salvin's Mollymawk 0 (1, 3, 1, 2, 2, 4); Black-browed/Campbell Mollymawk 2 (1, 10, 1, 3, 1, 5); Grey-headed Mollymawk 0 (4, 0, 1, 4, 8, 8); Buller's Mollymawk 6 (23, 6, 14, 74, 27, 16); Sooty Albatross 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Light-mantled Sooty Albatross 3 (7, 0, 4, 1, 3, 2); Yellow-nosed Mollymawk 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Chatham Island Mollymawk 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Mollymawk/Albatross sp. 3 (2, 11, 9, 7, 16, 10); Northern Giant Petrel 3 (1, 1, 2, 6, 7, 6); Southern Giant Petrel 2 (1 (3, 3, 0, 17, 8); Giant Petrel sp. 1 (7, 0, 7, 6, 7, 6); Buller's Shearwater 21 (42, 65, 43, 282, 107, 456); Sooty Shearwater 603 (160, 2102, 253, 650, 1983, 417); Short-tailed Shearwater 14 (84, 944, 50, 8, 157, 116); Wedge-tailed Shearwater 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1); Flesh-footed Shearwater 7 (1, 8, 25, 119, 22, 24); Fluttering Shearwater 73 (76, 184, 169, 471, 250, 402); Hutton's Shearwater 9 (17, 35, 61, 63, 59, 127); Fluttering/Hutton's Shearwater 7 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Little Shearwater 7 (10, 7, 1, 35, 14, 12); Diving Petrel 36 (158, 86, 57, 1146, 86, 111); White-chinned Petrel 0 (5, 2, 3, 5, 6, 2); Westland Black Petrel 1 (0, 3, 1, 2, 0, 1); Black Petrel 1 (3, 1, 3, 3, 1, 2); Grey Petrel 0 (3, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0); Antarctic Fulmar 5 (5, 0, 6, 1, 59, 3); Cape Pigeon 17 (3, 2, 13, 25, 41,

36); Blue Petrel 2 (4, 1, 1, 28, 9, 6); Fairy Prion 89 (51, 117, 113, 2304, 192, 226); Fulmar Prion 0 (0, 0, 1, 55, 2, 0); Broad-billed Prion 4 (17, 36, 224, 34630, 47, 43); Thin-billed Prion 13 (6, 4, 4, 1153, 14, 22); Salvin's Prion 2 (1, 3, 8, 2257, 3, 3); Antarctic Prion 2 (3, 1, 8, 1265, 4, 7); Prion sp. 58 (87, 47, 123, 12169, 166, 109); Cook's Petrel 5 (8, 5, 2, 9, 19, 11); White-rumped Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Mottled Petrel 17 (106, 16, 46, 40, 27, 44); Black-winged Petrel 1 (1, 0, 0, 0, 2, 2); Pycroft's Petrel 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1); Soft-plumaged Petrel 0 (4, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Gould's Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Kerguelen Petrel 1 (3, 1, 2, 2, 0, 0); White-headed Petrel 3 (18, 8, 11, 9, 33, 7); Grey-faced Petrel 11 (13, 3, 7, 15, 17, 13); White-faced Storm Petrel 4 (4, 11, 5, 86, 6, 19); Grey-backed Storm Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Black-bellied Storm Petrel 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); New Zealand Storm Petrel 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Storm Petrel sp. 1 (1, 1, 0, 5, 1, 0); Unidentified seabird 15 (32, 23, 2, 5, 21, 25); Yellow-eyed Penguin 2 (2, 2, 2, 5, 5, 4); Little Penguin 49 (64, 104, 61, 365, 420, 410); White-flipped Penguin 1 (13, 5, 19, 18, 5, 19); Fiordland Crested Penguin 3 (3, 2, 4, 3, 1, 4); Erect Crested Penguin 0 (1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0); Penguin sp. 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Red-tailed Tropicbird 0 (0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0); Tropicbird sp. 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Australasian Gannet 50 (66, 63, 116, 115, 429, 213); Black Shag 0 (0, 2, 1, 3, 6, 4); South Island Pied Shag 8 (15, 11, 10, 33, 32, 25); Little Black Shag 0 (1, 0, 0, 5, 1, 1); Little Shag 1 (2, 0, 1, 6, 3, 1); Spotted Shag 27 (46, 74, 146, 83, 47, 70); Stewart Island Shag 1 (22, 1, 9, 7, 9, 5); Auckland Island Shag 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Pitt Island Shag 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Shag sp. 3 (1, 1, 0, 6, 0, 0); White-faced Heron 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 2); Royal Spoonbill 1 (1, 1, 0, 4, 2, 1); Black Swan 18 (12, 26, 15, 8, 12, 8); Feral Goose 0 (1, 0, 3, 2, 4, 7); Canada Goose 5 (4, 6, 6, 1, 0, 7); Paradise Shelduck 2 (3, 5, 13, 17, 4, 9); Mallard 4 (1, 7, 4, 3, 8, 34); Domestic Duck 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Grey Duck 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1); Grey Teal 0 (1, 0, 3, 3, 0, 0); Shoveller 0 (0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 0); New Zealand Scaup 0 (0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 0); Harrier 1 (1, 1, 3, 3, 4, 4); Turkey 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 4, 0); Peafowl 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Chicken 1 (0, 2, 0, 2, 1, 3); Pheasant 0 (0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 1); Red-legged Partridge 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Weka 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Banded Rail 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Pukeko 0 (3, 1, 0, 1, 2, 5); Pied Oystercatcher 1 (4, 4, 6, 2, 1, 5); Variable Oystercatcher 0 (4, 0, 2, 1, 5, 2); Oystercatcher sp. 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0); Pied Stilt 0 (2, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Spur-winged Plover 1 (0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 1); Banded Dotterel 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 0); Bar-tailed Godwit 0 (0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 1); Southern Black-backed Gull 63 (74, 68, 108, 90, 185, 114); Red-billed Gull 23 (17, 31, 28, 33, 21); Black-billed Gull 4 (4, 6, 7, 10, 8, 8); Gull sp. 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Brown Skua 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 4); Arctic Skua 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0); Caspian Tern 3 (1, 2, 1, 3, 8, 1); White-fronted Tern 5 (14, 9, 15, 24, 34, 20); Arctic Tern 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Sooty Tern 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Tern sp. 0 (0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0); NZ Pigeon 3 (3, 2, 3, 3, 2, 0); Domestic/Feral Pigeon 2 (1, 3, 5, 3, 5, 2); Spotted Dove 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Kaka 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Red-crowned Parakeet 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Shining Cuckoo 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Long-tailed Cuckoo 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0); Sacred Kingfisher 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0); Blackbird 3 (0, 4, 0, 0, 4, 1); Song Thrush 0 (0, 0, 1, 4, 0, 4); Tui 1 (2, 1, 0, 3, 1, 1); Starling 1 (0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 1); Myna 0 (0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 0); Yellowhammer 2 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Goldfinch 0 (1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 2); House Sparrow 0 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); Silvereye 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1); NZ Fantail 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Magpie 8 (5, 5, 16, 14, 0, 9); NZ Pipit 0 (0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0); Stewart Island Kiwi 0 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Morepork 2 (1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0); Spine-tailed Swift 0 (1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0); Bird sp. 1 (0, 0, 3, 2, 3, 3).

The continued success of the Beach Patrol Scheme is due to the dedication of those hardy souls who brave all manner of weather conditions to trudge the weary miles in search of decaying corpses. Please note any banded birds on the forms or cards and please note any obvious cause of death. There is a large supply of blank cards for those who prefer to use cards rather than the online form.

Only two banded birds were noted on cards in 2015. Two Hutton's Shearwaters both banded on 19th March 2015 as chicks were recovered by Bev Elliot at South Bay, Kaikoura, on 1st April 2015.

LLOYD ESLER

| Section of Coast | No. of Cards | No. of Birds | km covered |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Auckland East (AE) | 20 | 20 | 38 |
| Auckland West (AW) | 57 | 262 | 337 |
| Bay of Plenty (BP) | 26 | 112 | 96 |
| Canterbury North (CN) | 13 | 121 | 104 |
| Canterbury South (CS) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| East Coast NI (EC) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fiordland (FD) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| North Coast SI (NC) | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| Northland East (NE) | 8 | 57 | 77 |
| Northland West (NW) | 3 | 30 | 125 |
| Outlying Islands (OI) (Chatham) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Otago (OT) | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Southland (SD) | 70 | 730 | 202 |
| Taranaki (TA) | 1 | 8 | 4 |
| Wairarapa (WA) | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Westland (WD) | 10 | 7 | 35 |
| Wellington South (WS) | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Wellington West (WW) | 17 | 23 | 37 |
| Totals | 231 | 1,377 | 1,065 |

FAR NORTH

The last three months have been busy with beach patrols and field trips. There were 64 Cattle Egrets at Hohoua, 5 Royal Spoonbills at Awanui, and we were surprised to find Bar-tailed Godwits on Ninety Mile Beach. We also collected specimens for plastics ingestion research while on beach patrol.

Pelagic trips from the Bay of Islands during the period turned up New Zealand Storm Petrel, Salvin's Albatross, Sooty Shearwater and large numbers of our other 'usual' seabird species, but the albatrosses were not as abundant as in previous years. Shorebird surveys included visits to Kowhai Beach by 4WD, Walker Island by boat, and Parengarenga by helicopter. We haven't tried drones yet, but they have been offered. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers are down this season, particularly at Parengarenga. Some of us also visited Miranda, Little Waihi and Maketu. I was interested in seeing what disturbed the birds and found that a leading candidate is Swamp Harrier.

CJ Ralph has been conducting 5MBC surveys and gull and gannet counts in the Bay of Islands since 2009. His home is on Moturua Island, where he has also been working to restore a variety of threatened species. CJ organised 5MBCs along 14 routes on 7 islands this summer, and there was a fair turnout of Birds New Zealand members and other volunteers. New and additional introductions to the islands include more North Island Saddlebacks, Whiteheads and North Island Robins. Extensive replanting of native trees on the Islands also continues.

Organisation for the 2017 Youth Camp at Orongo Bay in the Bay of Islands is proceeding apace. The camp is oversubscribed and now has a waiting list, and we have some top flight volunteers lined up. Planned field trips include Tawharanui and Waipu Estuary, Ninety Mile Beach to learn about Beach Wreck Patrols, Unahi to view the large Royal Spoonbill colony, Urupukapuka Island to learn about 5MBCs, a possible pelagic and a possible visit to Waitangi.

We have also had some interesting times at Warawara Forest. The previously reported Rifleman population there is now two populations, separated by some distance. Access is still difficult, sometimes treacherous. Other recent trips included visits to see the Red-footed Booby at Muriwai, New Zealand Shore Plover, and Little Spotted Kiwi. **LES FEASEY**

NORTHLAND

The shorebird count at Ngunguru Sandspit and lower estuary on 19/11 recorded 33 Variable Oystercatchers, 15 New Zealand Dotterels, 29 Red-billed Gulls, 2 Caspian Terns, 11 Welcome Swallows, and 1 New Zealand Pipit. The total number was slightly lower than previous counts carried out during the same time of year.

A large congregation of Pateke (Brown Teal) was seen at Ngunguru oxidation ponds, off Waiotoi Road, during late December and early January, with at least 80 birds present on 26/12 plus 5 Australasian Shovelers, 2 Grey Ducks, 106 Grey Duck/Mallard hybrids and 27 Paradise Shelducks.

A Whimbrel and 30 Bar-tailed Godwits were at Ngunguru Sandspit the same day.

Pat Miller racked up an impressive tally of 57 bird species over 24 hours (19/12 to 20/12) during his one-man 'Bird Race' in the coastal area between the Whangarei Heads and Waipu Estuary. **HILTON WARD**

AUCKLAND

This summer has been one of exceptional sightings. Two Spine-tailed Swifts were seen on Tiritiri Matangi Island by Ian Higgins and others on 17/11. A more significant sighting was the Red-footed Booby first seen by Blair Outhwaite at the Muriwai gannet colony on 18/1. This was the first record of this species on the New Zealand mainland and follows two records from the Kermadec Islands in 2016. The bird made the gannet colony its home for several weeks, drawing a constant stream of photographers to record its return to the colony each day. The bird is a white morph with black tail feathers, indicating that it may be the eastern Pacific subspecies, *websteri*. See cover photo.

Highlights from the 12/11 Kaipara Harbour census included 17 Pacific Golden Plovers, a Grey Plover, 2 Sanderlings, 9 Red-necked Stints, 3 Far Eastern Curlews, 8 New Zealand Fairy Terns and 8 Little Terns. Numbers of Little Terns built up over the summer with 46 recorded at Big Sand Island on 30/11 by Tony Harbraken, Gwenda Pulham and others. Six Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage were seen at Haranui by Denise Poyner and Judy Bendall.

Two large Caspian Tern colonies were present with 60 pairs at Mangawhai on 7/11 and at least 100 pairs at Tuhimata Island, Kaipara Harbour, on 11/12. A pair of Caspian Terns nested successfully near Traherne Island, Waitemata Harbour. Northern New Zealand Dotterels continue to expand into previously unused sites, with breeding pairs reported at Anawhata, Piha, Mataia and Red Beach.

Of the national total of 8 breeding pairs of New Zealand Fairy Tern, 7 pairs laid eggs in the Auckland region at Te Arai Stream mouth, Mangawhai and Papakanui Spit. Five chicks are known to have fledged from these 7 pairs, with large king tides causing some nest failures during November.

A good number of members took part in surveying for Black-billed Gulls, including finding a successful colony at Papakanui Spit in Kaipara Harbour in association with White-fronted Terns. Forty-three nests were counted on 17/12 and then 51 on 8/1 with chicks first sighted on 3/1. A smaller colony of circa 25 pairs was found on Te Atatu Peninsula by Jeremy Painting on 17/12. However, this colony was found to be abandoned by the first week in January. The reason for the abandonment is not clear, but may include predation by gulls, human disturbance, or egg collecting.

A total of 227 Red-billed Gulls was counted during the Mangawahi/Te Arai census on 19/11. Unfortunately they were seen predated Northern New Zealand Dotterel eggs at Te Arai and Caspian Tern chicks at Mangawhai. At Straka's Refuge near Waiwera, 3 pairs of New Zealand Scaup with 11 ducklings were recorded on 26/12 and 3 pairs of New Zealand Dabchick had an assortment of juveniles and young chicks. Also present was a Brown Teal. Very unusually, 5 White Herons were seen together at Taporapora, 25/1-27/1.

The Muriwai beach patrol turned up a Southern Giant Petrel and a White-faced Storm Petrel in November, and a Mottled Petrel in December. A beach wrecked Mottled Petrel was also found on Karekare Beach by Dion Pou in November. The annual December survey of Motu Kaikoura near Great Barrier Island by members and Unitec students led by Mel Galbraith included

new discoveries. Long-tailed Cuckoos were recorded there for the first time and the first breeding record there of Brown Teal. An interesting observation was of Morepork (Ruru) nesting successfully on the ground, indicating a low number of rats on the island. Our annual picnic was held at Waterview Reserve in Te Atatu on 22/1 with numerous Fernbirds seen during our guided walk. **IAN MCLEAN**



▣ Leucistic or albo Variable Oystercatcher (right). Photo by Murry Cave.

GISBORNE/WAIROA

Having recently relocated to Gisborne, getting the local branch up and running again is going to take time, but I am planning to use a number of initiatives to raise interest and help build membership. I've written a feature article that will be published in the Gisborne newspaper shortly, which I hope will generate interest. Other initiatives include working with DOC and a community group to put predator control in place for a vulnerable population of Spotless Crane; gathering local interest in the Tolaga Bay area for monitoring and building information on a leucistic/fully albo Variable Oystercatcher population; working with DOC and the Te Wherowhero Trust to carry out bird population assessments for the Te Wherowhero lagoon to put in place protections for the main bird breeding area; advising Gisborne District Council on an avifaunal assessment of an area on the outskirts of Gisborne where a wetland will be developed; and giving a series of talks on birds to local community groups. **MURRY CAVE**

HAWKE'S BAY

The summer wader census on 26/11 and 27/11 recorded some interesting species, including Australasian Bittern, Pied Shag, a growing number of New Zealand Dotterels, and a recovery in White-fronted Tern numbers, plus there were a few uncommon migrant waders. Royal Spoonbill counts were down, although birds could have been sheltering from high winds at Porangahau.

Various unusual birds observed at wetland areas around Ahuriri Estuary in Napier included a Marsh Sandpiper in late October, a Wilson's Phalarope found in November that stayed into January, as well as Sharp-tailed, Pectoral and Curlew sandpipers. Perhaps the most surprising sightings were of Spotless Crakes and Marsh Crakes seen repeatedly venturing from cover in an area of sedge tufts and open water/mud at the Southern Marsh adjacent to Ahuriri Estuary. Marsh Crakes were still being seen there into early January.

Eleven members visited Boundary Stream in late January where New Zealand Falcon, North Island Robin and Whitehead were among the species seen. North Island Kokako and other reintroduced native species were more elusive. The visit was followed by a branch meeting at the nearby Lake Opouahi kiwi crèche. **IAN SMITH**

TARANAKI

October's field trip to Barrett's Lagoon recorded 32 species, as per usual for this often visited locality. Tui were numerous and vocal, one making calls like a coot. A pair of Rainbow Lorikeets was seen at Inglewood, the first report of this species close to New Plymouth: some years prior to this Barry Hartley and I investigated sightings in the south-east hill country in Taranaki. I managed a brief sighting of two juveniles but no adults were seen.

There were 4 Royal Spoonbills at Urenui River mouth and 10 at Mokau. At Waiongana, 4 Cattle Egrets were in the paddocks. There was also a New Zealand Dotterel on the beach in the company of a Banded Dotterel, both in breeding plumage, and 3 New Zealand Dotterels at Sandy Bay.

The Cockerams had been to Australia where they saw over 100 bird species around Melbourne, Adelaide and Newcastle. The Messengers stayed home and on 17/10 heard the first Shining Cuckoo. Some of us did not hear any all season.

In November the Rapanui Grey-faced Petrel Trust that 4 local Birds New Zealand members are involved with received an "Environmental Action in the Community" Award at the annual Taranaki Regional Council awards dinner. It was a rather humbling occasion, but just rewards and recognition for all those volunteers who give freely of their time and energy to ensure the survival of these birds.

Once again sightings of migratory shorebirds have been few, but Barry had distant views of a Whimbrel at Mokau. Elsewhere, Ruddy Turnstones and the occasional Bar-tailed Godwit were seen at Waiongana, which is well down on what we used to see. Twelve Royal Spoonbills were seen at Barrett lagoon, too late for our visit.

Emily Roberts, birding her way up and down the coast, saw a pair of New Zealand Dotterels at the Stoney River mouth and Komene Road, also a record 12 at Kahui road on the South Taranaki coast. There are ongoing problems with dogs and vehicles on some of these beaches and measures are being taken to help alleviate the problem, including engaging with local schools to educate children—and hopefully adults—about the problems that our shorebirds face. A "Dotterel Defenders" committee has been formed and any actions they take will also be of benefit to other shorebirds.

PETER FYER

WHANGANUI

A late January field trip to Manawātū Estuary recorded 1 Little Tern, 38 South Island Pied Oystercatchers, 2 Pacific Golden Plovers, 37 Wrybill, 1 Ruddy Turnstone, 66 Bar-tailed Godwits and 7 Red Knot. The last species are well down on their numbers recorded in previous years at this estuary. Numbers of other species were also recorded, the most interesting of which were 14 Pied Shag, a species that seems to be spreading gradually northwards along this coast (even having been seen a few times late last year on the Whanganui River estuary, where it has long been considered a vagrant).

In mid-January, Paul Gibson, Tim Rumble and Adam Clarke found a single Nankeen Night Heron near the well-known Kemp's Pole roost, at the junction of the Kauaparaoa Stream and the Whanganui River. In spring and summer, most night herons leave this roost to breed elsewhere, presumably at

sites along the main river or up its larger tributaries. In February, Clive Aim saw a juvenile on the Matatara Stream, a second-order tributary of the Whanganui River. We don't know if it came from a nest nearby or if it was dispersing from wherever it had fledged.

Other notable species seen and heard by Paul, Tim and Adam were North Island Robin, 8-10 Whiteheads, Tui, Bellbird and New Zealand Fantail. Later in January, Paul Gibson recorded 4 Long-tailed Cuckoos along with New Zealand Tomtit, North Island Robins and Whiteheads in the Waitahinga Forest, inland from Bushy Park on Rangitatau East Road.

For the past 16 years, Colin Ogle has kept a monthly list of the species seen on his section. Although still in the process of analysing these data, he notes that some trends are already apparent, with certain species now being seen more frequently, if still somewhat irregularly, than in the past (e.g. Eastern Rosella, New Zealand Falcon), whereas others are now seldom seen (e.g. Yellowhammer).

Finally, in February, Lynne Douglas and Peter Frost reported Redpoll from different parts of Whanganui. Up to now, this has been an infrequent winter visitor from higher elevations inland. Is this another sign of change or simply a marker of an unusual summer? PETER FROST

WAIRARAPA

Wairarapa branch members have continued their work with 3 projects in this area: the New Zealand Dotterels at Riversdale Beach, the Caspian Tern colony at Onoke Spit and the Black-billed Gull colony which returned to its favoured nesting site on the Ruamahanga River this breeding season.

The New Zealand Dotterels had a dismal season with no chicks being produced, despite repeated nesting attempts made by both pairs. Storm surges accounted for most losses followed by Southern Black-backed Gull predation and egg-predation by Australian Magpies. The Banded Dotterels fared better this year with a small number of chicks fledged.

Despite a big effort from volunteers and DOC staff to control predators and manage human disturbance of nesting areas on Onoke Spit, the Caspian Tern colony again failed to breed. Camera footage indicates repeated disturbance and possible predation by cats, hedgehogs and Southern Black-backed Gulls being the suspected causes. A meeting to plan a fresh strategy for next season will be held soon. The Black-billed Gulls had a better time, as the nesting site they chose on the upper Ruamahanga River produced over 40 chicks. One pair of unfledged chicks was found swept 5-km downstream – they survived and are now with the others at Henley Lake.

A comprehensive survey of birds living on the Wairarapa rivers has just been completed by Wildlife Management International staff which involved over 150-km of riverbed walking with a spot of kayaking thrown in. This is a repeat of the same ground surveyed 10 years ago by Birds New Zealand members, so it will be interesting to see the final data. It seems there is a significant increase in the overall number of Black-fronted Dotterels.

The White Heron regularly at the Barrage Gates on the Ruamahunga was seen often during December/January. Members

monitoring the birds on Onoke Spit strongly believe a small number of Royal Spoonbills nested in low vegetation on the spit, west of the Southern Black-backed Gull colony and more of the same species nested for the second year in Boggy Pond. This second group keeps its nests well hidden. Last season they produced six fledglings from a flock of 112, mostly young adults. This year the adult numbers were down around 30 on Boggy Pond but the others are in evidence in related wetlands. Heavy raupo and a well-chosen nesting site makes the numbers game a little tricky. None has hatched yet and the best estimate is four nests.

For years a small remnant group of a once larger, wider population of Common Mynahs has hung out at the Masterton rubbish dump, sometimes drifting to the sewage ponds. Recently on two occasions reliable observers have spotted a small group just south of Martinborough. The Wairarapa Times Age is good about getting bird stories out to the public and its latest told of the Eastern Rockhopper Penguin which has come to moult on our shore. Good story, nice photo, but not a clue as to where you might find it. Well done DOC and the Times Age. JOANNA MCVEAGH AND ROBIN LIST

WELLINGTON

A camp was held on Kapiti Island from 14/11 to 16/11 that was attended by 6 Birds New Zealand (OSNZ) teenagers and 5 teenagers and young adults from Kapiti Island iwi. The camp was organised by Birds New Zealand Councillor Sharon Alderson and Lynn Adams in conjunction with Genevieve Spargo, Kapiti Island DOC ranger. The weekend was hosted by Gen and Nick Fisentzidis (DOC) with a supporting cast of Denise Fastier, Liz Gibson, Dallas Bishop and Geoff de Lisle. A structured programme was organised with flexibility to cope with the less than perfect weather.

A varied range of activities included, a night patrol looking for Little Spotted Kiwi, a beach patrol, an investigation of rock pools, an introduction to biosecurity on Kapiti Island, identification of birds and their calls, 5 minute bird counts, and an overview of the Hibi management programme, including their supplementary feeding and banding. While participants made a contribution for food, other expenses were met by DOC and Wellington Birds New Zealand (OSNZ).

There was plenty of positive feedback from the participants, including:

"Being in an environment that not many get to visit, being amongst very knowledgeable people who are willing to answer or source answers to your questions promptly, learning so much about conservation, biosecurity threats, ways we prevent threats, ways to get more knowledge. Absolutely loved everything about the trip." "Being surrounded by so many knowledgeable people that were willing to answer questions and provide advice. Amazing wildlife." "Awesome (food). Sara Lee rocks. As does the shopper."

Special thanks to Gen and Nick from DOC Kapiti Island for being wonderful hosts and inspiring a new generation in the wonders of New Zealand nature and its environment. Sharon Alderson and Lynn Adams are to be congratulated for organising the camp, including coming up with a most acceptable menu and purchasing all the food.

GEOFF DE LISLE

MARLBOROUGH

There are some new islands along the Marlborough coast thanks to the November earthquakes. By December a colony of Red-billed Gulls had started nesting on one of them. Beach patrols at Grassmere found several Little Penguins and a Hutton's Shearwater. In early January our younger members spent a week on Maud Island learning the practicalities of maintaining the island's habitats and watching the local bird life.

Picton members have been busy with community projects, trapping introduced predators and engaging people in bird surveys, increasing knowledge and enthusing others to actively enjoy birds. Our Regional Representative, Kristin, is at the Chatham Islands with the Bells, feeding newly transferred Chatham Albatross chicks.

We are up to 5,509 banded Black-billed Gull sightings and hope to reach 6,000 this summer, so please send any new sightings in. Claudia Mischler and Mike Bell completed a national survey of Black-billed Gull nesting sites, flying and photographing the colonies on the braided rivers of the South Island and East Coast of the North Island. Some of the colonies were found on settling ponds and in paddocks under irrigators. A special "thank you" goes to the enthusiastic and skilled pilots who generously gave their time and provided their planes. Without their assistance getting such a detailed survey done wouldn't have happened.

HEATHER DAVIES

NELSON

On Christmas Day, while most were at their mid-day table, several birders were sneaking along Motueka Sandspit to view an Asiatic Dowitcher among the roosting Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Knots, Ruddy Turnstones and Whimbrel. Other rare birds reported during the holiday break included Gull-billed Tern, also on Motueka Sandspit, and a glimpse of the 'grey ghost' - a South Island Kokako - on Heaphy Track.

The summer months were not that kind to coastal and river breeding birds. The Caspian Terns on Bells Island produced few chicks compared to the 70 chicks banded last year. Variable Oystercatchers also produced very few around Waimea Estuary. Nesting Black-fronted Terns on the Waimea River were washed out. White-fronted Terns nesting on Motueka Sandspit were successful until a storm went through and 20 or so chicks succumbed, probably suffocated with the flying sand.

The Rock Wren population in Karurangi National Park is reported to be double the number of the previous year and 10 birds were recently banded. Pest control in the area seems to be working, but young Blue Ducks still took a hammering from a cat.

On 7/2, more than 20 members attended our first indoor gathering since the festive season to talk about birding news and listen to several short presentations from local members. David Melville spoke about the latest research on Pectoral Sandpiper and two junior members, Amber Calman and Sophie Meffan, spoke about their recent birding exploits. Amber showed us photos of Australian birds taken on her visit there last year and Sophie reported on the 2016 Youth Camp at Miranda that she attended.

The summer wader census was conducted in February. Shortly afterwards, big flocks of waders were reported in areas not usually frequented. One comment suggested the reason being the recent mass stranding of pilot whales on the beach. Had the stranded pilot whales encroached on roosting sites or was it the stench?

The boardwalk approach to Abel Tasman National Park at Marahau has proved again to be a great spot to guarantee clear views of Banded Rail, and Marsh Crake have been reported there too. GAIL D QUAYLE

CANTERBURY

November was a busy month with two field trips, two meetings and a mid-week ramble. Mailee Stanbury gave the first evening talk, an account of work she did for DOC in 2015, monitoring New Zealand Fairy Tern nests at Mangawhai in Northland. Since the New Zealand Fairy Tern population comprises just 43 birds, the success of each breeding season is crucial to its survival, and it was fascinating to learn more about the monitoring work. In the second talk Yvonne Curtis spoke about a trip she and others took through Zimbabwe and Botswana. Definitely not for the faint hearted, but it did yield some stunning looking birds and other wildlife! November's ramble was to Pegasus Wetlands in North Canterbury. Of note were the relatively small number of Australasian Shovelers compared to normal, plus the increasing population of Mute Swans (9).

After a two week delay due to the high water level, the Ashley/Rakahuri River bird survey was finally undertaken. Disappointingly, nearly all species were down on their long term averages. The high water levels plus the increase in weed cover are considered to be likely reasons.

Our summer wader count at Lake Ellesmere was also held in November. The count total was down from just over seven thousand waders the year before to just over five thousand. The area between Jarvis and Embankment Roads held the majority of the less common migrant waders, including Curlew Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints and Pacific Golden Plovers. Other sightings of interest included a Gull-billed Tern and 2 Cape Barren Geese.

Quite a few rarities have turned up in Lake Ellesmere since the wader count. In late November, a Hudsonian Godwit was seen, and just a few days later, a Cox's Sandpiper, a hybrid between a Curlew Sandpiper and a Pectoral Sandpiper, was photographed there. If accepted, this will be the first record of a Cox's Sandpiper in New Zealand. That same month, a possible American Golden Plover was found, although no consensus was ever reached confirming the identity, despite much debate. A Sanderling was spotted in early December, while in late January a juvenile Wandering Albatross was photographed out on the water of the lake.

Unusual sightings elsewhere in Canterbury included a Little Penguin found swimming up the Avon-Heathcote River, right in the middle of the city, in January. It was captured by DOC amid concerns for its safety in such a busy area. In Kaikoura, an Erect Crested Penguin has come ashore to moult, and hopefully it will not be disturbed by the public. The Black Stilt is back at the Ashley Estuary, where it has been coming for the past few years after breeding.

Finally, an Australian Tree Martin has been reported in among the Welcome Swallows at the Bromley Oxidation Ponds. Despite the efforts of many birders, there has only been one re-sighting. Hopefully it will stick around for a while.

OTAGO

Members have been out and about during late spring and summer; eBird is one way of discovering where folk are: India, Malaysia, Katiki Point, Routeburn track. Our regular events have been well-supported. Our seasonal count of birds at Sinclair Wetlands 50-km south of Dunedin is proving to be a popular field trip, with new participants joining the regular survey teams. The highlights of the day were getting up close to Fernbirds (14 in 1-km), the variety of waterfowl, as well as bush birds in the restoration plantings on the islands. Acoustic recorders have been put out in the wetlands now for 6 seasons to monitor for bitterns and have each year picked up bittern booms, and this year there were 2 sightings. It is not known whether successful breeding is occurring. The summer wader count was conducted in very windy conditions, which may have affected the slightly lower tally.

The second oldest documented Royal Spoonbill was seen and photographed at Hooper's Inlet in November. The band's colours had faded somewhat, but Lei Zhu and Yue Cui's image was so clear that the numbers could be read on the metal band. The bird was banded as a chick on Green Island by Peter Schweigman in December 1999, so was 17 years and 10 months when seen. Bill Cash's recent observation at Wairau Estuary in Blenheim of one of his banded birds from over 20 years ago wins the longevity record.

A Black-billed Gull colony established on an island in the Clutha River just down from Balclutha in September 2016, with about 500 chicks fledged. This is an excellent record due to careful observations by Richard Schofield, plus his advocacy with the Regional Council to postpone weed spraying on the island until breeding finished.

An energetic team of surveyors hunted for South Island Robins in a 5-hectare patch of native regenerating forest on Mopanui, an area just over the fence from the Orokou Ecosanctuary. Four male South Island Robins were encountered in response to song playback. It is hoped that these robins can breed successfully outside the fence, but repeat trips found no sign of breeding this season. Juvenile Rifleman, Brown Creeper, Bellbird and New Zealand Tomtit were commonly seen. On one of these trips 4 Shining Cuckoos flew in, seemingly in response to robin recordings, calling and flitting from perch to perch for several minutes; communal displays like this have been occasionally reported by others (Brian Gill in the 1980s) although the reason for them is uncertain.

Also intrepid are the folk who go out on small boats to the edge of the deep-water canyons off the Otago coast in search of seabirds. In November they were rewarded with sightings of 5 species of albatross and 5 species of petrel, shearwater and prion.

A full programme of talks and field trips is planned for the Otago Branch as well as participation in the Wild Dunedin festival in April. MARY THOMPSON

Bird News

This feature contains news of sightings that have not received official acceptance by the Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee (1st September 2016 to 1st March 2017).

A **Chatham Albatross** with leg band E17 photographed at sea off Valparaiso, Chile, on 11/12 was one of the chicks transferred from The Pyramid to Point Gap on main Chatham Island in February 2016 as part of the Chatham Island Taiko Trust project to establish a second Chatham Albatross colony.

Twenty **Subantarctic Snipe** from Snares Island were released on Whenua Hou/Codfish Island off Rakiura/Stewart Island on 7/12. This followed an earlier transfer of 30 snipe from the Snares in December 2012 on Whenua Hou, where they are now breeding.

Five captive-bred **Hawaiian Crows** (Alalā) were released into the wild at the Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve on Hawai'i Island on 14/12. The species has been extinct in the wild since 2002. The plan is to continue releasing captive-bred birds there for the next 5 years.

SHORT ITEMS (photos on page 2)

Five **Australian Wood Ducks** were seen at Playhouse Café ponds near Mapua (Nelson) on 20/10, followed by 4 on 29/11 and 6/12. Then 11 ducklings were reported on 1/11. The 2 resident **Plumed Whistling Ducks** were seen repeatedly at Anderson Park in Taradale (Hawke's Bay) between 10/9 and 1/2, but there was no sign of them breeding. A **Chestnut-breasted Shelduck** was at Island Road, Mangere, on 24/11 and Mark Ford Drive on 30/11. A **Cape Barren Goose** was reported at Waimauku (Auckland) on 28/1 and a pair of **New Zealand Dabchicks** bred for a second year at Taylor Dam (Marlborough) in January.

An **Erect Crested Penguin** was at Kaikoura between 29/1 and 18/2. Another was at Waitangi Bay (Chatham Island) on 25/1 and one at Waikuku Beach (Canterbury) on 14/2 was taken into care. An **Eastern Rockhopper Penguin** was at Cape Palliser (Wairarapa) between 27/1 and 12/2 and a **Fiordland Crested Penguin** was at Castlepoint (Wairarapa) on 14/2.

In southern waters, a **Chatham Albatross** was seen at sea off Stewart Island on 14/11 and off Cape Saunders (Otago) on 16/11. Then an **Antarctic Prion**, 3 **Broad-billed Prions** and 3 **Campbell Albatrosses** were seen off Cape Saunders on 17/11. An **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** and an **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** were reported on the Fourty Fours (Chatham Islands) in the second week of December, and 3 pairs of Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross were reported breeding on The Pyramid (Chatham Islands) this past breeding season. A **Light-mantled Sooty Albatross** was off Taiaroa Head (Otago) on 12/12 and an **Antipodean Albatross** on Lake Ellesmere on 30/1.

Antarctic Fulmars were seen off Kaikoura Peninsula on 16/10, 23/10, 25/10 and 11/12, and a **Southern Giant Petrel** white morph was seen at Nicholson Trench in Cook Strait on 29/11, almost a year after one was seen in the same area. Nineteen **Kerguelen Petrels** were seen from the Open Bay Islands off the Haast coast (Westland) on 1/9 (4 birds) and 4/9 (15 birds). Further north, a **New Zealand Storm Petrel** and 2 **Pycroft's Petrels** were seen off the Bay of Islands on 14/11. Further east, a **Chatham Island Taiko** was seen at sea 64 kilometres south of the Chatham Islands on 29/11.

A **Brown Booby** was at the Muriwai gannet colony on 9/10 and a **Red-footed Booby** was there from 18/1 to 22/2. Two **Lesser Frigatebirds** were reported near Motutapu Island (Auckland) on 29/1.

There were sightings of 6 **Glossy Ibis** at Wairau Lagoon (Blenheim) on 8/10 and 7 on 9/12. This was followed by a nearby sighting of 2 breeding birds on 22/12. Single birds were also reported at Loburn (Canterbury) on 24/11 and Cape Farewell on 16/1.

The resident Renwick **Black Kite** was seen again on 11/11. Another was seen repeatedly near Meremere (Waikato) between 10/11 and 16/12. Two possible Black Kite sightings were reported in Alicetown (Lower Hutt) on 15/12 and near Hanmer Springs on 12/1. A **Large Sand Plover** was at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 17/9 and

11/12. Single birds were also seen at Waipu Estuary (Northland) on 6/11 and at Miranda on 22/11. **Grey Plover** was seen at Porangahau estuary (Hawke's Bay) on 1/10 and Kaipara Harbour on 12/11 and a pale grey **Golden Plover sp** was seen at Lake Ellesmere from 26/11 to 29/11 prompting debate on whether it was American or Pacific.

A newsworthy record was the **Cox's Sandpiper** (a hybrid of Curlew Sandpiper and Pectoral Sandpiper) seen at Lake Ellesmere from 25/11 to 11/2. If accepted, this will be a first record for New Zealand. Also at Lake Ellesmere was a **Little Stint** on 16/10, a **Red-necked Stint** on 24/10, and a **Sanderling** on 17/12. Further north, a Sanderling duo was at Kaipara Harbour on 11/12.

Black-tailed Godwits were seen at Miranda on 4/10, at Kidd's Shellbank (South Auckland) from 3/10 to 4/11, and at Oyster Point (Kaipara Harbour) on 25/1, and **Hudsonian Godwits** were seen at Little Waihi (BOP) on 16/10 and 4/12, Maketu Spit (BOP) on 22/10, Kidd's Shellbank (South Auckland) on 4/11, and Matahui Point (BOP) on 26/12.

A **Wandering Tattler** was regular at Kidd's Shellbank (South Auckland) from 3/10 to 13/11, and another was at Lake Ellesmere on 21/11, 25/11 and 4/12. **Grey-tailed Tattlers** were seen at Maketu Spit on 22/10 and Little Waihi on 23/10, Little Waihi (BOP) on 20/11, and Waitangi West (Chatham Island) on 18/2.

Two **Far Eastern Curlews** were regular at Kidd's Shellbank from 3/10 to 15/10 and there were 2 at Lake Ellesmere on 21/10 and 3 at Big Sand Island on 13/11. A very rare **Asiatic Dowitcher** was seen repeatedly at Tasman Bay (Nelson) from 25/12 to 22/2. A **Marsh Sandpiper** was at Miranda on 4/10 and 23/10. Another one found at Westshore Lagoon (Hawke's Bay) on 20/10 was present through November into December. This was followed by another sighting at Lake Ellesmere from 12/2 to 18/2.

Yet another rare record was a **Wilson's Phalarope** seen regularly at Westshore Lagoon, Ahuriri Estuary, and Southern Marsh (Napier) from 22/11 to 29/1, and there was a possible **Oriental Pratincole** near Mossburn (Southland) on 26/12.

Pomarine Skuas were seen off the Bay of Islands on 14/11, off Doubtful Sound (Fiordland) on 15/11, off Oamaru on 26/11, and at Ahuriri (Napier) on 21/1. Three were also seen at sea off Tiritiri Matangi Island on 9/11.

A report of a possible **Pacific Gull** at Karioitahi Beach (Waikato) on 11/10 was followed by the first New Zealand record of a **Laughing Gull**, which was seen regularly in the Opotiki area (Bay of Plenty) from 23/12 to 6/2.

A notable sighting was 46 **Little Terns** at Big Sand Island (Kaipara Harbour) on 30/1. A possible **Arctic Tern** was seen at Maketu (BOP) on 1/10. There were also records off Brighton (Otago) on 27/11 and in Horseshoe Bay (Stewart Island) on 20/11, and a tern seen at Foxton Beach on 10/10 may have been Common or Arctic. Further sightings there on 20/11 and 23/11 were identified as **Common Tern**, as was one at Miranda on 13/11. **Gull-billed Terns** were at Lake Ellesmere on 2/9 and 13/12, at Motueka Sandspit (Nelson) on 13/1, at Waikanae Estuary on 20/1, and at Foxton (Manawatu) on 28/1. A **White-winged Black Tern** duo was seen feeding along the Ashley River on 7/9 and 1 was seen there again on 19/9. Single birds were also seen at Otaki Sewage Ponds (Manawatu) on 17/11, Manawatu Estuary on 13/12, and Lake Onoke (Wairarapa) on 16/2.

Rainbow Lorikeets were reported in the wild at Mungavin Avenue (Porirua) on 13/10 and Whakamara Road (South Taranaki) on 17/10, a **Ring-necked Parakeet** was seen near Rotorua on 13/11, and a **Crimson Rosella** at White Pine Bush Road near Awakeri (East Cape) on 4/12.

Australian vagrants reported during this period included a possible **Grey Butcherbird** near Wellsford (Northland) on 1/9; a possible **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** on the Wainuiomata coast (Wellington) on 4/10; 2 **Spine-tailed Swifts** on Tiritiri Matangi Island on 17/11; a **Tree Martin** at Bromley Oxidation Ponds (Christchurch) on 5/2, 7/2, 15/2 and 16/2; and 2 possible **Masked Woodswallows** near Lake Pukaki on 4/12.

Finally, a record of a **South Island Kokako** from "North-west Nelson, Heaphy Track, between the Gunner River and Murray Stream between Lewis and Heaphy Huts" on 2/1 has been submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee.

Sources: *eBird New Zealand, Unusual Bird Report Database, New Zealand Birds Online, NZ Birding Forum, Regional Roundup, New Zealand Birders Facebook group.*

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