

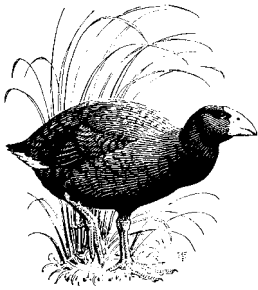


No. 4 December 2014

Birds New Zealand



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



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NO. 4 DECEMBER 2014

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QUOTE

Un oiseau siffle dans les branches
Et sautille gai, plein d'espoir,
Sur les herbes, de givre blanches,
En bottes jaunes, en frac noir.

C'est un merle, chanteur crédule,
Ignorant du calendrier,
Qui rêve soleil, et module
L'hymne d'avril en février.

Le Merle by Théophile Gautier (1811-1872)

COVER PHOTOS

Front cover: Glossy Ibis
Back cover: Pukeko and chick.
Both photos by Grahame Bell.

PUBLISHERS

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

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

David Medway Memorial Scholarship

This new scholarship is sponsored by the George Mason Charitable Trust and named in commemoration of David Medway. It is intended to provide financial support to a student studying full-time at post-graduate level on a topic relating to ornithology.

One scholarship may be awarded biennially (every two years) with a maximum value of \$5,000. The criteria, conditions and an application form are available on our website: <http://osnz.org.nz/node/543>

Applications open on 1st December 2014 and close on 13th February 2015.

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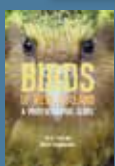
Two New Titles for 2014



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Native Birds of New Zealand
by David Hallett
RRP \$54.99 Hardback



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Birds New Zealand Sales Table

Items on sale from *Birds New Zealand* are a good way of keeping up with the society and identifying yourself as a *Birds New Zealand* member. Keep those lists ticking over with a Ticklist. Look up all those old *Notornis* articles with a fifty year index (1939-1989), and then check out the Chatham Islands and wander through the waders in the special editions of *Notornis*. Read up about our Society in *A Flying Start*, your essential introduction to the ins and outs of why we are here as birdwatchers!

Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ 1999-2004 – \$98 (within NZ only – overseas purchasers should enquire below for a quote)

Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ (1985) – \$14

Chatham Islands Ornithology – \$19

Fifty Years of Bird Study in New Zealand (Index to *Notornis* 1939-1989) – \$14

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Notornis – \$3

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Send orders to:
Paul Cuming, Birds New Zealand Sales, 2/7 Robins Road, Judea, Tauranga. Tel. (07) 571 5125, fax (07) 571 5126, email birdo@post.com

President's Report

Membership:

This year is a milestone for me as I joined the Society on 6th December 1964. That means that I have now been a member for 50 years; two thirds of the Society's existence.

As we build towards the Society's 75th Anniversary next year it would be interesting if people could delve through their records and advise how many can match my period of membership. There will clearly be a number of members but it would be good to compile a list of those who have had a long association with the Society. We can then acknowledge them at the annual meeting. Apart from Graham Turbott, how many foundation members are still remaining?

Council Meeting:

The Council is scheduled to meet in Wellington on 6th December and at the time of writing this report we are compiling the agenda. When this issue of *Birds New Zealand* is delivered it will be too late to raise issues you want discussed at that meeting, but for future reference the secretary can be advised at any time of matters of concern to you. Time can then be allocated at the next available meeting. Remember that Council members are meant to represent the wishes of the membership at large rather than impose their ideas on you, but can only react to matters that are brought to their attention, or are contained in the Society's strategic plan.

Strategic Plan:

Ian Armitage has undertaken a lot of work towards refining the strategic plan for the Society which was briefly discussed at the annual meeting in Palmerston North. Since the AGM the document was circulated to all of the regions for feedback and comment. I must say that the amount of feedback was disappointing but I do thank those regions who did respond bringing forward ideas that Ian will incorporate into the document.

Council will further consider the draft at the upcoming meeting and then circulate the revised document early next year for further consideration and hopefully adoption at the Annual General Meeting in Blenheim. This will give both the Council and regions guidance for future activities.

Field Camp for Teens:

In my last report I mentioned that Sharon Alderson and the projects and activities committee were planning a field camp for teens next year. Council will be receiving a report and a budget from Sharon at the upcoming meeting with a view to accepting the proposal and providing the support that the committee may require. The early consideration by Council was very favourable.

School Science Fair:

I also mentioned in my previous report the initiative that Les Feasey was undertaking in the Far North Region. A report of the outcome of his initiative is elsewhere in this magazine.

I know other regions in the past have undertaken a similar initiative but I am unaware of any still actively involved. However, if there are other regions still providing support to school science fairs please let me know as Council will consider support to these initiatives, as young students are the future of the organisation.

Bird Banding:

There are still ongoing issues with establishing the system of bird banding and permitting but David Melville, our banding liaison officer, is still actively pursuing a sensible and workable system with DOC. If any members are struggling with the new system



■ In mid-November I was present on a search for breeding Spotted Shags on the west coast south of Port Waikato. No Spotted were there; they seem to have completely gone from the west coast near Auckland now. Karen Opie and Tony Habraken are in the photo. Photo David Lawrie.

they should contact David and describe the issue so that he can raise it with the appropriate people. The Society considers that it is essential that banders have the appropriate training before they undertake the activity, but that the system must be as simple as possible. Our view is that permitting should also be kept as simple and flexible as possible, while still providing the essential data to DOC and other stakeholders. Banding birds needs to have a defined purpose and limits, but the system and paperwork needs to be minimised. The data gathered from Society banding activities provides DOC and other agencies with the information to enable informed management decisions to be made, and therefore should be considered as a beneficial activity, at minimal or zero cost.

Kay Haslett:

Kay was a member for many years and was involved in bird-related activities in the Auckland region until her recent passing. In her will she left the organisation a legacy in the form of a share of her residual estate, and for this we are grateful.

Kay was a little person with a big heart, and she enjoyed the comradeship of assisting with birding activities. She was also for several years the secretary of the Miranda Naturalists Trust.

Librarian:

After a long search I can confirm that I have appointed Heather Rogers as the librarian for the Society's book collection. This is run in conjunction with the library in the Auckland Museum.

This is a resource that is underutilised, but contains a number of interesting books and regular periodicals that can be borrowed by members.

This resource had been run by Kathy Barrow for many years, and she will assist Heather during the transition. More details about Heather's background is contained elsewhere in the magazine.

We welcome Heather to our team.

Ian Armitage:

Many congratulations to Ian (a *Birds New Zealand* Council member), who was named Wellingtonian of the Year (Environment Section) on 20th November. This is an honour that is thoroughly deserved for all his hard work over the years. The award citation read: Ian Armitage is a keen member of *Birds New Zealand*, involved at local and national levels to support the study and enjoyment of New Zealand's birds and was for the



■ Ian Armitage.

past six years the president of the volunteer Rimutaka Forest Park Trust, which recently celebrated 25 years of success. The Trust has developed into a substantial and experienced group of forest conservation volunteers. Its most well-known project involves returning North Island Brown Kiwi to the Forest Park.

Holiday greetings:

This will be my last contact before the holidays, so I take this opportunity to wish you a safe and relaxing time over the festive period.

If you are on holiday in a new area contact the Birds New Zealand regional representative in that region to find out the best birding locations or join activities and meet other members.

Above everything else make sure you enjoy your birds.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

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Are you still looking for that perfect Christmas gift?

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Call for Nominations for Council

The three year Council terms of David Lawrie (President), Bruce McKinlay (Vice President), Paul Garner-Richards (Treasurer) and Ian Armitage expire at the next AGM (2015). Nominations are called for these three positions. Note that the incumbents are eligible to stand again for these positions.

Nominations will close with the Secretary on 28th February 2015. Nominations papers must be signed by two financial member of the Society and be consented to in writing by the person nominated who must also be a financial member of the Society. Would nominators please include brief curriculum vitae of the nominated person if that person is not already a member of Council.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 2015 Annual General Meeting will be held at The Marlborough Convention Centre (42a Alfred Street, Blenheim) on Saturday 30th May 2015 from 4pm until 6pm.

Delia Small, Secretary, P.O. Box 834, Nelson

Calls for Notices of Motion

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 2015 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before 28th February 2015 and be in writing and signed by a mover and seconder who shall be financial members of the Society.

Delia Small, Secretary, P.O. Box 834, Nelson



AGM and Conference 2015

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

29th May (Friday):

4-6pm Registration (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

30th May (Saturday):

8-9am Registration (Marlborough Convention Centre)
9am-4pm Scientific Day: Day 1 (Marlborough Convention Centre)
4-6pm Birds NZ AGM (Marlborough Convention Centre)
6-7pm Happy Hour (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)
Followed by an Informal Dinner (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)

31st May (Sunday):

8-9am Registration (Marlborough Convention Centre)
9am-4pm Scientific Day: Day 2 (Marlborough Convention Centre)
4-6pm Open mike and Social (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)
6-7pm Happy Hour (Scenic Hotel Marlborough)
7pm onwards Conference Dinner (Marlborough Convention Centre)

1st June (Monday):

Field trips (departing from Marlborough Convention Centre)

Please refer to the online registration form on the Birds New Zealand website (www.osnz.org.nz).

Marked Increase in Records Sent to the OSNZ Moulting Recording Scheme over 2012-14

At the talk Monica Awasthy and I gave at the Tauranga OSNZ Conference in 2012, we appealed for submission of records from members who were routinely collecting moulting information as part of their studies and/or banding activity. Mike Bell responded to this very positively by offering to send in a spreadsheet of extensive records of primary moulting routinely collected by his banding group. This single contribution is the prime reason that records held by the OSNZ Moulting Recording Scheme have now increased by 81% to a total of 5,929. So many thanks to Mike Bell and to others in his team—Brian Bell, Chris Bell, Conori Bell, Dave Bell, Hinewai Bell, Padul Bell, Paul Bell, Rick Bell, Ian Carberry, Willie Cook, Andrew John, Dianne John, Sara Kross, Karen Lomax, David Melville, Julia Melville, Jim Murray, Oliva Norton, Mara Nydegger, Peter Reese, Paul Sagar, Heather Smithers, Jon Stewart, Jack Taylor, Kirsten Taylor, Tamati Taylor, Robin Toy, Sandy Toy, Mersadez Wilson, Ian Wilson, Sadez Wilson and Toni Wilson. Tony Beauchamp, Ben Bell, Brian Gill and Peter Rees submitted additional moulting records over 2012-14.

The OSNZ scheme has now accumulated moulting records for 131 species, 40% of them for birds in active moulting, the rest for non-moulting birds, while most (80%) are from live birds. Three new species added since 2012 are Mottled Petrel, Pitt Island Shag and Kakapo. The top ten species on the records list are Silvereye (1,111 records), then House Sparrow (686 records), followed further back by Goldfinch (455 records), Greenfinch (375 records), Redpoll (320 records), Yellowhammer (290 records), Chaffinch (199 records), Blackbird (142 records), Black-fronted Tern (137 records) and Dunnock (107 records). More details of the records received are shown in a table available online on the *Birds New Zealand* website <http://osnz.org.nz/moulting-recording-scheme>.

There are many opportunities for anyone handling birds to contribute to the Moulting Recording Scheme – e.g. banders, beach patrollers, or postgraduate researchers. Remember that you can record useful moulting information on birds at any time of year—and potentially from every bird you handle (live or dead). Records for non-moulting birds include both those in old plumage (worn and faded) and those in new plumage (fresh without wear) and the state of plumage ('old' or 'new') needs to be stated on the moulting card or record form. For many native species, especially endemics, we still have little systematic documentation of moulting patterns, so as much moulting information as possible is needed on them—complete the whole moulting card if you can.

If time does not allow, concentrate on wing and tail moulting scores, or just primary moulting. Primary moulting scores are important measures of the timing and progress of moulting. I encourage banders to record primary moulting scores routinely and to submit them annually on an Excel spreadsheet, as was done so usefully by Mike Bell and his team. If you run low on moulting card supplies, submitting photocopies of the cards and forms is fine. You can download PDF files of the moulting card, non-moulting form and some recent reports from the website (<http://osnz.org.nz/moulting-recording-scheme>). Alternatively, email me (ben.bell@vuw.ac.nz) or contact your Regional Representative. I look forward to receiving moulting records from you over the forthcoming year.

BEN BELL

Birds New Zealand Far North Science and Technology Award

Tim Baigent of Kaitaia College won the Birds New Zealand Science and Technology Award for the best study of birds in the Far North in 2014. He was presented with a pair of binoculars, donated by Hunting and Fishing (Far North), and a one year membership to Birds New Zealand at a ceremony at Kaitaia College on 31st October.

The topic of Tim's study was the ratio of male to female Kiwi on Little Barrier Island. Several obstacles had to be overcome: access to Little Barrier Island is restricted; the terrain is inhospitable; the study had to be conducted at night, because that is when Kiwi emerge to feed, and when they call; the female call is not as loud as the male call, so adjustments had to be made; weather and surf noise affect the range of the call; and only some of the listening posts were available during the period of the study. In spite of these obstacles, Tim was able to document his results with great precision. With this kind of stamina and tenacity, Tim will be right at home as a Birds New Zealand member.

Records Appraisal Committee Annual Report for 2013

Current membership is Colin Miskelly (Convener), Andrew Crossland, Paul Sagar, Ian Saville and Alan Tennyson. Elizabeth (Biz) Bell is the RAC Secretary, and continues to provide superb administrative support to the panel and submitters.

Brian Bell was co-opted to the panel to provide an additional independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. This occurred 13 times in 2013.

The online UBR reporting system on the OSNZ website is working well, and is the main source of UBRs received.

Receipt of UBRs is acknowledged promptly by the Secretary. Batches of UBRs are sent to the panel every two months, and they then have two months to provide comment. All panel members reliably kept within deadlines during 2013. There were some delays in providing responses within the agreed timeline during April-June, when the convener was over-committed during the final pre-launch stages of the *New Zealand Birds Online* website, but the resulting backlog was soon cleared. Apart from these three months, response letters were sent out three to five months after UBRs were received.

A total of 77 UBRs was received in 2013. Fifty-seven (74%) of these UBRs were accepted by the panel. No new species were added to the New Zealand list, but one of the eleven South Island Kokako UBRs submitted was accepted, making this the first accepted sighting of this 'extinct' species since 1967.

A paper reporting on 175 RAC decisions was published in the December 2013 issue of *Notornis*: Miskelly, C.M.; Crossland, A.C.; Sagar, P.M.; Saville, I.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Bell, E.A. 2013. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the OSNZ Records Appraisal Committee 2011-2012. *Notornis* 60: 296-306.

I thank Biz, Brian and my fellow panel members for their efficient support during 2013.

COLIN MISKELLY



Present at the Award from left were Allan and Lesley Baigent, Les Feasey (Birds New Zealand), Tim Baigent, William Tailby (Principal, Kaitaia College), Mike Bryan (Principal Science Teacher, Kaitaia College), Kevin Matthews (Birds New Zealand, Kaitaia)



Northland Phalacrocorax Survey

For some years now, the Northland branch has maintained a register of shag colonies in the north of New Zealand, including the Far North region (because there was no active branch there for a period). Janet Snell has recently revived the register that was maintained by the late Brian Simpkin and has taken this project 'under her wing'.

On 26th October 2013 Julie Hudson and I headed north to check on the current status of a Pied Shag colony which had not been visited for 34 years (so we were not sure that it remained where it had been earlier recorded) on the northern side of the Hokianga Harbour near the Tapuwa River. Passing through Dargaville on SH12, our first stop was at the Kai Iwi Lakes to check on a colony of Little Shags amongst the dead mangrove trees in a backwater near the main lakes. The number of both birds and nests, 37 adult and young birds plus 31 unoccupied nests, were much the same as they were when Claire Burt and I checked them in September 2010. After a picnic lunch we headed for Rawene where we would tent for the night. At the Rawene sewage ponds we counted 36 Pied Stilts, a Black Shag, eight Royal Spoonbills and numerous duck species. Later that evening we walked along the boardwalk in Rawene, but heard or saw no bird-life.

The next morning we filled the car with petrol before we were ferried across to Kohukohu where we put up the tent in the grounds of the Tree House Lodge. With our map and co-ordinates at the ready, we set off heading westward to locate the site and wait for the shags to appear. Nothing! So we waited some more, but no birds present. While eating our lunch on the side of the road, we were asked by two separate car loads of locals if everything was OK. Finally, we moved off back down the road where we spied a couple working in their woolshed. Aha, we thought, we'll go and talk to them!

They were locals and thought that they knew where the Pied Shag colony had moved to, so the guy hopped onto his quad bike and shot over to the back of the farm to check that the birds were still there while we talked animals and farming to his partner. He came back, rather perplexed, with the news that the shags had all gone. Thanking him profusely, we returned to our camp-site in Kohukohu where we chatted with the owners of the property. They suggested a phone call to a local identity who may know about them, but he could only tell us that his grandchildren had spoken of seeing a large shag colony while rowing up a side creek during the holidays. I asked him to phone me if he could get a more definite location for the colony, but have not as yet heard anything.

The next morning we packed up our gear and headed out to SH1 and turned south to Horeke on our way home in case the white White-faced Herons were still there, but no luck this time, although some locals at Rawene had said that they regularly saw two big white birds sitting on old piles by the wharf. At Horeke, one guy called them White Herons, while another person said they didn't seem big enough. Unfortunately, we did not see them, but counted around 100 Pied Stilts, 50+ White-faced Heron, three Pied Oystercatchers and two Brown Quails in a roadside paddock.

Any takers for another weekend excursion looking for shag species? It's quite a lot of fun, especially when the weather is fine.

JANET SNELL and JULIE HUDSON

Birding Places: Orongo

Don and Angela Armitage at Orongo Bay Holiday Park in Russell have a Birders Paradise disguised as a Holiday Park. They have wetlands, a parkland with totara, pohutukawa and kowhai, scrubland with manuka and kanuka, and some New Zealand bush along the coast road to Russell.



■ Brown Teal. Photo Les Feasey.

On my last visit Weka chicks were hiding in the eco-friendly gardens or simply feeding on the grounds being maintained by the staff (the Weka obviously thought that was for them).

Russell Thomas, a Kerikeri resident who is a 50-year member of OSNZ, was part of a group led by Russell Landcare Trust that managed the successful reintroduction of the endangered North Island Weka in 2002. Russell Landcare is reported to do annual Kiwi and Weka counts, and leads planting sessions around the peninsula. Don and Angela Armitage are doing the same thing on their land, planting natives like kauri, kowhai, totara and rimu, and encouraging the spread of manuka. Their next project, partially complete, is a birdwatching path that winds through the wetlands, manuka scrub and bush. Apart from the Weka, there are Kiwi, Morepork, Fernbird, Fantail, Brown Teal, Pukeko, Bittern, Kingfisher and many other species. In season, Shining Cuckoo and Long-tailed Cuckoo are heard and sometimes seen.

A pair of Brown Teal is nesting in the wetlands. Recent storms and the accompanying floods had probably destroyed their first nesting attempts, but they are apparently making another attempt. The drake was feeding this time, but both birds were sunning themselves last visit. They bred successfully last season, and at the appropriate time, the young left to find mates and new sites for nesting.

Eastern Rosellas abound. Don has counted as many as 27 feeding under the big totara trees when they are dropping their seeds; a favourite food of the species. The Tui dominate in numbers and behaviour, harassing the Eastern Rosellas when they feel a need. The Tui were feeding on flowering fruit trees, bottlebrush, flame trees and the usual nectar-producing shrubs, so it isn't competition for the food source.

There is an area of bracken that harbours Kiwi, and they are also found along the edges of the wetland. The Kiwi and Morepork can frequently be heard calling after dark, and can sometimes be seen with the aid of a red-screened torch.

The BBC currently has a camera crew on site doing a feature article on Weka. Several Weka chicks have been allowed to emerge from hiding and are being filmed. *The Northern Advocate*, our small Bay of Islands newspaper, interviewed the film crew for an article. If you are birding in the Far North, a stop for a chat to Don and Angela could be most productive.

LES FEASEY



■ Weka. Photo by Les Feasey.

Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Transfer of Chatham Island Albatross

The Chatham Islands Taiko Trust has undertaken a major conservation project to establish a second colony of Chatham Island Albatross on Main Chatham. This is a commitment to a five-year chick translocation project where, if successful, the returning chicks will come back to this new site to breed, and hence start a new population. With most of the world's 22 species of albatross threatened with extinction, it is vital to develop effective conservation measures to increase their chances of survival.

This project was assisted by a Birds New Zealand Research Fund grant. This funding was put towards the purchase of equipment for the chick translocations. With any project of this scale, it is important to have the right equipment. The Birds New Zealand funding was vital to help kick-start the project, and ensure that prior to the project starting we had all the correct gear to work with. In addition, this one year's funding will have lasting benefits for the entire length of the project, as all of the equipment purchased will be used for the duration of the project. This provides the Taiko Trust with the security of knowing we have the essential equipment for the entire project period.

All 50 chicks translocated fledged successfully, with the last chick leaving at the end of April. The 100% fledging success achieved is in part due to the Taiko Trust having the best equipment available. The Birds New Zealand Research Fund grant has meant that we had the right gear for the right job. This enabled chicks to be shifted safely, weighed and measured properly to follow development, and their food prepared, kept clean and hygienic, and fed to chicks in top condition. Basically, the best gear has ensured a safe and effective operation, which has meant the fledging of healthy chicks, which is our primary aim.

In addition, one of the objectives of the project is to refine transfer methodology for albatross species. This project aims to build on the successful Yamashina Institute of Ornithology Short-tailed Albatross translocation project, but has important differences designed to learn more about the methodology to move albatross chicks. The knowledge gained will assist future albatross translocations, and other threatened albatross species.

This project has generated widespread local and national interest. There have been over 400 visitors to the release site; not bad on an island with only 550 residents! Each and every visitor has been moved by their time at the colony with the birds, and we are seeing lasting impacts of this. The project is openly discussed, and many landowners have started talking to the Taiko Trust about how similar projects could be done on their land. Without a doubt this project is having the desired impacts we had hoped for. It is certainly increasing the profile of seabird conservation, and the plight of threatened seabirds. In terms of advocating for better protection of seabirds, this project is unrivalled.

To follow next year's translocation and other conservation efforts in the Chathams visit www.facebook.com/chathamtaikotrust

MIKE BELL, Chatham Islands Taiko Trust



Black-billed Gull Study



Left: Adult black-billed gull. Photo Dave Boyle.
Right: Banded black-billed gulls – sightings should include colour and number of the band. Photo Bill Cash.

The Black-billed Gull (*Larus bulleri*) is regarded as the world's most threatened gull species, and is endemic to New Zealand. It is listed as "Endangered" on the IUCN Red List and as "Threatened, Nationally Critical" by the New Zealand Threat Classification System. National population declines are estimated to be 78% over the past 30 years. However, very little is known about these gulls, thereby making conservation difficult.

This project will assess the breeding success, population dynamics, and movements of birds during the breeding and non-breeding season. It will focus on breeding colonies located in the Nelson and Marlborough regions, and will build on previous annual banding efforts completed in these regions since 2009. Helicopter surveys will be carried out for aerial population counts. Intensive searches for previously banded birds will be undertaken for understanding movements between rivers, population dynamics such as juvenile survival, as well as identifying key wintering areas. All information gathered is key for national conservation of this endangered species.

Everyone is encouraged to get involved as much as possible. Food and fuel vouchers are available to support those with an interest in searching for and re-sighting previously banded birds year-round anywhere in the country. Volunteers will be needed to assist with chick banding, allowing the opportunity to see and experience the birds in their natural habitat.

This project is in partnership with Save the Wairau River Inc., and funding has been generously provided by the Department of Conservation, Pub Charity, Lotteries Grant Board, and Wildlife Management International Ltd. With the additional support of the Birds NZ Research Fund, a full year of monitoring efforts during both the breeding and non-breeding season has been made possible.

For additional information, please contact Claudia Mischler: [claudia "at" wmil.co.nz](mailto:claudia@at.wmil.co.nz).

Donations

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

Keith Bell; Udo Benecke; William A. Cook; David and Ruth Crockett; Florence Gaud; Peter Howden; Ted Kirk; Mary McEwen; Sue McIntosh; Bruce McKinlay; Colin Miskelly; Gregory Moorcroft; Philip Munns; Gwyneth Norman; Vincent O'Donnell; Dan O'Halloran; Phillip Palmer; David Pye; DM Stracy; Michael Taylor; John Troost; Peter Turner; Duncan Watson; Ian Williams.

Chicks on artificial nests and dummy adults at the new colony at Point Gap.

Meet the New Birds New Zealand Librarian



Heather Rogers is a professional art and heritage conservator with a passion for the natural environment. After undertaking a degree in art history at Auckland University and internships in Auckland Museum and Auckland Art Gallery (1984) she was funded by the Department of Internal Affairs to attend three years of postgraduate study at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London (1989). She worked as a painting conservator until 2008 when she undertook further studies in chemistry and physics for an MA in preventive conservation. Her dissertation research undertaken at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa was on the light exposure management of light sensitive materials including feather cloaks.

An enthusiastic member of the Auckland University Field Club (1980-3) Heather has continued to engage in care for the natural environment throughout her life. She helped plant Tiritiri Island in the early 1990's and Motuihe Island in the early 2000's. She is a member of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand and a supporter of the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Joke and Koos Baars (Waikato); Matt Baber (Auckland); Tim Baigent (Student, School Science Award) (Far North); Joe Dillon (Waikato); Gemma Green (Taranaki); Ross Marriott (Hawkes Bay); Heather Raudon (Auckland); Amanda Riepma (Southland); Jason Wilder (Otago).

Waders at the Parengarenga Harbour roost.

Migration of Shorebirds under Threat

The President of Birds New Zealand, David Lawrie, recently attended the 9th conference of the Australasian Wader Study Group in Darwin. This was a meeting of researchers and interested people associated with shorebirds from Australia and New Zealand.

Our Disappearing Shorebirds

One of the world's great natural wonders is the migration of shorebirds between their breeding grounds in Alaska and Siberia and their non-breeding grounds in Australia and New Zealand using the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. This amazing phenomenon is in danger of imminent collapse because vital staging sites on the migration route are being lost. This was the conclusion reached at the 9th Australasian Shorebird Conference held in Darwin.

The Flyway's 23 countries include nearly half the world's human population and some of its fastest growing economies. The combination is applying extraordinary development pressure on tidal flats and wetlands where the birds find food to fuel their journeys.

Paper after paper described accelerating losses to aquaculture, agriculture and urban or industrial infrastructure, particularly in the Yellow Sea. Hunting, pollution and disturbance through recreational pursuits are also significant issues along the length of the Flyway.

Projects aiming to protect shorebird habitat and reduce its loss through remediation and/or restoration were highlighted, but the sheer scale and rate of change is overwhelming these efforts.

Traditional livelihoods of the many people in the Flyway who depend on coastal wetlands and tidal flats are also disappearing.

In view of the dire situation facing shorebirds, delegates of the 9th Australasian Shorebird Conference:

- Express their deep concern about the alarming decline in shorebird numbers in the Flyway.
- Encourage national governments to work in the spirit of international agreements to protect wetlands and coastal habitat for future generations.
- Call on governments at all levels, the business sector and the community to work together to protect shorebirds and their habitat to prevent further losses.
- Recognise and acknowledge the important role of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership as a framework to collaborate in the protection of shorebirds and their habitats.

The findings to support the above conference resolution were only possible to be determined because of the long-term population counting of shorebirds that takes place in Australia and New Zealand on a biannual basis. This count data has been analysed by researchers at the University of Queensland and the results have shown that there has been a steady decline in populations of most of the migratory shorebirds.

The shorebird data is collected by amateur bird watchers on an organised basis in each of the countries and these counts have taken place since the 1970s. The important outcomes that have been reached show the value of long-term count data and the necessity to continue this into the future.

The detail surrounding shorebird migration is one of the natural wonders of the world and it is essential that governments throughout the flyway take appropriate action to ensure that this can continue into the future.

DAVID LAWRIE, M.N.Z.M., President



A Really Old Black-backed Gull

The Black-backed Gull is a familiar sight to all people living in the Sounds, with lots flying about the area, including over land and sea. The gulls forage at sea behind boats for any items of food, especially when mussels are being harvested, and at boil-ups when large predatory fish or dolphins force schools of small fish to the surface. Also they walk about at estuaries and beaches, and over paddocks looking for food, and occasionally a flock will gather on a paddock when there is rough weather at sea.

However, this article is about one special Black-backed Gull, S-53936! It had been noticed walking very slowly in a paddock at Elie Bay, Pelorus Sound, for a few days in July 2014. Subsequently it was found dead on a nearby beach. On close inspection, David Barr noticed that it was banded, and the degree of wear piqued his interest – some of the inscription on the band was difficult to read. It read “Send Dominion Museum, New Zealand, S-53936.” It is decades ago that the Dominion Museum was responsible for keeping the records of birds banded in New Zealand, and so this also suggested that the bird had been banded some time ago. Bird banding was subsequently administered by the Wildlife Service and now by the Department of Conservation (DOC). David did a Google search on Dominion Museum and found a site that related to bird banding (the DOC site if I ended up at the same site) and filled out an electronic form with the band details. The information that was provided by the Banding Office about the banding of the bird was interesting to say the least.

S-53936 was banded as a chick on Maud Island by Wildlife Service staff, probably by Brian Bell assisted by his children. Maud Island is about 14 km from Elie Bay in a direct line. The distance between where the gull was banded and where it died wasn't too surprising. Generally Black-backed Gull chicks once independent remain during their lives within 50 km of where they have been reared, although a few disperse hundreds of kilometres. However, the date it had been banded was, December 1982, making it about 31.5 years old when it died. The previous oldest banded Black-backed Gull known lived more than 28 years. Therefore S-53936 eclipses that record by a good margin. I took measurements of the gull's head-bill length and bill depth. By putting these measurements into a formula (Nugent, G. 1982. *Notornis* 29: 37-40) and determining the result, it suggested that the gull was a male.

Given the significance of this gull to science I understand that it has been decided to bury it near where it was found and to erect a plaque giving a few details, such as its lifespan.

RALPH POWLESLAND



Friends for Tea

I'm a Griffon Vulture with no feathers on my head.
I love my fellow creatures, long after they are dead.
I grope about inside them, amidst the guts and gore,
Ingesting putrefaction 'till I can't eat any more.
Then, when my meal is over and I'm feeling quite replete,
No matter how I flap my wings, I can't get off my feet.
I have to climb a handy tree, with clumsy jump and hop;
A difficult performance with a great distended crop.
Then, when that's all digested and once more there's
room inside,
I sometimes hear the sorry news: a friend or two has died,
And if then I'm invited out, I must decline – you see,
I have to say I'm pre-engaged; I'm having friends for tea.

JOHN SQUIRE

White Heron and Royal Spoonbills at Waiongana

On Sunday June 8th while on my regular walk around my home patch to the east of New Plymouth, Taranaki, I saw a large white bird at roost on the edge of the Waiongana Stream well above the usual roost. Fortunately the tide was out and the stream level low so I managed to get upstream for a closer look. It turned out to be a White Heron in the company of two Royal Spoonbills (more regular visitors here). I managed to get quite close and got a few photos. This was my third record of White heron here, but my first photos and the bird was quite confiding.



Left: White Heron hunting in paddock. Right: Royal Spoonbill and cow pats.
Photos Peter Fryer.

After that the heron was seen quite regularly in surrounding paddocks as it followed herds of cows being break-fed there. It preferred the longer grass as the cows moved through. On one occasion when it was very close to our house I saw it grab and swallow something quite large, but the item was gone before I could identify it. I threw over a dead mouse that was lying on our lawn and it walked over and quickly picked it up and swallowed it, but rejected the apple core I threw over.

At one period after heavy rain flooded the paddocks it was joined by two Royal Spoonbills which fed in their usual manner in a temporary pond. Later there was just one Spoonbill moving through the areas where the grass was chewed down and the ground was dotted with cow manure. It fed around the edges of these piles shovelling up and swallowing pieces of cow pat. It was quite active whereas the Heron was quite sedentary. The Heron has spent two months, at the time of writing in mid-August, following different herds of cows through the paddocks.

PETER FRYER

ID Spot: Red Knot

On the face of it, the Red Knot should not be a problematic bird to identify. It is the second-most numerous Arctic wader in New Zealand, and it generally occurs in large flocks. But therein lies the problem. Explain to a newcomer how to separate the species in a mixed flock of godwits and knots and the reasoning will be something like “The large ones with the long upcurved beak and long legs are the godwits; the smaller dumpy ones are the knots”. Take that smaller dumpy bird out of context and it may be a far more challenging proposition. Put it on an unconventional habitat such as a rocky shore on the Kermadec Islands and you could have any number of nondescript waders looking back at you. Given such a bird, how do we identify it correctly?

A Red Knot in fresh non-breeding plumage (Fig. 1) is light grey above with fairly uniform-toned feathers. They may have paler fringes to the larger

feathers of the back, shoulders and wings. The crown is grey with slightly darker streakings, and the supercilium is whitish, streaked with grey. The underparts are mainly white, with fine grey streaking on the breast and flanks. The blackish bill is very slightly down-curved and about the same length as the head, and the legs are dark, slightly greenish grey.

Two other species that occur regularly in New Zealand are similar in general terms to a non-breeding Red Knot. The Great Knot is (as the name suggests) a larger bird, partway in size between a Red Knot and a small male godwit. There are several differences between these species. Plumage-wise, the breast of the Great Knot may have larger dark spots, and clearer chevrons (‘vees’) along the flanks, though Red Knots can show similar markings in these places (Figs. 2 and 3). The supercilium is not as clean as

in Red Knot, being finely streaked with Great, and the crown is often slightly more streaked than in Red Knot. If you get a clear view of the bill, it may appear more prominently down-curved than a Red Knot’s, or it may be straightish but thicker at the base. Either way, it should be noticeably longer than the head.

There are two other plumage characters that may be seen. One is very obvious – in flight, the Great Knot shows a whitish rump, whereas the Red Knot’s is barred (Fig. 4). The other is more subtle – the centres of the mantle and scapular feathers tend to be darker on Great Knot, so their upperparts are less evenly-coloured than those of Red Knots. The other species of possible confusion is Curlew Sandpiper, which is a much leggier, leaner bird than Red Knot, with a longer very obviously down-curving bill. It also has clean white underparts without the streaking that



▲ Fig. 1. Non-breeding Red Knot, showing streaking down the breast and flanks, faintly downcurved bill about the same length as the head, and off-white supercilium. Photo P. Battley.



▲ Fig. 2. Non-breeding Red Knot with heavier markings on the breast and browner, more worn feathers on the upperparts. Note the trio of new white-fringed wing coverts below the scapulars. This is probably an immature bird that is replacing one generation of non-breeding feathers with another. Photo P. Battley.



▲ Fig. 3. Non-breeding Great Knots (Australia). Note chevrons along flank, breast streaking, diffuse supercilium and bill length and shape. Photo B. Russell.



▲ Fig. 4. Rumps of Great Knot (left, in breeding plumage) and Red Knot (right, in different stages of pre-breeding moult). Photos P. Battley.



▲ Fig. 5. Juvenile Red Knot showing yellowish legs, more brownish plumage with distinctive dark subterminal bands on the worn wing covers. Note the new non-breeding scapulars starting to appear. Photo P. Gibson.



▲ Fig. 6. First-year Great Knot. Photo Eco-Vista, Brent Stephenson.

Red Knots show. In flight it too has a white rump.

Things get a bit messier with juveniles and immatures. We don't see a lot of 'classic' Red Knot juveniles in New Zealand. They migrate through Australia on the way south and probably trickle into New Zealand through our summer, having moulted into their first non-breeding plumage on the way here. Some juveniles do make it here in juvenile plumage, however, and they can be quite striking. Their legs are a mustard-yellow colour, so suddenly you are looking at a yellow-legged wader not a grey-legged one (Fig. 5). They also have a distinctive pattern on the upperpart feathering, with a dark subterminal bar running around the edge of the feathers. These feathers start off with a white fringe, but this wears down so that by the time the birds reach New Zealand, the dark subterminal line may be at the edge of the feather. Juvenile waders

also have shorter scapulars than adults do, so less of the wing will be covered by those feathers, making the wing covers even more obvious. This dark subterminal pattern is also found in juvenile Curlew Sandpipers, but they will be dark-legged and have a white rump. Juvenile Great Knots are very distinctive in fresh plumage, with white-fringed blackish upperparts, but these feathers will largely be lost by the time any birds reach New Zealand, and birds will look superficially like a large Red Knot, but with the distinctive head features (Fig. 6).

In breeding plumage things get much easier. Red Knots turn red, and Great Knots get a blackish breast and black and red upperparts (See Fig. 4). There is considerable variation amongst the Red Knots in any flock, and we now know that some of the knots in New Zealand are the subspecies *piersmai*, which breeds on the New Siberian Islands, rather than *rogersi*, which breeds in Chukotka,

eastern Russia. *Piersmai* knots tend to be more extensively red, especially on the scapulars and hindneck, and often on the vent (Fig. 7). Their base colour is darker brick-red compared to the lighter colour of *rogersi*. *Rogersi* tends to have a whiter vent (though it's not always completely devoid of red) and the scapulars and wing covers are largely greyish around the fringes (Fig. 8).

So, what do you look for if you have a single wayward wader that might be a crippling rarity, or it might just be a Red Knot? Pay attention to the bill size and shape, the supercilium and crown, the details of the upperpart feathers, the leg colouration, and, if possible, the rump. You might not be able to use the old adage "If it's not anything else, it's a Knot", but hopefully you can make a positive identification rather than a reluctant guess.

PHIL BATTLETT



▲ Fig. 7. Red Knot of the subspecies *piersmai*, showing the largely black and red scapulars, red on vent, and red face and hindneck typically found in this subspecies. This individual has been independently identified as a *piersmai* when on migration through China. Photos P. Battley.



▲ Fig. 8. A classic, though slightly dishevelled, *rogersi* Red Knot showing much greyer upperparts and whiter vent than *piersmai*. Photo P. Battley.

Suburban Kotuku

This White Heron landed on my fence in Palmerston North very early in the morning on Saturday 16th August. It didn't move for about five minutes, so I crept inside and got my cell phone, not wanting to spend too much time looking for my camera only for the bird to fly off. So with my sturdy Galaxy S4 in hand I took the accompanying photo through the side dining room window in order to get close to the bird.

We have since found out that our white-feathered friend has been having a great time catching all the fish around the area from people's goldfish ponds, more noticeably down the road at the Olive Tree Retirement Village's big pond which used to have over 100 goldfish. Sadly they will have to replenish said pond again. Other neighbours have watched in awe at it pinching their goldfish (not sure if anyone had the time to grab photos). Our neighbours across the road had the bird land on their roof of their garage, it then decided to land in the back garden, the bird not realising they had two little shih tzu dogs that decided to become very brave and run out and bark at it. The bird promptly turned and hissed at them. The two dogs turned tail and ran back inside and watched from the safety of the bedroom through the sliding doors glass: not so brave after all. The White Heron stayed for a few days, moving on I suspect when all the goldfish were gone. I sincerely hope the bird is okay. The neighbourhood around Amberley Avenue certainly hasn't seen anything before like the White Heron. I believe Maori say you are honoured if the bird visits on your property, well we feel the feeling is mutual.

ANN COATHUP



Saving Pacific Birds – the Challenge in French Polynesia

Kiwi Steve Cranwell, Seabird Programme Manager for BirdLife International in the Pacific, likes challenges. That's great, because his test is to get a ship, 90 tons of rat bait, a helicopter, a New Zealand pilot, small boats and a team of local staff and volunteers, to a group of atolls 1,500 km to the east of Tahiti. The project is part of BirdLife and its French Polynesia Partner, Manu's plan to achieve 1,200ha of pest-free sanctuary and protect some of the Pacific's rarest birds.

French Polynesia has 125 islands and atolls spread over an area the size of Western Europe. These remote, scattered archipelagos have high levels of endemism with 27 species found nowhere else. Sadly three-quarters of them are globally-threatened. The main cause is a familiar one for islands, invasive alien species and particularly mammals such as rats and feral cats, are among others, pushing these unique birds toward extinction.

In the south-west of French Polynesia are two globally-important island groups – Acteon (in the Tuamotu Archipelago) and the Gambier archipelago. These island chains support many of French Polynesia's threatened birds including the Tuamotu Sandpiper (critically endangered), the Polynesian Ground-dove (endangered) and four endangered species of petrel and shearwater. The atolls are also over-wintering sites for migratory Bristle-thighed Curlew (vulnerable).

To safeguard these species, an operation is planned to eradicate rats, feral cats, goats and rabbits from six of these islands and atolls, which are top priorities for restoration as BirdLife Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). The remoteness of these islands makes conservation actions difficult and costly. However, by sharing transport, equipment and expertise across sites, the costs for each island are significantly reduced.

In sustaining the outcomes from these operations BirdLife is developing the skills and knowledge of its partners and local people to carry out the restoration work, including biosecurity in keeping the islands protected. The development of sustainable livelihoods such as nature tourism and high value coconut products will also be supported, complementing the islands long term protection. The skills and knowledge developed will also be used to restore other islands in French Polynesia and the wider Pacific.

Together, this project and the creation of over 1,200 ha of predator-free habitat safeguarding at least nine globally-threatened species, provide for unprecedented economies of scale and conservation impact.

To date, US\$ 600,000 has been secured of the total US\$ 800,000 needed for the

operation which is scheduled to take place in the first quarter of next year. BirdLife will be launching a further appeal for the project at the Australian Bird Fair in Sydney at the end of October.

If you would like to hear more about this project or get on the BirdLife Pacific eNews please contact BirdLife's Pacific Regional Development Manager (Mike.Britton@BirdLife.org) or you can make a contribution on www.birdlife.org/pacific.



▲ Steve Cranwell.



▲ Polynesian Ground Dove.

Birds of the Heaphy through the Ages

Part 1

By Chris Petyt

During research for a book about the Heaphy Track I was struck by the number of references to birds of this area. They came from a variety of sources: cave deposits, with some new ones added in this account; Maori middens; birds the early European explorers ate; and more recent sight records. Added together they provide us with a picture of the variety of birds which inhabited this area over thousands of years.

Cave deposits

Our information about the earliest birds of this area come from comes from studies of fossil deposits in caves. Trevor Worthy examined bones accumulated around the nest of a Laughing Owl in a cave on the Goulard Downs; a site at a relatively high altitude in a mixed habitat of open downs and forest. The bones probably accumulated over many years, and, as there are no bones of the Pacific Rat, the deposit was considered to be over 800 years old. With many forest species included it was not deposited during the glacial times so is younger than about 10,000 years.

Prey was mainly fairly small with no adult moa (just one chick) and the only kiwi was a Little Spotted; none of the Great Spotted found there now. A species of diving petrel was the only seabird, but specimens from other caves remind us that many seabirds nested inland in the main islands of New Zealand before mammals arrived. Waders were represented by New Zealand Dotterel and South Island Snipe. A Falcon was thought to be a recent deposit, and Weka, Morepork, Kaka and a species of parakeet are all found in the area today. Kakapo survived locally well into the 20th century, whilst the Owllet-Nightjar became extinct much earlier with bones rarely found in middens; as a small ground-nester and possibly flightless it would have been easy prey for rats.

Four members of the wren family were found: Stout-legged, Stephen's Island, Bush or Rock Wren and the Rifleman. New Zealand Pipit, Fernbird, Brown Creeper, Tomtit, Robin, Tui and Bellbird are all still present, and we can probably add Kokako to that list, but Yellowhead, Saddleback and South Island Piopio all disappeared early in the 20th century.

Worthy also made a preliminary on-the-spot investigation of fossils in Megamania Cave in the valley of the Gunner River. These were mainly a very different collection of species, a mixture of specimens from glacial, Holocene and recent periods. Many were from flightless birds which fell into the caves and were unable to escape. Others were from birds whose bones were washed down streams into the cave system. This is a site at a low altitude, only 50-150 m. 31 species were noted, though no doubt a more thorough search would increase the list.

Seven species of moa were noted. Little Bush Moa, Upland Moa, and Stout-legged Moa were common. Three species of Giant Moa were found in smaller numbers, and Crested Moa were rare. A large Kiwi, Weka, Takahe, Adzebill, and New Zealand Coot made up the rest of the flightless contingent (though the last species possibly could fly). Seabirds were represented by a diving petrel, probable Westland Petrel, Fluttering Shearwater and Black Shag. There were Brown Teal, Finsch's Duck and a species of snipe. Kakapo, Kea, a species of parakeet, Owllet-nightjar and Falcon were all recorded, as well as extant species like New Zealand Pigeon, Robin and Kokako. Birds recently lost here were a wren and Saddleback.

Honeycomb Hill Cave, though not strictly in the Heaphy area, lies only a few kilometres south in the Oparara Valley and has been more extensively studied. It lies at an altitude of 300-400m and during late glacial times would have been located in shrubland, resulting in a greater diversity of species. Species additional to the Megamania list include more seabirds:



▣ Scott's Beach at the southern end of the Heaphy Track.
Photo Nick Allen.

Black, Cook's and Mottled Petrels, and a prion. There are South Island Goose, Blue Duck, Laughing Owl, Eyles' Harrier and Haast's Eagle. Long-tailed Cuckoo, New Zealand Pigeon, and many other extant species are represented, even a Blackbird, as well as the recently lost Yellowhead and Piopio. Two rails (Hodgen's Waterhen and Banded Rail) were recorded with three wrens (Stout-legged, Stephen's Island and Long-billed Wrens). Two specimens of the Chatham Island Raven would now be classified as New Zealand Ravens.

Excavations of Maori Middens

The excavations of the Moa-hunter site at the mouth of the Heaphy River give us a better-dated but only fragmentary picture of the birds hunted by the Maori. The site was carbon-dated to 1518 (plus or minus about 70 years) and it is thought the site was probably permanently occupied for only about 30 or so years.

The commonest bird bones found by Ron Scarlett's excavations were from the Little Bush Moa. Though named 'Little' this species stood about 130 cm tall and weighed about 35 kg. Most bones were from adults and predominantly leg bones, so birds were obviously butchered where killed and only the most edible parts brought back to the site. Only one bone fragment came from a larger moa species; rather surprising considering the range of species represented in the caves up the valley.

Of seabirds the Fiordland Crested Penguin was plentiful, whilst the Little Penguin was not common. As the Fiordland Crested Penguin is nowadays not found until 375 km further south, whilst the Little Penguin still nests locally, Maori obviously targeted the larger more diurnal penguin and were probably responsible for its extinction on the northern part of the West Coast. A probable White-capped Albatross could have been beach-cast or caught on a fishing trip, but they might have nested locally in those days. One bone from a Little Shearwater was unearthed, as well as bones of the Pied Shag. There is a mixed colony of Pied and Black Shags a few hundred metres up the river, and Scarlett suggested the Black Shag may have established subsequent to the time of the Maori settlement.

A species of kiwi was found, as well as New Zealand Pigeon, Tui and Kaka. There were also two bones from what Scarlett says was an undescribed, extinct species of small Kaka that once ranged widely in the South Island, which is a bit of a mystery.

Obviously this is only a small sample of birds living in the area at that time. Bird bones don't always preserve well and fossils in the caves show a much greater variety of species were probably available.

To be continued in the next issue of Birds New Zealand

New Zealand Birds Online – the First Year

New Zealand Birds Online was launched at the New Zealand Birds Conference in Dunedin in early June 2013. The website provides text, images and (where available) sound files of all wild bird species recorded from New Zealand, including extinct and fossil species. This article provides an update on changes to the website since its launch, and explores some of the patterns behind who is accessing the website, and what they are looking at.

The *New Zealand Birds Online* image archive continues to grow. There are now over 300 contributing photographers (up from 256 at launch), with an additional 650 images bringing the total to 7,243 images at the anniversary date. The other major addition to website content during the first year were 354 pdf extracts from the seven volumes of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (see *Southern Bird* 56:7).

Five further species have been added to the website, with three newly-described fossil species (St Bathans Kiwi, Bartle's Bittern, and Love's Paleocene Seabird), plus two vagrant species. One of the latter (Buff-breasted Sandpiper) was added to the New Zealand list this year, while the other (Dusky Woodswallow) is waiting on a Records Appraisal Committee decision.

The website was visited over 264,000 times in its first year. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of the visits to the website were from New Zealand (73.1%). This was followed by the United States (8.0%), Australia (4.6%) and the United Kingdom (3.3%). After the first six months, about 77% of new visits to the site came via Google.

Of more interest is where in New Zealand the website visits came from, particularly when compared with population size. Which town or city can lay claim to the title of having the greatest per capita interest in New Zealand's birds?

Among our largest cities, Wellington was the clear leader, with about 85 website visits per 1,000 residents, followed by Palmerston North (66) and Nelson (65.5).

But there was one town with even higher visitation rates than Wellington. Queenstown had an astonishing 116 views per 1,000 residents; more than twice the rate for most other centres in New Zealand. It is likely that this high rate was due to international tourists seeking information on New Zealand birds. But why was Queenstown so far ahead of Rotorua (36 views per 1,000)?

The most-viewed bird species on the website was the Tui, with 14,969 views. The top seven species were all native land birds that regularly occur in or near one or more of the major cities, suggesting that contact with native New Zealand birds is the major driver for people to look them up on *New Zealand Birds Online*. While the Tui was the clear leader, the second placed Bellbird (8,755 views) was closely followed by Shining Cuckoo (8,276), Fantail (8,145), Kaka (7,784), Morepork (7,731) and Pukeko (7,633).

The most-viewed introduced bird species was the Eastern Rosella in 8th place (7,466 views), followed by Song Thrush (6,926), Blackbird (5,617) and California Quail (5,202) among the top twenty.

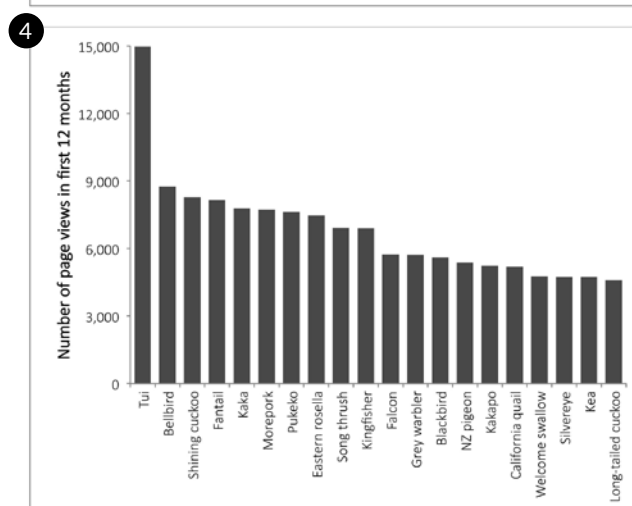
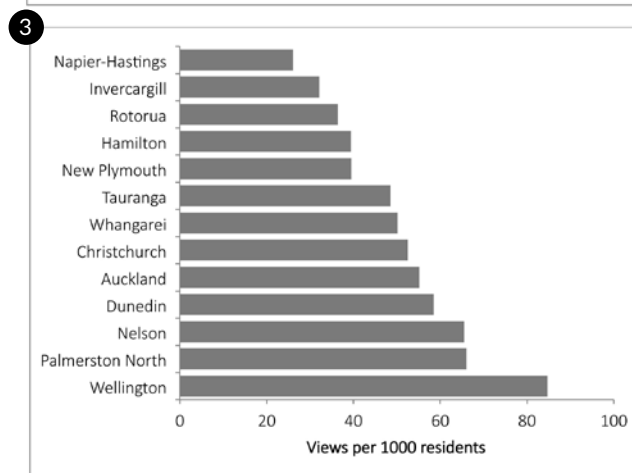
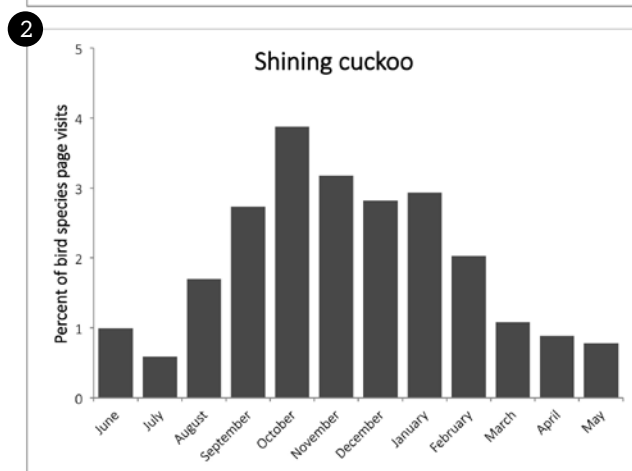
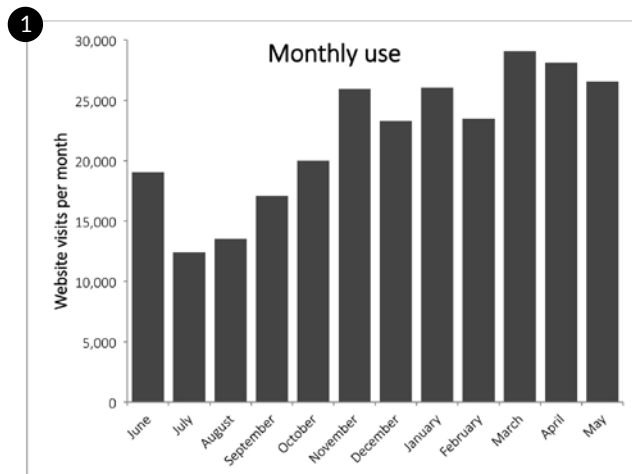
Intriguingly, the rate at which the Shining Cuckoo page was visited closely matched the seasonal occurrence of Shining Cuckoos in New Zealand. This further supports the theory that the majority of visits to the site are by people seeking information on birds that they have personally seen or heard.

Visit New Zealand Birds Online at www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz

COLIN MISKELLY

Graphs

- 1 Growth in visits to the New Zealand Birds Online website during the first 12 months after its launch.
- 2 Seasonal pattern of visits to the Shining Cuckoo page, as a percentage of total visits to the website per month.
- 3 New Zealand visits to the website as a proportion of residents.
- 4 The twenty most-visited bird species pages on the website during its first 12 months.



FAR NORTH

Isabella and Derry Godbert have been doing beach wreck patrols for over 30 years in the Northland. During that time they have seen significant changes in the birds that are beach wrecked in the Far North, mostly on Ninety Mile Beach. There have been fewer beach-wrecked birds of late.

The patrol usually starts with a drive up the beach from West Coast Road to about Hukatere Road, where beach patrolers are disbursed at 5-10 kilometre intervals until we run out of people. We typically cover 20-30 kilometres. The typical density of birds Isabella and Derry have found is about 1.5 per kilometre, or about 30 birds. We have had fierce winds and rough seas over the past two months, yet on our October patrol we only found three birds. As Janet Snell remarked in her September Regional Roundup, what's up with that? We did find a dead whale, four dead seals, and a more-dead-than-alive baby seal. We also found a single, lonely, very hungry Red Knot, alive but tattered. Hopefully, it is now with its peers.

The first Shining Cuckoo was heard on 24th August, 2014, and another wasn't heard for three weeks. They are now heard daily at numerous locations throughout the Far North. Royal Spoonbills have scattered to their nesting sites from their winter roosting sites. Shorebirds have returned, although in much reduced numbers to this point. New Zealand Dotterels have been observed with greater frequency than normal; 11 at Kowhai Beach, seven at Whiorau Bay, seven at Parekura Bay and two at Pipi Bay (one banded). Reports indicate that there is also an expanded population on the Karikari Peninsula. We haven't counted Parengarenga and Walker Island yet as inclement weather made boating to those locations hazardous.

The Eastern Bay of Islands Preservation Society been active for a number of years restoring wetlands at the beginning of the Whangamumu Track in Rawhiti. They have a mailing list of over 90 volunteers. About 25 species can now be observed in the area, but most interesting is the increase in the Fernbird population, which has risen from five breeding pairs to an estimated 20 breeding pairs. In addition to Fernbird, Brown Quail, Banded Rail, Tui, and further up the track, Tomtit can be seen.

As is well known, Russell established a very successful Weka colony about 12 years ago. Russell Thomas, a resident of Kerikeri and a 50-year member of OSNZ, was part of the team that established the successful colony. A BBC film crew was at Orongo Bay this week filming the Weka. About half a dozen chicks emerged from hiding and provided good footage for the crew.



▲ Weka and chick Orongo.



▲ Isabella and Derry with a beach-wrecked albatross.

The Department of Conservation (Far North) has posted an OSNZ web page on their site as described last issue. They are providing a boat to ferry survey participants to Parengarenga for the shorebird survey shortly. OSNZ will provide shorebird identification and guidance to Fun Days for campers at DOC campsites in January.

Except for the Three Kings Island group, the Red-billed Gull survey is progressing. We should have all the mainland sites visited in the next month, and are trying to make arrangements to provide a solution to the Three Kings.

Participation in eBird in the Far North hasn't met expectations. I'd be interested in learning what other Regional Representatives are doing to encourage participation. As mentioned in the previous Regional Roundup, a Regional Representative blog on the OSNZ web site would be of great assistance in initiating discussion on topics like this.

- LES FEASEY

NORTHLAND

During September a few Royal Spoonbills were still lurking around our area but by October, none were reported on the "Recent sightings" list. By early November the Fairy Terns (Tara-iti) are nesting, with one nest containing two eggs at the Waipu Sandspit, and another seven-plus nests on the Mangawhai Sandspit. Those nesting at the Waipu site are the same pair that nested there last season.

All Fairy Tern chicks that can be accessed are banded and it is very interesting to follow their movements during the season as they mature. Publicists have promoted the slogan "It's Our Tern" and hope that this year the Fairy Tern may earn No.1 place in Forest and Bird's vote for "Seabird of the Year". As there are only about 40 of these terns known to exist, this makes it one of the most endangered birds in the world. Volunteers, DOC employees and members of the Fairy Tern Trust take "turns" to check all nests every day. There are also trappers that have worked year after year on predator control, who contribute in a big way to successful nesting seasons of these little ground-nesting birds.

Guest speakers at our September meeting were Far North RR Les Feasey and former RR Detlef Davies and his wife Carol. I particularly enjoyed Detlef's presentation "Seabirds seen on Pelagic trips out of Whangaroa" as it showed in superb detail some of the birds recovered by us on Beach Patrols when they are but a motley bundle of bedraggled feathers. It was fascinating to see them resting on the water or flying around in their natural habitat where their true colours and feather patterns are visible, particularly when a number of different species were feeding together enabling their respective sizes to be compared.

Also of great interest was Graham Taylor's paper "Changing our understanding of Oceanic Seabirds" which was presented to the 2014 Conference. Les Feasey had acquired a copy of this and spoke to it. Many thanks to our neighbours in the Far North.

In conclusion, we are seeing quite a few California Quail up here this spring, but not very many Brown Quail. - JANET SNELL and KEVIN HAYES

SOUTH AUCKLAND

The winter wader census is a big deal for South Auckland in June with two big harbours to count and some of us assisting Auckland with the Kaipara counts as well. We had good turnouts for counts of the Firth of Thames although not quite so good for the Manukau Harbour, achieving good counts of the most important species all the same. A smattering of rarer species added interest. With a Gull-billed Tern on the Manukau, the Firth of Thames had a much better set of wintering Arctic migrants: two Great Knots, an Eastern Curlew, a Black-tailed Godwit, a Red-necked Stint, a Pacific Golden Plover and three Curlew Sandpipers.

Beach patrols have continued with the greatest excitement coming from a living bird this time. Tony Woodroffe, Wim Houtman and Ian Southey had the excitement of encountering a bird obviously unfamiliar to all of us on May 27th. In post-mortem we believe it could only have been an immature Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, which was flushed by a Harrier and fled shrieking. Unfortunately it has not been seen since so we are waiting to see what the rarities committee makes of our notes and reasoning. Eyes back on the sand we haven't found masses of corpses this winter but there have been some very interesting birds amongst them - a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross on July 24th and a Blue Petrel on August 21st being two of the highlights.

We have recently tried two guided bird walks for the public in the Auckland Botanic Gardens to raise our profile in the community and perhaps our membership. These have been organised and lead by Wendy Goad with a variable number of helpers. The miserably wet weather for the first of these was not encouraging but people turned up all the same and even more for the second under better conditions. As guides we are still wet behind the ears but learning fast, so although the bird fauna of the gardens is not spectacular it offers enough variety to give us plenty of discussion points. So far these walks have gone well and they are likely to continue as best we can manage, possibly as a school holiday activity.

Karen Opie has been working hard at Port Waikato organising predator control for nesting birds and restoration of the sand dunes. As part of the project she has been trying to tempt back the Caspian Tern colony that used to nest there. Last season some of David Lawrie's duck decoys were painted grey and white with red beaks and placed out on the sand. They did not seem to encourage any amorous intent so for this season a team carved out much more realistic models from polystyrene. They were placed out on the spit on August 30th by local volunteers and a *Birds New Zealand* group with what we hope will be an appropriately seductive, if ear-splitting,

sound system. Within half an hour we saw three birds sitting beside the decoys and up to 29 have been roosting there. The fence around the bird nesting area was also replaced and traps set up in the area on that day too.

Tony Habraken and David Lawrie reported that Pied Oystercatchers were still departing from the Firth of Thames and the Manukau Harbour during the second weekend in August but numbers on the roosts are well down. Wrybills were starting to leave in numbers then too. Three Bar-tailed Godwits showing all the signs of newly-arrived birds were seen on August 10th, which seems rather early, prompting speculation as to whether they came from Alaska or somewhere closer like Australia. The first big influx of Godwits was noted by the same pair on September 6th at Miranda. Many of the birds were still so stiff and sore that they couldn't fold their wings properly.

We had some early records of Shining Cuckoo, Wim Houtman hearing full song at Clark's Beach on August 4th and Terry Hatch reporting single notes from Pukekohe East on July 24th and August 12th, but we still have not had that many records with Gillian Vaughan reporting them from two locations around Papakura on September 6th and 7th.

Also visiting the Tuakau Sewage Ponds on August 10th Tony Habraken and David Lawrie found many waterfowl including a big flock of 600 Australasian Shovelers, 48 New Zealand Dabchicks, along with a Brown Teal and a New Zealand Scaup. Seven White Herons seen at Wattle Downs on July 5th could not be found by subsequent searchers although a few singles are scattered around the region. Up to three Little Egrets were reported at Mangere by Ray Clough and Phil Hammond, but more usually two are present. A bigger surprise was the lack of Cattle Egret records from the Aka Aka Swamp, where we have been accustomed to seeing them for many years. Eventually the flock was found by Bruce Parry on August 28th having moved to a different part of the swamp. Best count so far was 42. Two or three more Cattle Egrets have been seen around Miranda, sometimes on the shellbanks this winter, and there were four near Thames on census day. Up to three Black-tailed Godwits have been seen at Mangere this winter, but they appear to be moving around with two of them recently seen at Miranda.

After a succession of dry summers the Weka population at Kawakawa Bay has declined severely, but the birds are doing their best with mating observed almost as soon as the drought broke and chicks have been seen there already. We hope they do better this coming season. - IAN SOUTHEY

TARANAKI

Spring arrived in Taranaki and brought with it the usual mix of the occasional fine days interspersed with periods of wet and windy. Despite this members braved the conditions to get out and about, some going as far as to leave the country altogether. The Cockerams, however, only got as far as Waiongana where they added another species to my list on hearing and seeing a Bellbird in coastal Banksias. Ian Dudding won this year's first Shining Cuckoo report with one heard at 12.30pm on September 25th; somewhat later than usual.

Royal Spoonbills have been seen at several sites with seven at Mokau in the north, twelve at Waitara, two or three regularly at Waiongana (and five on one occasion), but these were eclipsed by a flock of 40 seen inland at Inglewood, probably passing through. The question is will they ever start breeding here? Somewhere along the Mokau river is the most likely area.

The White Heron that turned up in July is still here, seen on the lagoon at Waiongana, although not as often.

The September field trip around eastern Taranaki recorded 20 species including two New Zealand Dabchicks at Inglewood oxidation ponds and 77 New Zealand Scaup at Lake Mangamahoe. October had seven members visiting Stratford Mountain House and Potaema Bog. No Fernbirds were recorded at the bog although we know they are there. Riflemen were also elusive, but not so the Tui feeding on Tree Fuchsia flowers and numerous heard high up the mountain in the bush clad valleys. A good number of New Zealand Pigeons were flying around.

There have been two sightings of Kaka, one at Okato and the other by Marie and Helen at Pukeiti, but as they were ten days apart we are unsure if there was one individual bird or two. Barry Hartley has been photographing and counting Red-billed Gulls nesting around the Sugar Loaf Islands as part of the national survey, managing to count up to 736 pairs.

Two weeks after visiting Pukorokoro/Miranda and seeing my first Eastern Curlew amongst the returning waders a Red-necked Stint arrived at Waiongana, despite a noisy female Paradise Duck trying to scare it away. Regarding the New Zealand Dotterels here I am convinced they have no idea what they are up to.

In November five of us toured some South Taranaki beaches. At least the Sandy Bay New Zealand Dotterels know what they are doing, with a two-egg nest found. Lunch was spent at Opunake Lake where a Black Shag was dining on a perch so long it was having trouble getting it down: I would have been proud to have caught it! We finished a fine but breezy day up under the mountain at the Blue Rata Reserve watching Pipits and Fantails hawking insects over the aptly named Stoney River. It was a most satisfactory day providing a tally of 35 species. - PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

A further visit has been made to Lake Runanga, where landowners are involved with removal of exotic vegetation and planting of natives. The intention was to repeat a survey first done in January for the presence of Spotless Crake and Fernbird. Due to low numbers of OSNZ members present it was not possible to cover the entire shoreline, which is quite extensive at 11 to 12 km. One section was surveyed and at least four Spotless Crake were heard, as well as excellent views of one of these birds. We hope to complete a full survey sometime over the summer.

Several branch members travelled to Boundary Stream Mainland Island, together with a DOC ranger, and stayed overnight in a DOC house there. Kaka have been re-introduced and we helped with collecting leaf litter for the Kaka aviary floor and with preparation of supplementary feed.

The seabird breeding area was also visited, which has over 100 artificial burrows in a hilltop forested area. Both Cook's and Mottled Petrels were transferred there last year and a high percentage of chicks fledged successfully, although somewhat later than expected. This site is around 30 km from the coastline and so will be more challenging for birds to return to when breeding than coastal relocation sites such as Cape Kidnappers.

A visit to the extensive Porangahau estuary in early October turned up around 100 Godwits and smaller numbers of Red-necked Stint, Wrybill and Red Knot. We then moved on to the home of a landowner who is undertaking pest control work to boost numbers of native species on his property. Lunch was enjoyed on the front lawn with a spectacular ocean view, and we were entertained by a number of birds including a Shining Cuckoo calling and perching in full view.

Our group has been helping Bittern researcher Emma Williams with live capture (never done in NZ before), and with monitoring and locating birds within Lake Hatuma near Waipukurau. We have also been trying to locate a missing bird with a tracker that could even be as far away as Napier. Our Regional Representative Bernie Kelly has a TR 4 with aerial that he is using to cover known wetlands in our area. There is also some great video footage of an Australasian Bittern taken from a trail camera. - IAN SMITH

WAIRARAPA

Birds New Zealand Wairarapa lives with the ornithological version of John Lennon's remark that "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans."

September's weather was a genuine threat to our field trip into the Waiohine Gorge. To get there we have to cross a very well-built but long suspension bridge. When the wind gets compressed in the gorge that bridge can become a twisting, flailing menace. "Those in favour of going on a quiet day please raise your right walking stick." That settled it. And after three postponements we had the best turn out in months! So we aren't cowardly old curmudgeons. We just know how to get to enjoy birds for a long time. Even so, it was not an easy trip in that very few birds could be seen and we were working against the background noise of some wind, the river and the inevitable human stuff of a large party. We were also under the altitude that rats give up at. Therefore we didn't meet with Riflemen.

For September we fused the trip and the evening talk, moving from the Waiohine to Peggy Duncan's hospitable home where Nikki McArthur refreshed, revived and inspired more members to be active eBird users. Nikki did a simple reversal of the process and demonstrated the spread of Kaka in the Wellington city area based on citizen reports, with a brief animation. It was an "Aha!" moment for many.

In October, members Joanna and Colin shared their knowledge and skills gained from the Dotterel Management Course at Pukorokoro Miranda. They are both deeply involved in the management of the toe-hold that New Zealand Dotterels have at Riversdale Beach here in the Wairarapa. The field trip headed to the coast too, to Mataikona and

Castlepoint, looking for Red-billed Gull colonies and likewise for shags, as Wellington and Wairarapa are surveying shaggeries. What a bleak wind off the sea! Had to pick up my ears and put them back on twice. No trouble to the Red-bills at Castlepoint though, and as a reward, while standing counting I had two Gannets zooming through the water at times within two metres of my feet. Sometimes it pays to look like a piece of driftwood.

Meanwhile, back to the opening sentence. Without asking our permission, it transpires that further to the previous *Birds New Zealand* there is actually a family of New Zealand Falcons in Queen Elizabeth Park and some Black-billed Gulls are making a serious investigation of a newly reshaped island in Henley Lake, another, larger public open space, as a breeding site. Yesterday there was some pairing and copulation; this morning just loafing and watching the dragon boat crew training. Interestingly, the boat was no problem and the crew are very sympathetic after front page coverage for the gulls. Canada Geese and rats are the villains we fear. - *ROBIN LIST*

WELLINGTON

Saturday the 25th of October was the only fine day of Labour weekend and by some good fortune it was also the day that a group of 30 OSNZers and friends had a trip to Mana Island. The trip was made possible by a new boat operator who takes charters to the island. The principal reason for the trip was to provide members with the rare opportunity for them to see what must be one of the more important ecological restoration projects in New Zealand. Over a period of 27 years the replanting programme has transformed the island from a sheep farm to an emerging forest. As the island has been transformed there has been an associated programme of introductions of birds, reptiles and insects. Our one-day survey of Bellbirds revealed healthy numbers of birds of both sexes scattered throughout the island. This was a great result as it indicates that the introduction of Bellbirds in 2010 will result in a self-sustaining population. Such a result is in contrast to many other translocations of the species, which have not been successful.

While Mana Island has one of the largest population of Takahe outside Fiordland, few birds were seen as it was nesting time. However, Jeff Hall the DOC ranger on Mana Island on the day of our visit found the first Takahe chick for this breeding season. The trip provided a good opportunity to investigate the Red-billed Gull colonies for the national survey and Pied Shag colonies for the recently-started Wellington shag survey. Members were fortunate to get a guided tour by Colin Miskelly of the artificial seabird burrows and the sound systems playing seabird calls. In addition to the bird life Mana Island has many other points of interest including a rich history as a sheep farm and later as a quarantine farm for imported sheep. One of the insect introductions, Flax Weevils are having a noticeable effect. They have been so successful that some of the flax bushes have been killed by them. The success of this trip has prompted a call for it to become a regular event. - *GEOFF DE LISLE*

NELSON

Indoor meetings have included a talk from Rob Schuckard entitled Collating Baseline Information of Birds and Mammals in the Marine Environment. Rob's work in Tasman Bay was prompted by proposals for oil and gas exploration which identified our ignorance of which areas of the bay are used by wildlife. Aerial and boat-based surveys have demonstrated consistent year-on-year usage of the bay with the exploration site being much used by wildlife.

Our migrants have arrived with Shining Cuckoo first recorded on eBird on 25th September. Waders also arrived, but sadly the Welcome to the Godwits celebration, organised by Pauline Samways in Motueka, was cancelled due to poor weather. No celebration, but 950 Bar-tailed Godwits were counted on the Sandspit on that day, including four colour-banded in Australia and one in Alaska. A few Knots had also arrived by then.

On 6th September, a survey of Banded Rails in the Waimea Inlet, organised by the Waimea Inlet Forum, with several OSNZ participants discovered evidence of rails in seven areas of the Estuary.

Last year's beech mast is germinating with carpets of two-leaved seedlings covering the forest floor throughout the region. Rodent numbers built up through the winter and are reaching plague proportions. Without action, prospects for forest birds look grim. 1080 applications in Abel Tasman NP and, as part of DOC's Battle for our Birds, throughout much of Kahurangi NP are trying to stem the flood. OSNZ members are repeating annual five-minute bird counts in the Flora Stream area. Since 2005 we have performed these counts in seven non-mast years, providing a valuable baseline for comparison to the current mast event.

Weka are becoming more abundant around Nelson suburbs, with several adults reported to be terrorising cats in Brooklands Road (Go Wekas!), entering kitchens uninvited to help themselves to cat food and fishing goldfish out of ponds. - *ROBIN TOY*

MARLBOROUGH

After our usual August Lake Grassmere count we drove south to Lake Elterwater where we were able to have our picnic lunch on private land on the lake edge. We had gone there to see the Australasian Crested Grebes, which are pairing up there. We saw 11 of the grebes at the far side of the lake. Unfortunately they did not come across to our side so seeing them with telescopes was the only way.

From the end of August some of our members have been counting Black-fronted Terns on the Wairau River. We hope to continue to count them on a regular basis for a year to learn find out more about their behaviour, when they move up river to breed and when they move back to the coast. This involves us in counting for one hour from noon every Wednesday. A good time to pack a lunch and enjoy the braided river and its birdlife.

In September after our Grassmere visit we drove to Lake Elterwater again to search for two reported Hoary-headed Grebes. Unfortunately we did not see them, but anyone driving south will probably stop and have another look.

Another visit to Lake Elterwater in October gave a good range of species, with New Zealand Scalp, Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler, Black Swan, Australian Coot and more. Two Australasian Crested Grebes came close to the lookout area. For anyone travelling south from Blenheim it is worth a stop to check on what bird life is around. - *DIANNE JOHN*

CANTERBURY

A combined fieldtrip with Forest and Bird members to three wetland reserves in the east of Christchurch was held in August, showing members of both organisations a wide range of waterfowl and shags. Scarcer birds such as Glossy Ibis at Travis Wetland, Australasian Bitterns at Bexley Wetland and Banded Dotterrels at Charlesworth Wetland remained hidden or elsewhere unfortunately. A small number of participants stopped at the sewage ponds and saw a long-staying White-winged Black Tern.

October's trip went to Panama Rock Reserve on Banks Peninsula. The steep walk rewarded us with plenty of Bellbirds, Silvereyes, Brown Creeper and Tomtits, plus a single Rifleman was heard and fleetingly seen. Two Shining Cuckoos were heard. One was at very close range but frustratingly was not spotted. Strangely not a single New Zealand Pigeon was seen on this occasion.

Migratory waders are returning, with 50 Wrybills spotted at the Ashley Estuary and 150 Bar-tailed Godwits seen at Jarvis Road. The sighting of a Reef Heron at the Avon-Heathcote Estuary was particularly exciting. A Little Egret has been frequently spotted, and in October two were seen together at Kaituna Lagoon. Black Stilts have been seen at Lake Ellesmere, the Ashley Estuary and the Avon-Heathcote Estuary. A group of Cattle Egrets have been regularly seen in the Rushbrooks Road/Drain Road area. Many are now in breeding plumage, and will soon leave for Australia.

The monthly evening meetings continue to be well-attended. Andrew Crossland gave an entertaining talk on the impact of the earthquakes on Christchurch's bird life plus a few highlights of his birding adventures in Indonesia. Jamie Wood's talk on moa coprolites was very educational and a good follow-on to an earlier talk by Paul Scofield, highlighting what we are now learning about moa through an analysis of DNA in ancient bones. - *ELEANOR GUNBY*



Participants on August's trip to Travis Wetland. Photo Nick Allen.

OTAGO

Our region participated in the Botanic Gardens Bioblitz on 12th July, an event organised as part of the Dunedin International Science Festival, and we were lucky with mild, calm weather. The aim of the day was to introduce the public to practice the skills required to observe, identify and classify an array of species from fungi to fish, pests to plants, birds to bugs. A large number of organisations were involved so it was good to fly the *Birds New Zealand* flag. We ran guided birdwatching walks, for which over 40 people signed up. On the day a total of 28 species were recorded - 15 native and 13 introduced. There was also a good deal of interest in the bird nests we had on display.

Our major activity this spring has been involvement in a major bird survey of the variety of habitats in the greater east Otago region. The aim is to provide information on distribution of forest birds and their habitat requirements as part of a project called "Beyond Orokonui", commissioned by Landscape Connections Trust to develop a management plan for the east Otago region. Teams have carried out five-minute bird counts at marked GPS points within a variety of habitat types ranging from exotic coniferous forests and kanaka scrub to regenerating native forest.

At this stage in the project, 115 different sites in 10 different habitat types have been surveyed. 24 species have been recorded, with the most commonly seen or heard being Silvereye (214), Bellbird (200), Brown Creeper (148), Grey Warbler (110), Fantail (70), and Tomtit (55) with 13 Tui, 10 Riflemen and eight Robins. This project has given us a chance to get to areas that we don't normally get to on private land and to do some birding that can contribute to long-term conservation goals in our region.

Seabirds and migrants are returning to Otago region. The Bar-tailed Godwits arrived during the first week of October. At Blueskin Bay numbers increased to 290 from 89 the previous week. The flock included four juveniles and two colour-banded birds from 2006. There has been a report of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Aramoana, which is a rarity for us. The Sooty Shearwater migration was in full flight from the beginning of October with over 12,000 birds per hour seen passing Taiaroa Head. A Buller's Albatross was found dead in Central Otago near Ranfurly on 9th October; it was probably a late fledging juvenile from the Solander Islands.

At the end of October, on the Mataura and Oreti Rivers (Southland) five colonies of Black-billed Gulls were found between Gore

and Mossburn, with two very large colonies of over 1,500 birds. Gulls were incubating eggs but no chicks were evident. Black-fronted Terns were nearby but not yet nesting. These colonies were on water-surrounded islands in the river and have a good chance of being successful if there is no spring flooding. - MARY THOMPSON

SOUTHLAND

Our biggest news for many years was, of course, the discovery of a new species for New Zealand by a Japanese couple on Stewart Island. They had initially thought they had photographed a Little Woodswallow but after checking their photos it turned out to be a Masked Woodswallow. It was photographed on September 27th but unfortunately did not stay around and was gone before any twitchers could descend on the island. I wonder if this is the first new species for New Zealand that has been discovered by Japanese tourists and also just how many more species land on our shores that are never seen or never identified as being something different?

Other interesting sightings around the province have been a Bittern seen in the upper Oreti Valley and also one at the head of Awarua Bay. The Eastern Curlew was again in its usual place in Haldane Bay in August. White Herons were seen on Stewart Island and near the Roger Sutton Boardwalk in the estuary lagoon, and in September Glenda Rees photographed the leucistic Turnstone at the head of Awarua Bay along with our resident Terek Sandpiper.

A flock of seven Cattle Egrets was seen in Wallacetown on the main Riverton Highway on several occasions, and were still there in late October. Another much larger flock of 19 was feeding in a paddock between Gorge Road and Fortrose at Titiroa not far from the Mataura River Bridge. This would be one of the largest flocks seen in Southland for a number of years.

Glenda also reported Black-fronted Dotterels, possibly two on the Mataura River at Mataura, not far from the freezing works. This is the first time they have been reported there and brings forth the idea that a survey of this stretch of river at some future date could be useful.

To round off these exciting sightings we were also advised that a California Quail was seen in Otago, near Invercargill. It may have been a cage escapee, but we are unaware of any breeders in this area. We have had reports of these birds previously from Te Anau, Heddon Bush and The Catlins. - PHIL RHODES

Birds New Zealand Research Fund - Tracking Shining Cuckoos

Each year, two species of New Zealand cuckoo perform the longest regular overwater migrations of any land birds. The larger Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) heads for small islands spread across western and eastern Polynesia, but perhaps more remarkably, the Shining Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*), a fraction of the Long-tailed's weight, flies the 4,700 km to the Bismarck Archipelago northeast of New Guinea. Whether it gets there direct or makes a pit stop in Queensland is still unknown. Technology has now advanced to the point where archival geolocation tags are small enough, despite having batteries that last 1-2 years, to not seriously inconvenience migrants even as small as a Shining Cuckoo in their flight.

The Birds New Zealand Research Fund has provided us with a grant that will allow us to deploy 16 of these tags on Shining Cuckoos this breeding season. Birds from the populations breeding near Kaikoura and Nelson will be fitted with the tags using strong but flexible harnesses. Mounted on the birds' backs, only a light-sensitive wand will protrude above the feathers, allowing the device to record the times of sunrise and sunset. Those times depend on the bird's latitude and longitude, relative to where the device was fitted and retrieved. Previous work on other projects has shown that males in particular return to the same hectare of forest. As well as providing the first evidence for the migration tracks, the data downloaded from devices retrieved next year will provide information that will help us understand how such a small bird can achieve such extraordinary accuracy in its amazing migrations, regardless of wind, weather, mountains, and oceans.



Left: Counters at Mt Watkins, left to right: Maree Johnstone, Jinty MacTavish, Mary Thompson, Pat Dean, Francie Beggs, Lesley Gowans. Photo Jean Fleming. Centre: A Robin in Silverpeaks Forest. Photo Jinty MacTavish. Right: Counters being briefed before heading out at the start of the Beyond Orokonui project. Photo Mary Thompson.



Three tags alongside a New Zealand \$1 coin (diameter 23 mm) for scale.

Book Reviews

Birds of New Zealand Electronic Field

Guide. Brent Stephenson and Paul Scofield. *mydigitalearth.com*, 2013; available as an app through the Google Play Store or iTunes. NZ\$36.19

Pioneering their impressive Auckland University Press photographic field guide via a web app, authors Stephenson and Scofield have contributed to New Zealand web history with this online version. It was always going to be a big task to scrunch 546 pages into a workable and useable app, so to come up with the result they have is a credit to their persistence.

After processing the image-heavy app; a hefty download, all 315 megabytes of it taking 25 minutes on an ultrafast connection, you are now in the possession of a handy field guide on your device.

The layout can be described as easy to work with, but has been called quite basic by online reviewers. I found it adequate for what I paid for and basic is good; less things to mistakenly click on. Essentially you are presented with six tidy option tabs on the home page.

The first two tabs are whether you would like your online guide to be in taxonomic or alphabetical order. Watch out for Golden-Plover, with hyphen, under G. This resolves an old print-based chestnut, which order to go with, immediately. Giving the user the choice here is a good feature. Up to 365 species can be on this list, which narrows if you select your location (more on that later). A handy toggle lets you zoom down the list swiftly. Each species of bird is presented with, in the majority of cases, several images, followed by scrollable text and a distribution map accessed by a drop-down function button. It might be timely to mention the clarity of images in this format: some are stunning. Stephenson's photographs, and those of a few others, are razor sharp when viewed on a handheld device.

A most useful feature is Bird Compare, the ability to compare two species on the same screen, just by ticking an "eye"-shaped button top of screen and then ticking the species. It is handy to sort your terns and gulls this way. Photographs, maps and descriptions are all compared. The calls of many bird species are also accessed via a top of screen button once you are in the main entry. The calls can be repeated, but only if you select repeat before you play the calls the first time. If more than one call is provided, and you want to play both calls, you must click on the second call down before the first one stops, or you have to exit and play another species' call, then return. Les McPherson provided the majority of the recordings.

As most Android or Apple device

users are aware, the usual swiping and expanding tools on your screen can be used to navigate and zoom text, and the app provides additional support here with zooming at the more important stages.

If you are unsure of your identification, there is another tab on the home page called Smart Search, where you can drill down to your species by selecting features such as habitat, colour, type, bill and size. I tried this with the White-faced Heron and got the species matched correctly.

The My Language tab is divided into what name you prefer to use with your guide: IOC Names, Maori Names, New Zealand Common Names and Scientific Names. I selected New Zealand Common Names, and this worked in most instances, the few exceptions were Kelp Gull, Great Cormorant, Baillon's Crane, Masked Lapwing, jaegers, and Little Penguin.

The next tab can get you into a bit of trouble. It is called My Location. Try as I might, I could not get the app to recognise my device's GPS location; quite important to the logging and location details required if you want to use the app as a notebook. The troubles are not noted on the review page in the Google Play Store, so the query rests with the online help (unresolved at time of submitting this review). This tab can work without GPS co-ordinates, but would be troublesome if exporting to a GPS-based web resource such as eBird.

The final tab is for the listers amongst us and is called My List. This gives you the ability to create a list of what you saw by providing details of species, location, time and comments, with the ability to export the list to an email, or to your SD card. It has the ability to export to eBird (an online bird recording website many birdwatchers use). I couldn't see the ability to have more than one list on the same day at the same time for different sites, so for me it is only useful as a day list. I presume this is to get you exporting the information quickly and not letting any old lists remain in your device. You can import old lists back to your device according to the Help button.

Whilst we are on the subject of help, the Help section is indicated on the home page by a question mark, and is very straightforward. Help tips can be viewed in larger font size. Screens subjected to screen font increase adjust to the screen automatically so you don't have to scroll sideways.

Also in the Help area is a list of other *mydigitalearth.com* apps, copyright information and photographic acknowledgements. The names of the photographers are not associated with the images except for this list.

While the app is very handy for the new birder, and perhaps handy for the

seasoned eBirder with a good mobile data package, what I suggest it will be most handy for will be the visiting birder. As *mydigitalearth* has apps for bird guides from other countries, I think this is the market the authors were appealing to, and will get most of their downloads from.

Paul Cumming

The Bird Garden. Fay Bolt, Hartford Books, P.O. Box 178, Motueka New Zealand ISBN: 9780473160722. Paperback \$30.00

This is a delightful book of 210 mm by 145 mm and of 200 pages that is perfect for the coffee table of the home of every New Zealander with an interest in nature. Well written by Fay Bolt with a description and short stories of each the bird species found in her large rural garden in the Orinoco Valley near Motueka. A total of 28 species of birds are described (endemic, native and introduced) and these are particular to the location of Fay's garden in the North West of the South Island, so there are no Mynas, Spotted Doves or Rosellas as would be found in Auckland, but there are Little Owls (known as Little Wols) and black phase Fantails; however, surprisingly there are no Dunnocks, which might be expected in a garden there.

The photographs are wonderfully detailed and are testimony to the birds being carefully watched and photographed with skill. There are 26 chapters in the book, each with a short story on a particular type or group of birds and many of these have interesting names that suit the birds' particular personalities, behaviour, looks and calls e.g. "The Godfather" for the bossy Tui and "Dick Vercoe - A Game Bird" for the Californian Quail and their call!

Many of the stories are heart-warming, but are also stories of true life and death, some disappointments, but also perseverance and new life and examples include the nests of both Fantails and Song Thrushes failing due to cold weather and predation, but the birds starting anew and nesting for a second time. Included within the stories is fascinating information on a bird species place and importance in history with references in both poetry and art. Examples of this are a painting by Il Garofalo showing Christ as a small infant being greeted by John the Baptist who is bringing his cousin a Goldfinch, and poet Robert Browning's reference to Skylarks "... the lark's on the wing; the snail's on the thorn: God's in his heaven - all's right with the world!"

A lovely book for both bird lovers and those with a generalist interest in nature, but also a book that will inspire and encourage people to develop an interest and appreciation for the birds around us.

Ian McLean



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