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for the members of the Ornithological
Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

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Please note that sightings recorded in this newsletter are subject to confirmation.

Mokoia Island Stitchbirds

Along with Tuks and Bellbirds, our other endemic honeyeaters, Hihi (or Stitchbirds) were originally widespread on the North Island. Following European colonisation, Hihi disappeared from everywhere except Little Barrier Island. Attempts to establish Hihi on Hen, Cuvier and Kapiti Islands have been unsuccessful. Hihi still occur on Kapiti as a result of repeated transfers there but would probably have disappeared otherwise. The most popular explanations for the failure of these transfers were insufficient year-round supply of nectar and fruit, competition from Tui and Bellbirds and lack of nesting cavities. These were therefore key factors to investigate when 20 male and 20 female Hihi were transferred to Mokoia Island in September 1994.

In the island's favour, there were no mammalian predators (rats were eradicated in 1989) and Bellbirds. Tui were abundant, which could be a good thing or a bad thing. It was a good thing in that it implied that there was lots of honeyeater food around, although Tui, being very mobile, could forage outside the island when food is scarce. It was a bad thing in that the large, aggressive Tui might exclude the smaller Hihi from prime food sources. Also, Mokoia has fairly young secondary growth, without a huge variety of plant species and few natural tree cavities.

Our initial research objective was to test whether Hihi are limited by access to food, either due to food shortage or due to exclusion by Tui. We wanted to know whether Hihi needed supplementary food to survive and, if so, whether this could be achieved by a strategic planting programme. We also wanted to be able to make predictions as to whether food supplies were sufficient on other islands where Hihi might be transferred.

Over the first year we supplied supplementary food at three feeding stations.

Outside the breeding season, we made food available for 16 days out of every 28. We compared their condition after 16 days of free food with their condition after 12 days on natural food only. We measured birds' condition by weighing them - an electronic balance at each feeder gives the weight on a digital readout, which is recorded (along with their band combination) on a video recorder. At the same time MSc student John Perrott observed what flowers and fruits the Hihi were using, and measured the availability of these foods and the degree to which Hihi were excluded by Tui. Surprisingly our data from January to October suggested that there was *no time throughout that period* when Hihi suffered from shortage of nectar or fruit.

We used a different method during the breeding season. With breeding birds it was far more important to find out whether food limited reproduction than to find out whether it limited condition of adults. The only way to do this is to give food to some breeding birds and not to others. We approximated this by putting nest boxes at different distances from the feeders and comparing reproductive success of birds close to and far from the feeders. The results for 1994/95 were very suggestive. Females nesting close to feeders raised 4.5 young on average, whereas those more than about 200 m. from a feeder produced only 1.5 young. Combining data on both survival and reproduction, it seemed that Hihi might survive with supplementary food in the breeding season but had no chance otherwise. However our data on "fed" versus "unfed" reproductive rates were based on a sample of only ten females, so could have been misleading.

In the 1995/96 breeding season we have tried to get further data on "fed" and "unfed" reproductive rates. We also tried to make the comparison more extreme: half the birds would have feed-

ers right by their nests and the other half would have to go at least 700 m. However the birds foiled this plan. First, fewer survived to breeding than we had hoped, and the ones that survived tended to go for the side of the island with the feeders. This wasn't for the obvious reason as we waited until they had started nesting before moving the feeders around. Also some birds foiled us further by nesting in Saddleback roost boxes rather than nesting where they were supposed to. To top it all off, the few females that ended up a long way from any feeder have done rather well! So this year's data don't really back up last year's. We'll see what happens next year and hope that we outsmart the birds. The good news is that the reproductive rate has been higher this year, and we look forward to an increased breeding population in 1996/97.

The focus of the project has changed and broadened over the last 18 months, and is no longer so much about food. Isabel Castro, who completed a PhD on the Kapiti Hihi in 1995, started a postdoc on Mokoia this past summer. Isabel has found the Mokoia Hihi ideal for pursuing her interest in evolution of mating systems - *the birds are small, we can (generally) get them to use nest boxes and so can determine where they nest, and Hihi are about twenty times easier to observe on Mokoia than on Kapiti.*

Isabel and her assistant Karen Mason have been finding out amazing things about Hihi breeding behaviour. This work is of great fundamental interest, but may also have management payoffs. It is likely that breeding is highly stressful for Hihi, and that it may have strong effects on adult survival as well as reproduction. Therefore, if we learn what affects the mating system, we may be able to maximise both reproduction and survival.

Since October, Karen and Isabel have also been doing most of the hands-on

maintenance work of changing the feeders daily and monitoring reproduction. They have also found that they need to change the nest boxes at least once per reproductive cycle. The problem is mites, which build up to plague proportions and drive the young out of the nests. This year it seems that few young would have been produced if the nest boxes hadn't been carefully monitored and changed. While we can combat the problem by changing the boxes, this is very labour-intensive. We aim to increase our understanding to a level where we can keep the Hihi population going with minimum intervention.

Overall, it is amazing what we have learned in the past 18 months. We'll be continuing work on Mokoia for at least another two years. In addition, MSc student John Ewen has been working on Hihi on Tiritiri Matangi Island since their release there in September 1995. Between us, we should come up with some clear answers about what is necessary to maintain Hihi populations on these islands.

Our research has been made possible by grants from WWF-NZ, the Marsden Fund, the Lottery Board and Massey University. Finally we wish to thank the many OSNZ members who have helped in the field in the past 18 months.

DOUG ARMSTRONG

Chatham Island Winter Wader Survey 19-23 June 1995

Four members attended the second wader survey on Chatham Island, as a follow-up to the November 1994 survey (see *OSNZ News* No. 74). They were Julia Brooke-White and Kerry Oates from Wellington and Willie Cook and Rob Schuckard from Nelson.

During the summer survey, eight people spent eight days visiting every possible wader habitat, counting most of the species found. During the winter, with fewer people and less time, we concentrated on those areas known to be most productive for wader numbers and on counting mainly wader species.

With assistance from Steve Sawyer (DoC), we were very fortunate to be taken by inflatable boat around the eastern and southern parts of Te Whanga Lagoon, and three islands in the lagoon, not previously visited. This meant that we covered the entire lagoon shore in one day, as two people went by boat and two walked the northern and eastern shores.

Areas covered were: Te Whanga Lagoon from Te Awainanga Rivermouth to the airport, following the eastern and northern lake shores, Kaingaroa/Okawa Point and Beach on the southern side of Okawa Point, Cape Pattison and

Te Whanga Lagoon : North (N) = airport to Lake Koomotu, East (E) = Lake Koomotu to Rangiauri Trig, South (S) = Rangiauri Trig to Te Awainanga River.

Other areas: Okawa Point (O), Cape Pattison (P)

	Nov. 1994					June 1995				
	N	E	S	O	P	N	E	S	O	P
SIPO	5									
Pied Stilt	9		3			63				
Spur-winged Plover	36	25	39	9	32	6	150	76	29	5
White-faced Heron	2	1	10	5		5	5	6	2	8
White-fronted Tern	2		78	32	110	30			31	
Welcome Swallow			6			3	3			
Banded Dotterel		38	19	18	4	9	32	8	3	
Chatham Is. Oystercatcher		7		2	6				4	1
Lesser Knot		1793	25							
Red-necked Stint		3								
Turnstone		236	49	42	70	14			1	
Bar-tailed Godwit		98	30			80			11	
Pukeko		1			1					
Chatham Is. Shag			3	189	2			115	31	3
Pitt Is. Shag			6	34	22			15	70	11
Black Shag			60	3						
Red-billed Gull			226	68	115					not counted
Black-backed Gull			42	5	200					not counted
Giant Petrel sp.			1	1						
Grey Duck			30+					51		
Mallard			50+							
American Whimbrel					2					

Survey Totals Nov. 1994 June 1995

Waders:

Turnstone	397	14
Banded Dotterel	87	124
Chatham Is. Oystercatcher	15	5
SIPO	5	-
Spur-winged Plover	155	266
American Whimbrel	2	-
Lesser Knot	1818	-
Pied Stilt	9	63
Red-necked Stint	3	-
Bar-tailed Godwit	128	91

Gulls/terns/petrels:

Red-billed Gull	571	not counted
Black-backed Gull	266	not counted
White-fronted Tern	317	31
Giant petrel sp.	6	-

Shags:

Black Shag	67	-
Pitt Is. Shag	89	96
Chatham Is. Shag	251	149

Waterfowl and others:

Grey Duck	40+	51
Mallard	60+	-
Paradise Shelduck	2	-
Black Swan	500+	not counted
Shoveler	3	-
White-faced Heron	21	26
Pukeko	52	-

Waitangi West Beach and the Tuku Valley/Point Durham areas.

Comparisons between November 1994 and June 1995 follow:

Summary:

In November 1994 eight people, for most of whom it was a first visit, spent eight days on Chatham Island - we therefore had the time, numbers and exploratory interest to visit as many wader sites as possible. Some of the sites visited in summer proved to be unsuitable wader habitat.

In June 1995, with fewer people and less time, we concentrated on those areas known to be suitable wader habitat. Many of the Arctic waders present in summer were absent in winter, except for godwits.

Our results may show some internal movement patterns of shag populations, such as an increase in Pitt Island Shag numbers in winter and a decrease in Chatham Island Shag numbers. Winter increases in Banded Dotterel and Spur-winged Plovers were also noted.

OSNZ wishes to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Department of Conservation staff on Chatham Island with both practical and logistical matters. The participants also enjoyed the generous assistance and hospitality of the Chatham Island people and the financial assistance of the OSNZ Projects Assistance Fund.

KERRY OATES

From the President's Desk

This comes once again from your president's knee, as my life continues to be dominated by islands and survival in a tent - though the weather has been considerably more pleasant than when I last wrote. Even a tiny islet (about 4 hectares) such as Little Sister continues to provide ornithological surprises, and indicates that an area which one may think is well known can still produce new experiences.

Over the space of two days we have been visited by a Southern Buller's Mollymawk (*Diomedea b. bulleri*) and an Atlantic Yellow-nosed Mollymawk (*Diomedea c. chlororhynchos*). The Buller's was an adolescent, with a bill less colourful than in adults and is a first for the area. The Yellow-nosed was an adult, and was the third of this taxon recorded in New Zealand - all of them at the Sisters. The first was almost to the day 21 years ago, whilst the second was in September 1976. Though the Indian Ocean Yellow-nosed Mollymawk (*D. chlororhynchos carteri*) is a regular visitor to New Zealand waters, these Chatham Island records are currently the only ones in New Zealand of a taxon which breeds at the Tristan and Gough

Islands in the Atlantic. Those observing at sea around New Zealand should keep their eyes open.

Whilst one bird (Buller's) required observation in the hand to confirm the identification (especially as adolescent plumages of most of our mollymawks are imperfectly known), the behaviour and movement of the Yellow-nosed illustrated the importance of these factors in identification. Some recent submissions to the Rare Birds Committee of the Society were meticulous in their description of plumage details. However, the birds concerned were little known in New Zealand and the plumage stages while here are imperfectly known or documented. In many cases the behaviour of the bird may provide more immediately definitive clues to its identity. Flight patterns, feeding methods or movements and mode of walking are distinctive to most taxa and generally prove an important starting point to your identification. This can often be a subconscious reaction, especially when a fleeting glimpse is all that can be achieved. It is often the 'jizz' of the bird which makes the oddity stand out in the first place.

These are the sorts of observations which become so important to the writers of field guides on whom we rely for assistance in our identifications. The new "Guide" is well on the way and should be out later this year. This will then be a good time to look for those current gaps which should provide us all with opportunities for observations to improve ornithological knowledge in the future.

Every so often we have ornithological "smoke reports" of species which are currently presumed to be extinct. It is only a couple of years to the 50th anniversary of the rediscovery of the Takahe or Notornis - the distinctive logo of the Society. How often do we hear of other reports of species which are treated with a certain incredulity and confined to the "couldn't be" file? A member has recently written to ask what we do with such reports - are they followed up? In spite of the severe effects of introduced predators and habitat change, what is the probability of further discoveries? I can recall hearing of rumours or reports of South Island Kokako, NZ Thrush, Bush Wren and even Huia and Laughing Owl in the past 20-30 years. Where are these records? Are we doing enough to encourage people to look? What are we doing about them if we do hear of them? Who are the most likely people to see these birds in the first place? What species have been rumoured or reported in the past ten years? Certainly the first place to send such a report or indication of a rumour is the Secretary of the Rare Birds Committee.

In the context of change, how many of our mainland or coastal bird species are actually increasing their numbers, either locally or nationally? I would predict that there are probably not more

than about ten. The worrying thing is that in most cases we do not actually KNOW if there is any change, or, if we do, usually we don't know WHY.

While predators and habitat change have an effect, are we really sure that in some cases that that is the real cause? Sometimes it may be as necessary to understand and record why a taxon is increasing as it is to record and understand the declines. We are often very good at identifying our species when we see them, but how often do we record what use they are making of their habitat and changes that may occur during the breeding season? Often such observations provide the clues to other aspects worth studying. With the probability that the Society will again be undertaking an Atlas project over the next few years, this is a good time to review such gaps in our knowledge before some birds become much rarer. The conservation managers of the future will depend on an adequate supply of such information, rather than having to rely on hunch or guesswork.

Elsewhere in this mailing to you, there will be papers relating to the Constitution and this year's AGM in Foxton. Please study them carefully as they affect the whole Society and the way that it functions in the future. During March I will have visited many regions in the North Island and had an opportunity to meet many of you personally to hear at first hand ideas for future directions and activities. These will be important to our continuing review of all of our activities.

Happy birding for 1996.

C.J.R. ROBERTSON
President

OSNZ Junior Members Field Course Held at Ward, Marlborough, 9-18 January 1996

Once again Jack Taylor hosted a flock of enthusiastic ornithologists on his picturesque farm. Eleven junior members attended, flying from as far away as Whangarei and Invercargill. This flock was supplemented by four more OSNZ members, experience having slightly worn their plumage!

After a day spent 'scoping out' the general area, we settled in our roosts for the night. While the girls enjoyed the luxury of the farm cottage, the boys roughed it in the woolshed, some even on the top of wool bales. Two seniors opted for the en suite tent in an adjacent field.

The following morning, mist nets were set up in "Plum Valley" and harrier traps were deposited at various nearby sites.

Over the course of the next nine days, 44 passerines were banded,



L-R: Chris Garden, Emma Fillery, Karl Baker, Karen Lomax, Brian Bell, Francesca Cunningham Scott Butcher, Jamie Wood, Caroline Anderson, Susan Cunningham, Paul Bell, Tom Buckley, Ben Darlow. Crossing the Upper Flaxbourne River.

Photo: Paul Cuming

weather hampering progress on most days. Around five harriers were caught through the same period, a good number of these already having been banded by Jack in previous years. Also banded were one fledgling harrier and, at Dashwood, north of Seddon, two nestlings.

Next on the agenda was the Flaxbourne River. Aside from good swimming spots, it offers ideal Pied Stilt nesting areas. This proved right as six chicks were caught and colour-banded in a short stretch of river. Later that day, four more were processed on the lower Flaxbourne River near Ward Beach. One further chick was caught at Jack's on the 12th and one recaptured for a newspaper photographer on the 17th - a lucky break as it was partially flying (see front page of the *Marlborough Express* of 18 January 1996).

Aside from Pied Stilts, Gull Buntings were seen by some for the first time and a nest with four chicks was found by Paul Bell. These were later banded.

Further activities, other than those in the following articles, were:

- sessions on how to fill out nest record and beach patrol cards, and banding schedules

- close-up viewing of introduced passerines courtesy of Jack's freezer, and

- hunting for South Island Robins on the Pegioh Road and Spotless Crakes by the Ward Beach turn-off - both unsuccessful.

Five minute bird counts - these counts were conducted on Jack's neighbour's farm, and showed that knowledge of bird song is important in tall scrub. The area of bush surveyed was dominated by tall Kanuka, with Matai and coastal broadleaf trees. The importance of this habitat was highlighted when the following species were seen or heard - Brown Creeper, South Island Tomtit and Rifleman, Keruru, Redpoll, Yellowhammer, Gull Bunting, Goldfinch, Silvereye, Blackbird, Pied and Black Fantail, Greenfinch, Bellbird, Dunnock and Grey Warbler. Other birds in the area were California Quail, Skylark, Australasian Harrier and Magpie.

Beach patrols - patrols were carried out twice; at Marfell's Beach and Cape Campbell. The former provided some patrollers with their first Hutton's Shearwater. Also found at Marfell's were Fluttering Shearwaters, a Fairy Prion, Blue Penguin and a Black-backed Gull. Cape Campbell beach wrecks included three Spotted Shags, six Blue Penguins, eight Fairy Prions, five Red-billed Gulls, three Fluttering Shearwaters and one each of Australasian Gannet, Hutton's Shearwater, Black-backed Gull, Common Diving Petrel and Mallard.

Live birds seen at Cape Campbell were around eleven metal- and colour-banded Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls, over 50 Turnstones, and a sick Blue Penguin which later died. Low numbers of the following were also present - White-fronted and Caspian Terns, Black, Pied and Little Shags, NZ Pipit, Banded Dotterel, Variable and South Island Pied Oystercatchers, harrier, gannet, Gull Bunting and, the find of the day, a Grey-tailed Tattler. Brian Bell heard it initially, which brought everyone's eyes sharply into focus. A great reward for a long day's walk; Cape Campbell is six kilometres along the coast from Marfell's Beach.

A few rules were learnt as the juniors - and some seniors - progressed through the course. 'Contributors' of the rules are bracketed:

1. Underwater photography demonstrations were not part of the course (Susan/Karl)
2. Look where you are going when carrying penguins (Scott) or looking for stilt chicks (Francesca)
3. If you are a fledgling Goldfinch, make yourself scarce when Caroline is around (Paul C.)
4. Never run after meals, unless you are Francesca (Susan/Malcolm)
5. Barbed wire and clothing don't mix (Ben)



Banding Spoonbills at Wairau Lagoons: L-R; Scott Butcher, Malcolm Rutherford, Karl Baker. Photo: Paul Cuming

6. Never use a bush shirt pocket as a bird bag (Paul C.)

7. Too many plums can make you uncomfortable (Malcolm)

8. **Never** play Jack at table tennis (Everybody)

Being a survivor from a previous junior members' course, it was most pleasing to see that the current members are more enthusiastic than ever... and fitter!

Special thanks go to Jack Taylor for allowing Dog Hill Station to be overrun by us, for carrying us around on the farm truck and for "how to lose table tennis" instruction.

Thank you also to Brian Bell, who again organised and ran the course expertly, and assisted with a final draft of this article.

Catered meals, by Heather Ruffell, at the Ward Memorial Hall, were much appreciated at the end of the day.

Participants on the trip were Emma Fillery (Northland), Tom Buckley (Waikato), Karl Baker (Hawkes Bay), Susan Cunningham (Wellington), Caroline Anderson (Marlborough), Scott Butcher and Ben Darlow (Canterbury), Francesca Cunnigham (Otago), Malcolm Rutherford, Jamie Wood and Chris Garden (Southland), with "seniors" Brian and Paul Bell, and Karen Lomax (Wellington), Paul Cuming (Waikato) and Jack Taylor (Marlborough).

PAUL CUMING

Lake Elterwater

Lake Elterwater is a small coastal lake situated on State Highway One five kilometres north of Ward township.

The lake is mainly inhabited by waterfowl. The highlights of the trip were seeing 506 Paradise Shelducks, over 50 Pied Shags, seven Canada Geese, over 100 NZ Scaup and about 50 Grey Teal. Other species seen were Mallard, Grey Duck, Shoveler, Black Swan, Black Shag and White-faced Heron.

Three of us were lucky enough to get out in a small row boat. We rowed to the far side of the lake, where we were able to get behind a Pied Shag nesting colony in the willows. We also found what we think were Banded Rail tracks.

We found the lake well worth visiting and we recommend it to you if you are passing through.

KARL BAKER/MALCOLM RUTHERFORD

Upper Flaxbourne River

On 12 January we walked the upper Flaxbourne River, which is a narrow, braided shingle river inhabited by many species of birds.

On 10 January we had colour banded the chicks of three pairs of Pied Stilts breeding on the river. However we had missed one, so we caught up with this chick and banded it.

One of the reasons we did this walk was to see Brown Creeper. We succeeded, seeing three birds in a small patch of scrub after walking about half an hour. Among other species, we saw Cirl Buntings, which are perhaps more commonly found here than in other parts of the world.

During this walk we climbed to the top of a low hill, where we could see much of the Flaxbourne River and the country we had walked through. On the

way up we saw unusual plants, such as the Leafless Clematis, and a native to the region, the Marlborough Rock Daisy. Some specimens were up to a hundred years old.

Two nests were found by Paul Bell while walking back to the base. One was a Dunnock's, with four brilliant blue eggs, and the other a Goldfinch's, containing two newly hatched chicks and two eggs.

On this very successful trip we saw and heard 27 species of birds.

SUSAN CUNNINGHAM/EMMA FILLERY

Lake Grassmere

Lake Grassmere is situated ten kilometres north from where the 1996 OSNZ junior course was held. The lake is 1416 hectares in area, with the saltworks being about 728 hectares. It is non-tidal, seawater being introduced to the lake via pumps.

Grassmere's geographic position makes it ideal for migrant waders and waterfowl, being close to both Lake Elterwater and the Wairau Lagoons. It forms a link in a chain of very good bird habitats.

Numbers of species tended to be quite limited on our visit, and waterfowl were dominant. A count of over 3000 Grey Teal was very high. Other counts were 164 Red-billed Gulls, 159 Pied Stilts, around 30 South Island Pied Oystercatchers and only a single Black-fronted Tern.

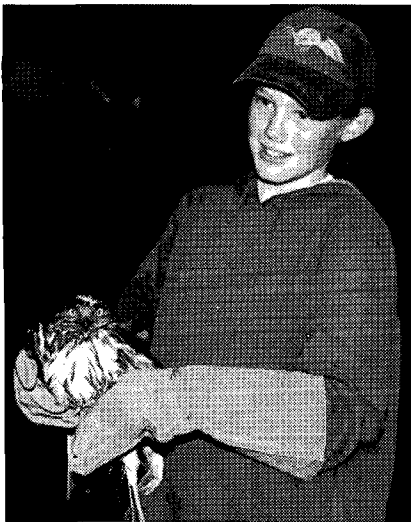
Grassmere as a whole is a good spot for birds - but being a long way from Blenheim means that it is hard to study regularly. A study of the lake would however give some interesting information.

SCOTT BUTCHER

Waima River Mouth

On 13 January we visited the Waima River mouth. The Waima is a small shingle river that flows into the sea via a small lagoon. Birds in the lagoon were visited first. These included three Wrybill, two Variable Oystercatchers, six Banded Dotterels, around 550 Black-backed Gulls, 35 Red-billed Gulls, 315 Black-billed Gulls and eleven juvenile Black-fronted Terns. Karl Baker managed to spot a metal banded Red-billed Gull.

Further up the river we found two virtually unoccupied Red-billed Gull colonies. One had 70 nests, the other 93. There were also Black-billed Gulls, White-fronted Terns and Banded Dotterels nesting there. We banded three Red-billed and three Black-billed Gull chicks, one White-fronted Tern chick and three Banded Dotterel chicks.



Banding harriers at Ward. Ben Darlow.
Photo: Paul Cuming

We think the Waima River is a neglected ornithological area, and we would recommend it to anyone living in, or passing through, the area.

BEN DARLOW/CHRIS GARDEN

Wairau Lagoons

On 16 January, participants from the OSNZ junior training course joined up with Bill Cash (DoC), Bev North and Stuart Kennington (OSNZ Marlborough) to band Royal Spoonbill chicks at the Wairau Lagoons. In all we banded thirteen chicks. We also counted 47 nests (some of which may have been from other years), 29 chicks, 24 eggs and 199 adults.

Other species seen were Black-backed Gulls, Black Swans, Black-billed Gulls, Pied Stilts, Black-fronted Terns, White-faced Herons, Bar-tailed Godwits, Grey Teal, Caspian Terns, Mallard, Red-billed Gulls, Shovelers, Paradise Shelducks, Black Shags and two Marsh Sandpipers.

There were quite a few unoccupied Black Swan nests in the long grass. We also spotted three adult spoonbills with colour bands, which proved to have been banded in the same area in the past couple of years.

TOM BUCKLEY/JAMIE WOOD

New Format for *Notornis*

Starting with the first issue of Volume 43, the production of *Notornis* has become completely computer-based. This seemed like a good opportunity to modify the appearance of the journal, which has been virtually unchanged for about two decades.

The journal is now printed on a better quality paper, and the general format of the articles has been changed to con-

Summary of Passerines banded at Ward						
9-17 January 1996						
Date	Jan 10	Jan 11	Jan 12	Jan 15	Jan 17	TOTAL
Species						
House Sparrow		1	3		4	8
Silvereeye	1		5		2	8
Song Thrush			1			1
Bellbird	2				4	6
Chaffinch	1					1
Goldfinch					4	4
Blackbird	6		2		2	10
Greenfinch					1	1
S.I. Fantail			1			1
Chil Bunting				3		3
Yellowhammer					1	1
Daily Total	10	1	12	3	18	44

form more closely to current international standards. The covers have also been redesigned, and the computer-based formatting allows us to control the appearance more seamlessly, including the electronic processing of photographs.

This should result in better quality and I hope you will like the new *Notornis*. I thank Paul Sagar, Tony Crocker and Chris Robertson of OSNZ and Doug Wray, Rees Morley and Murray Ferris of Te Rau Herald Print for their help in developing the new "look".

GABOR LOVEI

Editor, *Notornis*

Falla Memorial Award & A.T. Edgar Junior Award - 1996

Nominations are called for the above awards and should be with the Secretary, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, by 30 June 1996. Nominations should be on the standard forms, which are available from RRs and the Secretary.

All nominations will be considered by the Awards Committee and its recommendations will be forwarded to Council for consideration at its spring meeting.

A full summary of OSNZ award procedures was published in *OSNZ News* 58 (March 1991).

RAEWYN EMPSON

(Hon. Secretary)

Scientific Day, 1996 AGM

As mentioned last issue, there will be a Scientific Day at this year's annual con-

ference. The response to date however to this has been very poor, which means that there are still vacancies open to willing participants. If these are not filled, then unwilling participants will be tracked down!

Talks confirmed so far include long term bird counts on Tiritiri Matangi Island, Kiore predation on Little Shearwaters, wader migration along the East Asian flyway and Fairy Tern nesting. Other talks over the weekend include the very latest developments in using genetic techniques in bird studies, from sexing identical birds to trying to rediscover extinct species (the latter progressing even as I write this) by Professor David Lambert of Massey University's Ecology Department. Everyone will find this fascinating, I guarantee! Phil Battley will look at how migrating waders cope with such a lifestyle, from living in the near-freezing Arctic to the sweltering tropics.

So join in the fun, and make the Scientific Day a success. There are prizes to be won.... Contact Phil Battley, at Department of Ecology, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North, fax (06) 350 5623, E-mail P.F.Battley@massey.ac.nz if you are interested in giving a talk, by 10 April if possible. I look forward to hearing from you!

PHIL BATTLE

Donations to the Society

The Society would like to thank the following members for their generosity. Their donations will each go to the fund requested.

Geoffrey de Lisle (2 donations), Alan Tennyson, Hugh & Lea Robertson, J.F. Davidson, Peter Grant, W.R. Messenger, G.W. Wells, Barry J. Stevens, Mona J.

Taylor, Marie Neverman, Barry Friend, Paul Cuming, P. Munns, Mary Craven, Stewart Lauder, Kay Haslett, Patricia Evans, Kevin J. Taylor, M.M. Simpson, John C. Davenport (2 donations), C.J. Foreman, Allan Hjørring, Murray W. Eagle, Mrs M.A. King, Dr Kim Sterelny, Barbara Burch, D.R. Fioravanti, Nick Green, Ephra Garrett, M.A. Waller, Brian Boesen, Dr Michael Fitzgerald, A.R. Carey, Mrs Joy Soper, L.S. Rickard, Colin Hill, Bill Cash, Mrs & Mrs D.H. Booth, Sue Cotton, K.V. Todd, G.R. Brown, Laureen Alston, Jill McDonald, Mary McEwen, Patrick Buxton, W.A. Cook, Geoff A. Foreman, S.M. Legge, Barbara Dingle, Prue Cozens, Gerry Clark, David Baker, Vicki Lowrie, David Wilson, W.A. Watters, G.I. Hunt, Barbara Lovatt.

The above are all New Zealand donations: the following are from overseas - Nils Ake Anderson (Sweden), Takeshi Sugimoto (Japan), Peter Vodila (Czech Republic), Neil G. Cheshire (Australia), Spencer Unthank (Australia).

HAZEL HARTY
Membership Secretary



National Census - Royal Spoonbills Weekend of 15 & 16 June 1996

I would like to recommend having the National Census of Royal Spoonbills over the weekend of 15 and 16 June, which is as close as possible to previous years' censuses. As this will be the last planned census, I trust that we will have a full turn-out of observers in order to find out the total population of spoonbills in New Zealand after this breeding season.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN

Colour-Dyed Albatrosses

During November 1995, scientists from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA), Christchurch, colour-dyed albatrosses breeding on Campbell Island. All birds were dyed on the breast and rump. The colour will remain until the birds moult, after mid 1996. This programme is part of our study of the feeding locations of these albatrosses on Campbell, Solander and Snares Islands.

Birds dyed were: 1000 Black-browed Albatrosses (yellow-orange) and 700 Grey-headed Albatrosses (pink-red). Buller's Albatrosses from the Snares and Solander Islands will also be dyed in February and March 1996. The colours have yet to be decided, but should differ little from the Campbell Island birds.

We need help from vessels operating in the New Zealand, Australian and Southern Ocean regions, to gather reports of our study birds. You can help by sending observations of the birds at sea. It is also very interesting to know if no colour-dyed birds were seen on a vessel's route.

Please report the vessel name, position, time, date, dye colour, species of birds, number of dyed birds seen at each time, observer name and address.

Please send reports directly to Susan Waugh, NIWA, P.O. Box 8602, Christchurch. Fax (03) 348 5548, E-mail waughs@chch.niwa.cri.nz.

SUSAN WAUGH/PAUL SAGAR

OSNZ Slide Collection

Contributions over the last year have been steady, with slides from the following people much appreciated: Julia Brooke-White, Hugh Clifford, Reg Cotter, Geoff Foreman, Don Hadden, Folkert Nieuwland, Stella Rowe and Graham Searle. New slides are always welcome and these contributions have boosted the collection to nearly a thousand slides.

However, some gaps are still present. A select list follows: Brolga, Chukor, Long-tailed Cuckoo, Australian Tree Martin, Chatham Island Mollymawk, Magellanic Penguin, Soft-plumaged Petrel, Grey Plover, Salvin's, Thin-billed and Antarctic Prions, Stewart Is. Robin, Ruff, Saddleback, Marsh Sandpiper, Little Black Shag, Hutton's Shearwater, Campbell Is. Teal, Whiskered Tern, plus nest shots of Kaka, Bellbird and NZ Dotterel. Many offshore subspecies are absent, particularly parakeets.

If you have slides of any of these, I would be delighted to add them to the collection. For more information on how to order slides from the Library, see *OSNZ News* 72 (September 1994).

PAUL CUMING
OSNZ Slide Library
82 Morrinsville Road
Hamilton

OSNZ News photographs

Members are invited to submit good photographs of birds for publication from time to time in *OSNZ News* to "brighten" your publication. These photos are intended to accompany particular articles regarding the species in question, or as items of interest in general, on a regular basis.

Good quality slides and prints are acceptable. Composition of the photograph is not important, as this can be done at the typesetting stage.

Please send copies of your favourite bird photos, plus a short account of where and when the photo was taken, to the editor at the address on the front page. All contributions will not necessarily appear straight away, but will nonetheless be gratefully accepted!

TONY CROCKER

A Crested Tern at Port Taranaki

The Crested Tern is apparently a rare vagrant to New Zealand proper. The Checklist records live birds only at Farewell Spit, Firth of Thames, Napier, Wellington Harbour and west coast and Kaikoura.

The first Crested Tern observed in this area was flying with White-fronted Terns at Port Taranaki on 1 November 1995. What was presumably the same individual was seen again and photographed on 29 November 1995 when it came to rest for a short time with a group of White-fronted Terns on a rock wall extending from the shore. It has not been seen subsequently. It is difficult to determine the age and plumage stages of most terns. The New Plymouth bird appeared to be an adult, apparently approaching summer plumage. Its subspecific identity is unknown. I am not able to say whether the extension of the black head plumage to below its eyes, obvious in the accompanying photograph, has any material bearing on that issue, or whether that feature is a factor relevant only to age or season.

DAVID MEDWAY

(A second Crested Tern, this one in full breeding plumage, was recorded at Washdyke Lagoon, South Canterbury, on 18 November 1995.)



Crested Tern at Port Taranaki. 29 Nov. 1995. Photo: David Medway.

Mystery Bird #22

Occasionally when birding you are left with a far from satisfactory view of a potential cripplingly good bird, such as when your binocular lenses are covered in salt spray from too much seagazing. Unfortunately Mystery Bird # 22 appears to be in such conditions! It was planned to have a slightly larger, out of focus bird reproduced, but we don't always get the views we want, do we? Despite this fact (and I'm sure all OSNZ members clean their binoculars regularly), we are still trying to identify all the birds we see, if at all possible. So what is it?

While the view is pretty awful, there is actually a surprisingly large amount of detail contained in it. The bill is moderately long, possibly tapering. The wings are quite broad, but pointed, and the tail and/or legs are fairly long. The plumage is strongly marked, with a clean white underwing with dark linings, dark on the outer upperwing with a pale area near the base of the primaries, and smudgy black markings from the head down the underside to about the belly, possibly even to the vent.

Firstly, what on earth is it? The combination of longish bill and pointed wings suggests a wader, especially with the possibly long legs (but short neck, unlike herons, etc.). Narrowing down the options from this can be quickly done just on the bill. While it is longish, it is much shorter than the truly long-billed waders, such as godwits, curlews and whimbrels (except Little Whimbrel), dowitchers, snipes, oystercatchers and stilts. Equally so, it is much longer than the plovers and short-billed sandpipers (eg. stints). But it does fit the bill of a medium-sized sandpiper, and the plumage details help us reduce the field further.

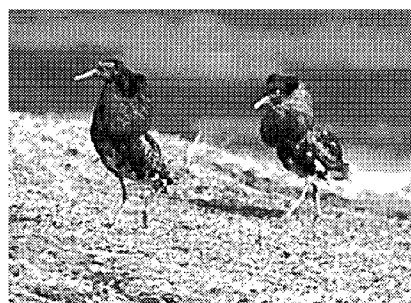
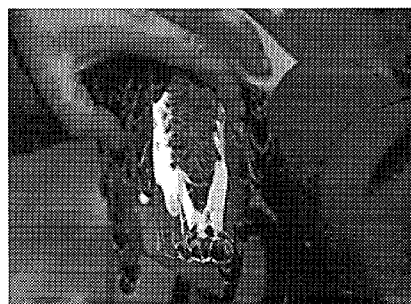
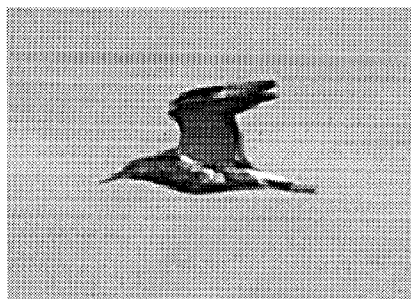
Certain species on the New Zealand list do enter a breeding plumage with dark breasts and upperparts, such as the Curlew, Sharp-tailed and Pectoral Sandpipers, and Red and Great Knots. Curlew Sandpiper has a very long, fine bill, and slenderer proportions than this bird. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers are unlikely to show such solidly dark markings on the underside, while the lack of a clean cut-off from breast to belly, and the markings on the side would argue against Pectoral Sandpiper. These two also show very little in the way of a wingbar. Plumage-wise, Red Knot is the most likely to show such (slightly uneven) colouration on the underparts when moulting to or from breeding plumage, although Great Knots do develop a dark breast, and also have some markings down the sides as well. However the proportions of this bird do not agree with the knots, lacking the stoutness of a Red Knot, while the bill appears too short for a Great Knot. The legs appear too long for all of the above species. Time to look back again at the field guide!



Mystery Bird #23

Identify this bird. Answer next issue.

Having failed to find an obvious contender, is there any especially variable species which may have escaped our first perusal? A sharp eye will reveal that there is one additional sandpiper which should be considered - the Ruff. This is a large, Eurasian sandpiper, known for its lekking breeding habits, and strong sexual size and plumage dimorphism (the latter only in the breed-



ing season). In the non-breeding season, both sexes are plain brown and white birds, but in the breeding season the males develop incredible ear tufts, a neck ruff (these can be dark, pale or intermediate, and the birds' behaviour differs accordingly) and darken on the undersides. The females (known as Reeves) become slightly splotchy on the breast, but not to the degree shown here. Of course, birds do moult after breeding, the males losing their elaborate ruffs to leave just the darker "regular" plumage of the breast. With this suggestion, the rest falls into place, such as the long legs and the large wingbar on the outer wing. The strongest plumage feature of the Ruff is also visible - the white sides to the rump, which are very long and show up as large white oblongs in flight. This shows up well in the mystery bird.

I can confirm that this is indeed a Ruff, photographed in the south west Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia, in July 1995. As males provide no parental assistance to the female, their breeding duties are over early in the summer, although the fighting on the lek to obtain the attentions of a female in the early season can be very vigorous. These habits have earned the Ruff the rather great scientific name *Philomachus pugnax*. While it does breed right up to the Arctic (well over 70 degrees north), Ruffs also breed in lower numbers down Western Europe to the Netherlands and Britain. The accompanying photos show the distinctive rump and summer plumage of male Ruffs.

PHIL BATTLETT

Mystery Bird Quiz

As I mentioned in the December 1995 OSNZ News, quiz pictures J, K, and L would complete the Mystery Bird Quiz for the time being. The identifications of J, K and L were:

J Spur-winged Plover

K Dusky Moorhen

L Juvenile Coot

Congratulations to Pam Agnew, who wins the free annual OSNZ subscription with a 100% correct score.

Thank you to all those who entered, even from overseas.

DON HADDEN

Australasian Seabird Group

I was recently appointed the New Zealand representative for the Australasian Seabird Group. As we all know, New Zealand has far more seabirds than Australia and possibly more people who study seabirds, yet only about ten New Zealanders are members of the group. I hope that other New Zealand people interested in seabirds will join the group.

The Australasian Seabird Group publishes two newsletters each year and acts as a forum for people with an interest in seabirds on both sides of the Tasman. I will be contributing a "News from New Zealand" column in each issue of the newsletter and ask that Kiwi seabird people keep me informed of their activities.

The Group's annual subscription is A\$15.00 and this is payable to the Secretary Paul Scofield, Flat 1, 84 Federal Street, North Hobart, Tasmania 7000. I would be willing to collect the New Zealand subscriptions and send them all in at once to save bank charges. Please forward payment to arrive by 15 April 1996.

So if you are interested in seabirds, join the Australasian Seabird Group, and if you are doing research on New Zealand seabirds please tell me about it.

KERRY-JAYNE WILSON

Department of Entomology and Animal Ecology

P.O. Box 84 Lincoln University

Fernbirds on Mt Edgecumbe

The upper parts on the northern slopes of Mt Edgecumbe in the Bay of Plenty seem an unlikely place to find the New Zealand Fernbird. Therefore when I thought I had seen one about two years ago, I decided that there was too much doubt to be sure.

I visited the same area again on Sunday 12 November 1995. There was no doubt this time that the birds we saw were indeed North Island Fernbirds. The vegetation in this area is generally tall native grasses, including Toetoe, with small native trees such as Lemonwood, which have a generally dry undergrowth. The north facing ridge is exposed to the highest amount of sun on the mountain. The patch of grassland is

at around 650-750 metres elevation.

Mt Edgecumbe is isolated from other native forest vegetation by large plantations of pine forest on the southern and western sides, with farmland to the coast on the northern and eastern sides. This isolation and habitat does appear to be an unlikely place to find fernbirds.

JOHN BRIERLEY

Fiordland Conservation tour

Paying participants are invited to join Red Feather Expeditions' ecological research programme to Breaksea Sound from 8-16 April 1996. Assisting with follow-up research based on the successful eradication of rats from Breaksea and Hawea Islands, the trip will focus on the recently re-established populations of skinks, weevils and NZ Robins on these and other islands, plus monitoring of seabirds and other vertebrates in Breaksea, Dusky and Doubtful Sounds.

Scientific Leader Bruce Thomas of Landcare and Group Leader Doug Mende head the expedition aboard the vessel "Breaksea Girl", and participants will follow a busy programme as "amateur researchers", supporting the research which, through funding constraints, would not otherwise be able to take place.

Details from Beth Coleman or Doug Mende; Red Feather Expeditions, Box 60243, Titirangi, Auckland, phone/fax (09) 817 9396.

BETH COLEMAN

Birds of the World

Birds of the World by Charles G. Sibley is a computerised "book" for anyone interested in birds. It is on two compressed 3.5 inch diskettes and if printed would occupy about 1000 pages. Version 2.0 is updated to 1 February 1996.

The diskettes contain the Sibley, Ahlquist and Monroe sequence of classification based on the evidence of genetic relationships produced by more than 20,000 comparisons among 1700 species using DNA-DNA hybridisation (Sibley and Ahlquist, 1990 *Phylogeny and Classification of Birds*. Yale University Press).

Contents: Latin and English names, habitats and geographic distributions for 2,061 genera and 9,802 (or more) species in Version 2.0. Morphological characters for orders, families, some genera and some species. Family level information on food, feeding behaviour, nests, eggs and other aspects of natural history. Taxonomic comments, references and abstracts of recent literature, including studies based on DNA sequencing and DNA-DNA hybridisation. Brief essays on classification, names and nam-

ing, phylogeny, species/subspecies definitions, hybridisation, DNA methods, references, glossary. "Hypertext" programming permits jumping to any order, genus or species in seconds.

Minimum computer system requirements: 386, 486 or higher CPU, 4 megabytes of RAM, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95. Only the PC version is currently available. A Macintosh version may be available in 1996.

May be purchased from Thayer Birding Software, P.O. Box 43243, Cincinnati, OH 45243, USA. Fax (513) 561 4486, E-mail "74644.2577@compuserve.com". Web page www.birder.com. Price US\$75.00 plus US\$10.00 shipping outside of the U.S.

For more information and tech support, or to offer comment or corrections etc.: Charles G. Sibley, 433 Woodley Place, Santa Rosa, CA 95409, USA. Fax (707) 539 1026. E-mail "sibley@sonoma.edu"

Regional Roundup

Northland

This year summer began with a lot of rain over the December-January period, followed by hot, humid weather, so lake levels are higher than normal and vegetation more lush in general.

Members arriving at Paua on the Parengarenga Harbour in early November to carry out the wader census found the farmer busy ploughing up the flat paddocks to plant squash. These paddocks have been an important wader roost for many years, so we will be interested to see what impact this changed land use has on the birds.

Good numbers of waders were counted but only two Wrybills and two Pacific Golden Plovers were found. Other interesting finds were a Pectoral and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 22 Curlew Sandpipers and a Greenshank (at Lake Ohia).

The Kaipara and Whangarei Harbours were surveyed for the census in late November. A lone Wrybill and a single Golden Plover were seen at Port Whangarei with a further 40 Golden Plover counted at Takahiwai - otherwise results were about average for the time of year.

Beach patrols have continued each month with good numbers and a wide range of species being recovered. A bird which is possibly a New Caledonian Petrel was found on Waipu Beach. A live American Whimbrel was seen during the September patrol about 10 kms south of Tikinui on the west coast.

From 1996 two new beach patrol regions have been created by separating Northland from Auckland's west and

east coasts. Northland's regions stretch from Cape Maria van Diemen to Poutu in the west and Bream Tail, at Mangawhai Harbour in the east. It will now be easier to determine how far south tropical species are being located by patrollers, and the exact extent of seabird wrecks, and we are pleased to be credited with the work that we do in the North.

We were fortunate to have Glyn Young, Senior Bird Custodian at the Jersey Wildlife Trust, deliver an address, accompanied by excellent slides, on Madagascar and its endangered teal. Don Merton also gave an interesting talk with slides on his work with the Black Robin on Little Mangere Island, his involvement with the recovery plan for the Magpie Robin in the Seychelles Islands and an update on the Kakapo recovery management plan.

Our end-of-year barbecue at Bill and Anne Ringer's property became an indoor function because of rain but was enjoyed all the same. Six Whangarei members plus Terry and Raewyn Smith from Napier spent the Christmas break in the sunshine at Taiko Camp on Chatham Island, preparing for a radio telemetric effort at the end of this year. Only one rainy day, and the bogs weren't even boggy!

In late December Audrey Williams and her team banded 69 Black-backed Gull chicks at Waipu oxidation ponds, continuing our on-going project to see how far they travel and how long they live.

The Fairy Terns monitored in our area produced seven chicks, four of which fledged. Tidal floods and nest desertion (possibly caused by 45 knot winds sandblasting the area) were major problems this year. A surveillance camera set at two frames per second was used for the first time this season. No predation of a Fairy Tern nest was observed, but a trial period, monitoring a Caspian Tern colony, captured good footage of a cat - now deceased - killing chicks and eating only their brains.

A Red-tailed Tropicbird was found exhausted in Dargaville in mid-January and was cared for at the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre until it suddenly died after around a week. It had only one of the distinctive red tail streamers but otherwise appeared normal.

During Auckland Anniversary weekend, a large group of Northland and three Auckland members undertook a high tide survey of the Rangaunu, Houhora and Parengarenga Harbours on Saturday, followed by a survey of the Far North lakes on Sunday and Monday. The lakes have not been fully surveyed since 1987 and the status of some had changed - they were either completely dry or rush-filled. The most interesting find was that Australian Little Grebes are well established in some areas, especially on the southern Aupori Peninsula.

We have an interesting programme planned for 1996 and look forward to a rewarding year carrying out these activities together.

(Lorna Simpkin)

Auckland

Phillip Battley spoke at our November meeting on his travels to Kolguer Island and the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia. Birdlife on the island consisted of mainly waterfowl but there was a high population of Dunlin. A most interesting bird Phil spoke of was the Ruff. He found a nest of a Spotted Redshank which was a real find. A principle feature of the peninsula was the swarms of mosquitos. Passerines, raptors and waders were observed, but not a single Bar-tailed Godwit. Members were interested in the skins Phil brought along with him. He is not a fearless hunter - they were given to him!

At our December meeting John Rowe, ably assisted by Stella, gave a most interesting talk on the birds of Chile. Species seen were most diverse - from hummingbirds to penguins. The talk was illustrated by slides, and several were of the countryside with vegetation similar to that of New Zealand.

To many New Zealanders interested in birds a visit to the Bird Hall of the Auckland Museum has been a must. Modernisation of all of the museum displays is now underway and this includes the Bird Hall which is to be closed. Dr Brian Gill, curator of land vertebrates, spoke at our February meeting, giving us a history of the museum's bird collection and what the future holds. Members were later able to visit the Bird Hall for the last time. The evening marked the passing of an era and the welcoming in of a new age, where the exhibition of natural history will be modernised and at the same time take on an even greater importance. It was fitting that Graham Turbott, a former director of the museum, was present, and, in a short address, pointed out the importance of the museum's bird collection.

Gwenda Pulham was presented on 8 December with a 1995 Conservation Award for her significant contribution to the conservation and study of the Fairy Tern by DoC's northern conservancy. Gwenda is a very active member and the award was one that was richly deserved by this enthusiastic and committed birder.

Two Mongolian Dotterels were seen at Tapura on 26 November, and the same day 41 Whimbrels were counted during the South Kaipara Harbour census. Significant figures for the census were also 13,620 Lesser Knot and 14,585 Bar-tailed Godwit.

A Grey-tailed Tattler was observed in November in Shoal Bay, which is directly across the harbour from Queen Street. A White Heron was seen at the

Pakiri River estuary on 15 December - a first for this particular site.

After a late start to the nesting season for Caspian and White-fronted Terns, high tides in November washed many nests away and caused abandonment of sites. Variable Oystercatchers, Fairy Terns and NZ Dotterels were also affected. Black-billed Gulls, found nesting for the first time in the harbour, lost nine nests.

Nesting of all species recommenced in December but high tides again caused devastation. Cats at Mangawhai did not help either. Overall the breeding season results for beach and shellbank nesters have been extremely poor.

(Doug Booth)

South Auckland

As usual the end of the year came along with astonishing speed, and many of us South Aucklanders found ourselves at our annual end-of-year barbecue, this time at Annette and Tony Habraken's Pukekohe property. It was as usual a most enjoyable evening and fortunately the weather stayed kind.

On 1 January Pam and Des Agnew and myself decided to check out an area of mixed mudflat and shellbank near Duders Beach which, until recently, was privately owned and inaccessible to the public. The main aim of the visit was to establish whether the area is used as a high tide roost, which, indeed, it was. Present in the area at the time was a sizeable flock of Bar-tailed Godwit and Lesser Knot, plus a few each of Variable Oystercatcher, New Zealand Dotterel, Spur-winged Plover, Banded Dotterel, Paradise Shelduck and, briefly, two Wrybill. Certainly the site has potential, and we shall check it regularly in future.

A record of note pertains to us sighting four Kaka flying and calling over Maraetai on the same day. Despite several reports of individuals in our region of late, this constitutes a rare sighting indeed and not a bad start for the first day of 1996.

The following day, seven members were taken across by boat to the sand island at the mouth of the Waikato River to assess the breeding success or otherwise of the Caspian Terns, Variable Oystercatchers and New Zealand Dotterels which nest there. Of the latter we counted eight adults and two juveniles. Variable Oystercatchers numbered 34 adults, ten juveniles and a tiny chick. There were 191 Caspian adults, 75 juveniles and 16 nests still in attendance.

In addition to these breeding birds, there were also numerous Black-backed Gull chicks present and a constant overhead vigil was maintained by their noisy parents. We watched with interest as an unsuspecting harrier crossed over from the mainland and was very quickly set upon by the gulls. Despite beating a

hasty retreat the harrier was still constantly bombarded to the point where it ended up in the river. We watched with concern as it fought against a strong current and flapped in vain on the surface of the water. I am happy to report that, after a fifteen minute struggle, the bird made it to the other side and lazily pulled itself out of the water, seemingly none the worse for the ordeal. We were unable to intervene as the boat had returned to the mainland and was not due back for some time.

On 21 January a visit was made to Tapora on the eastern side of the Kaipara Harbour. After sorting through and counting an assemblage of waders, we agreed upon the following totals - 93 Wrybills, 1000 godwits, 1500 knots, 300 Banded Dotterels, five Far-eastern Curlews, thirteen Red-necked Stints and two Large Sand Dotterels. It was a first visit for many of us to Tapora and made for an interesting day.

A couple of worthwhile items have come to light from Conifer Grove, thanks to Elaine Ward who lives in the area. A colour banded Pied Stilt from Canterbury has been recorded both from there and the Drury oxidation ponds, and the frequently seen Marsh Sandpiper was last recorded on 24 January.

After four visits to the Black-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern colony at Miranda, a total of 165 gull and thirteen tern chicks were processed and now sport green bands on their upper tarsus. One individual Red-billed Gull chick found among them quite possibly represents the first breeding record for Miranda.

After a walk on 14 December along Sunset Beach, Port Waikato, Tony Habraken reported 140 White-fronted Terns outside the surf club, a further 380 at the end of the beach, 80 on the sand island and up to 200 out at sea. The weather conditions were wet and windy and the entire coastline on the return walk was awash with terns, actively feeding just off shore.

Not surprisingly, such activity attracted the attention of several skuas, in the form of five Arctics and a Pomarine.

Our latest beach patrol turned out to be especially noteworthy as absolutely nothing was picked up. Although a negative result, it is still of interest as it is such a rare occurrence and, I guess, good news for the birds!

(Paul Harrison)

Waikato

A small party enjoyed a weekend in the Rangitoto Ranges Station where many bush birds were seen and heard, in spite of the rather inclement weather. Those who know the area from past visits were pleased to see native plantings coming away well on what was previously open farmland. Tui, Bellbirds and Robins were vocal after the rain. Silvereyes, Tomtits,

Whiteheads, Grey Warblers and Shining Cuckoos were reasonably common, but only four or five NZ Pigeon were noted. Kaka and Riflemen were heard in the virgin forest. Mixed flocks of finches were seen on the bush edges and the resident pair of NZ Falcon was seen from the house. Altogether 31 species of birds were identified.

Our gull and tern survey was completed as part of our normal census, but no nesting colonies were found inside Kawhia or Aotea Harbours. As the day was fairly blustery, and the tide particularly high, some areas that may have supported nesting colonies in the past were completely inundated. In fact, a small colony of Red-billed Gulls had their nesting attempts washed out as we watched on Te Motu sandbank, but a NZ Dotterel with three eggs was valiantly guarding her nest despite being surrounded by water. A coastline search by car later in the week found a small colony of White-fronted Terns nesting on coastal cliffs at Raglan.

Phil Battle entertained all with a graphic report of his high Arctic adventure, and we were greatly intrigued by the cryptic colouration of various wader chicks in the nest, blending in perfectly with the colourful tundra vegetation. Trying to find nests of waders such as Dunlin, plovers, turnstones, stints, phalaropes and Ruff would have daunted most of us, but turned out to be a piece of cake for the indomitable Phil.

We concluded our year by socialising around a scrumptious pot luck dinner, which was followed by light entertainment provided by a couple of members and an evening visit to Otorohanga Zoo, where a large group had gathered for a picnic tea before being shown around. All were intrigued with the antics of Freefall the tame Kokako, who obligingly nibbled offered fingers, then intimidated the Great Spotted Kiwi, who bounded up and down the fence line of his enclosure, inspecting any hand with his snapping bill, then dealing with it in kiwi fashion with a formidable kick!

(Bev Woolley)

Hawkes Bay

November was taken up with the wader census and gull and tern survey. We held a meeting on 5 November to organise the gull and tern survey. During the summer wader census at Porangahau a colony of c.250 Black-billed Gulls and four Red-billed Gulls was found. On revisiting the colony on New Year's Day it was found to be washed out. This year there has been no sign of the usual c.1400 White-fronted Terns nesting at Waitangi/Tukituki. A few birds (around 60) were seen nesting at Black Reef, and around 20 pairs of Black-bills and 15 pairs of White-fronted Terns were nesting on Napier wharf. It would seem that these species are not nesting en masse

in Hawkes Bay this season.

One White-fronted Tern was seen on the Ngaruroro River above the Fernhill bridge at Christmas with quite a large chick. A couple of days later this river was in flood. A trip to Little's Clearing and Makahu Saddle at the beginning of January was a highlight for those few members who went. A combination of birdwatching and botanising was rewarding. A pair of Moreporks was seen with two young birds roosting at Little's Clearing. Whiteheads, Riflemen and Tomtits were present. At Makahu a Long-tailed Cuckoo could be heard.

Our Christmas meeting combined an informal twitchathon finishing with a barbecue at Jim and Christine's. A trip to Boundary Stream in late January was postponed due to wet weather.

The wader census in November held no surprises, but of note were nine Red-necked Stints and three Curlew Sandpipers at Porangahau. Godwit numbers appeared to be back up to their usual number after last year's low count. Ten Royal Spoonbills were still present at Ahuriri and two were seen at the lagoon at the northern end of Porangahau.

(Christine McRae)

Taranaki

The first Shining Cuckoo recorded in our region for this season was heard on 21 September, which is just a week earlier than last year. Three Long-tailed Cuckoos have also been heard and seen.

New Plymouth's two Rooks were reported to be nesting in October and two young were seen flying with the adults in December. In Waitara two Royal Spoonbills were seen on one occasion and one on another. A White Heron was recorded near Cape Egmont and three Australasian Bitterns were observed in a paddock near the coast.

Good records for Taranaki came from a trip to the coast near Okato, with Crested Tern, NZ Dotterel, Variable Oystercatcher with chick and NZ Pipits being sighted amongst the more usual birds.

News from the Sugarloaf Islands is that, despite approximately 300 Red-billed Gulls and 50 White-fronted Terns having been counted there, this is the first time in over thirty years that they have failed to nest on the islands, which is a mystery to us all. An area of recently "reclaimed" land near New Plymouth's Lee Breakwater looked like a new nesting site for the terns as approximately 300 birds and some nests were seen, including two eggs, but this site later appeared abandoned.

Some unusual bird behaviour has been reported again over the last months of 1995. Two Starlings were trying to get the fledglings out of a nest box by holding food out of range of the chicks. One falcon was seen taking sparrows which were fed in a resident's back yard in

Waitara. Two interesting observations of Magpies hunting were noted. One was a bird landing on a bowling green, and catching and killing a mouse before flying off with it. The other concerned two birds seen knocking a Blackbird out of the air and killing it on the ground. A Chaffinch was also located with a wound on the back of its head which could have been caused the same way.

(Erika Woodger)

Manawatu

Our end of year get-together, on 29 November, was a great success. The pot luck dinner was very tasty and Ian Hunt's video of New Zealand birds was very impressive. Ian is a returned local resident and has travelled widely in New Zealand. Most of the bird shots are in natural habitats and he has obviously spent many hours assembling the video with appropriate titles and commentary. Roger Wasley also showed us his new slides of the Black Shag colony he has been photographing over the last three seasons. His hide was so close to some of the nests you really felt you might be fed with the chicks!

As far as I know, no unusual waders have visited the Manawatu Estuary over the summer. On 4 February there were 360 Bar-tailed Godwits, 183 Lesser Knots, 55 South Island Pied Oystercatchers, three Variable Oystercatchers, three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, nine Caspian Terns, 100 plus Pied Stilts, 67 Banded Dotterels, a Siberian Tattler, thirteen Golden Plovers and 30 Wrybills. Numbers of Lesser Knots have been well down compared to the previous year. Is this a local phenomenon, or is it New Zealand-wide? Two banded birds were spotted, one a Wrybill which returned about 7 January according to Jim Moore. This bird was banded as a chick by DoC on the Ohau River in November 1993. It has certainly been site-faithful since then. We also found a banded SIPO, the first to our knowledge at Foxton. Jim Moore had also seen fifteen Royal Spoonbills feeding at low tide at the estuary.

Phil Battley and his intrepid canoeists did battle with the Manawatu and its tributaries and managed to find one colony of Black-billed Gulls at the confluence of the Manawatu and Mangahou. It has subsequently been checked out by local members on foot. The gulls did not nest on an island near Palmerston North city this year, but there is intensive new stopbank work going on in the river, so that is not surprising.

Plans for the AGM are well underway, so fill out the registration form in this issue. We look forward to welcoming you to Foxton on Queen's Birthday weekend.

(Pam Slack)

Wellington

Wellington has got off to a busy start to a full and busy programme for 1996, with three field trips already undertaken by early February. The kiwi counts on Kapiti have started. The first two count evenings were fine and mild, with especially good numbers from Seismology Hut, the southernmost of the count stations. In the daytime we helped with the supplementary feeding and observation programme for the Stitchbirds. Two bonuses for Janet and I, who were working together, were a Stitchbird chick being fed, and we watched one of the Kokako flopping through the treetops for several minutes. We also looked for robins.

The second quarterly count at Karori Reservoir has just been done. Colin Miskelly talked to us at our evening meeting about how the statistical analysis of these results will be used, so it all makes a bit more sense now.

Late last year we scoured the region for Black-backed Gull nests and eggs. We covered Kapiti, Ward, Somes and Mana Islands, as well as Wellington Harbour and coastline. So, in January, on a very hot day we returned to Somes Island to band some chicks, who weren't thrilled at being chased all over the paddocks. We banded 160 and were well pleased.

The November meeting was a bit of a gamble which paid off handsomely. A panel consisting of Ralph Powlesland, Sandy Bartle and Colin Miskelly answered a range of members' questions and engaged in vigorous discussion on a wide range of ornithological topics. The gamble was that there might not have been any questions, but they came thick and fast. We are fortunate to have these knowledgeable people on hand and always ready to give information.

In February Geoff de Lisle talked about his work testing kiwis for the rabbit calicivirus. A highly political issue, it was good to get some facts about the virus and its effects. Ros and Derek Batcheler showed some photos of their trip to the Farne Islands last year.

(Ros Batcheler)

Canterbury

Distinguished Canterbury member John Warham was honoured by the British Ornithologists' Union in December, when he was appointed an Honorary Member of the Union. John is currently working on finishing touches to his forthcoming *The Behaviour, Population Ecology and Physiology of the Petrels*.

Canterbury has slowed down a little this summer, owing to the fact that I have been helping to build a new house and accordingly have not been able to put my usual commitment into our affairs. I did manage to organise the gull and tern survey, along with Peter Howden in South Canterbury, which accounted for our October and November field trips.

Everything went well for the survey, thanks to the use of planes and jet boats pin-pointing the colonies, followed by members going in and counting nests on foot. Canterbury had a final total of about 17,000 Black-billed Gulls. The most important rivers were the Ashburton, with well over 5,000 birds, and the Opihi and Orari with over 6,000 and 3,000 respectively. The Rakaia (except at the mouth) and Waimakiriri returned nil results. Few Black-fronted Terns were counted, but these could not be seen from the air. Details of White-fronted Terns are not all in as yet.

One colony of Black-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns was easily accessible, enabling weekly checks. Located some 5 kms upstream from the Ashley River mouth, the colony was very successful.

Just one evening meeting to report on which was in November. Johanna Pierre gave an account of her studies on the recently released South Island Saddlebacks on Motuara Island in the Marlborough Sounds. Johanna has now left us to continue her studies in Canada, and we all wish her well.

Our Lake Ellesmere Caspian Tern colony had 90 birds with 35 nests. A Crested Tern was seen at Washdyke Lagoon and White-winged Black Terns have again been sighted here and there. For the second summer Lake Ellesmere has produced a Little Curlew and the Ashley Estuary had six Far-eastern Curlews.

Andrew Crossland organised a count of waders in mid-February. The count is not yet complete, but is based on studies which show that estuaries tend to have peak numbers at this time. Key sites are being counted and will be collated.

Most excitingly, Peter Langlands has seen a Laysan Albatross on one of his offshore trips. He photographed the bird, and the identification has been confirmed by John Warham. The record will be forwarded to the Rare Birds Committee, and, if confirmed, will be the first sighting in New Zealand waters since Captain Cook!

(Sheila Petch)

DEADLINE FOR THE JUNE ISSUE IS 10 MAY