

Note: Deadline for the September issue will be 10th August

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

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

OSNZ News

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Lake Kohangatera Black Shags

Breeding of the Black Shags near Lake Kohangatera, Wellington, began in 1995 in early April, as in previous seasons, and extended until late October when the last nestlings left their nests. During each visit most observations involved noting the stage of nesting at each nest (nest-building, incubating, feeding chicks), the number of chicks, and the presence of banded adults.

Banding of chicks began in late May, with individual combinations of colour bands, one leg having white over metal to denote 1995 as the year of banding. The weight of nestlings at banding varied from 800 to 2,000 g., but most were 1,000 to 1,500 g. While banding one chick, it regurgitated a 315 g. eel, which was nearly 28% of the chick's weight! The sighting of each banded nestling was recorded to determine which ones survived to fledge. Each time banded fledglings were seen, their band combinations were noted as well as whether they were still being fed by their parents.

There were at least 31 nests occupied during April-May, and a further six during June-July. Three nests were occupied by pairs of which one bird had been banded in 1992 (3 year olds). One of these birds bred in 1994 and the other two were breeding for the first time. All three pairs fledged chicks, although one pair failed at their first attempt.

None of the birds banded in 1993 nested successfully. Three such birds were regularly seen at the colony, two of which paired together, occupied and refurbished an old nest, but probably the female did not lay eggs since they were not seen incubating.

Of the approximately 25 individually banded shags that fledged last season, none were seen at the colony during the nesting season. At least two were known to survive, having been seen about Wellington Harbour during May-

October. Hopefully others have evaded detection because 8% survival is very low.

Of the 31 "early" nestings (clutches laid April-May), 27 were sufficiently visible by telescope from the opposite ridge for us to determine nesting success. 21 nestings succeeded in fledging at least one chick each (78%). Of the six nestings that failed, the clutches apparently failed to hatch in four, the young brood in one died during harsh weather, and the reason for the other failure is unknown. All six of the "late" nestings succeeded in raising fledglings. Thus overall nesting success was 82%.

Of the successful nestings in 1995, nine resulted in one fledgling each, 14 in two fledglings and four in three fledglings. This gives an overall result of 1.5 fledglings per successful pair. The unsuccessful early nestings raised fewer fledglings per nest (1.4) than the late nestings (1.7). 37 nestlings were banded during the season, of which 31 fledged (84%). One fledgling was seen obtaining food from a parent when it was about 140 days old, nearly three months after leaving the nest for the first time. This long period of dependence probably reflects the difficulty that fledgling shags have in learning to find and catch sufficient prey to survive.

Two banded fledglings, siblings, were both found starving at about three months of age when they would have been learning to forage, but should have been receiving some food from their parents. Both were handed to Viv Hextall of the Eastern Bays Blue Penguin Foundation. One died within an hour, but the other, Peter, gradually improved. Within five days the bird had recovered sufficiently to fly away from its backyard home right beside the sea. Over the next few days of soft release, whereby it was free to leave and forage, it learnt to return "home" when hungry for a meal of pilchards. Six weeks after being found

in dire straits, it was officially discharged since at night it roosted at places unknown and returned only once a day, if at all, for a meal. It was seen associating with another Black Shag and catching fish, so seemed to have learned to forage reasonably successfully. Hopefully it will survive for another two or three years and return to its natal colony to breed.

Our thanks to David and Michael Bell, June Bullock, David Cornick, Reg Cotter, Geoff de Lisle, Alan Munro, Kerry Oates, Jon Powell, Colin Scadden, Neville Todd and Janice Woon for assistance with banding nestlings and reporting sightings of banded birds; to Viv Hextall for the recovery and release of "Peter"; to Mike Curtis for access to the colony, and to the Lower Hutt City Council for granting us vehicle access beyond the Pencarrow gate.

RALPH POWLESLAND
& PETER REESE

An earlier report of the Lake Kohangatera Black Shag colony appeared in OSNZ News No. 65.

Jenny Hawkins

Members will be saddened to hear of the passing away of Jenny Hawkins in Nelson on 25 April 1996. A Council member, the Society's Banding Liaison Officer and Nelson region's Regional Representative for many years, Jenny's enthusiastic participation at all levels of the society will be sadly missed. Our sincere sympathy is extended to Brian and family.

New Constitution Approved

The 1996 AGM of the Society in Foxton approved the replacement of the existing Constitution with the new Constitution which was circulated to members as a Notice of Motion. This means that from 2 June 1996 the Society will operate according to these new objects and rules until amended.

C.J.R. ROBERTSON
President

Nominations for Regional Representatives 1997

Each region of the Society shall have a Regional Representative who will be an Officer of the Society and as such is responsible to the Council for the management of the region. Each RR shall serve for one year (from 1 January 1997) and is eligible for re-election.

Nominations for the Regional Representative of each region of the Society will close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 12397, Wellington) on 31 July 1996. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must be a financial member of the Society.

If more than one valid nomination is received by the Secretary a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 1997 year.

RAEWYN EMPSON
Secretary

Co-opted Councillor

Council is pleased to announce that Paul Sagar has agreed to be co-opted onto Council to fill the position left vacant by the sudden death of Jenny Hawkins. Further, under the new constitution, he has been appointed to act as the South Island Vice President of the Society until the first election for this position can be held in 1997.

C.J.R. ROBERTSON
President

New Banding Liaison Officer

Council is pleased to announce the immediate appointment of Chris Challies, 22a Highfield Place, Avonhead, Christchurch 4, as the Banding Liaison Officer to replace the late Jenny Hawkins.

C.J.R. ROBERTSON
President

Gull and Tern Survey - Preliminary Results

The following are the preliminary results of the 1995/96 National Black-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern survey. Not all details have been received from all regions, so totals for regions and therefore the grand totals are provisional only.

Many regions commented that the breeding season for, especially, White-fronted Terns, appeared not to be a good one. On the basis of this, and the desirability of a comparison with this year's survey, it has been decided to repeat the exercise. Details will be published in the September *OSNZ News*.

Black-billed Gull

Region	No. of nests	Totals
Northland	nil	
Auckland		
Rat Island	3	
Shell Island	9	12
South Auckland		
Kidds	26	
Miranda	80	106
Waikato	nil	
Taranaki	nil	
Volcanic Plateau		
Sulphur Point,		
Rotorua	166	166
Bay of Plenty	nil	
Gisborne/Wairoa		
Portland Island	17	17
Hawkes Bay		
Napier Wharf	c.20	c.20
Wanganui	nil	
Manawatu		
Manawatu/Mangahou	Rock c.10	c.10
Wairarapa	nil	
Wellington	nil	
Nelson		
Buller/Howard Rivers	c.75	
Upper Matakaitaki R.	c.10	c.85

Marlborough		
Upper Buller R.	82	
Wairau Bridge	c.200	
Ure R. mouth	5	c.287
West Coast	nil	
Canterbury		
Ahuriri R. (2 colonies)		
195	Tekapo R.	c.25
Cass R.	c.10	
Tasman R.	c.10	
Wairau R. (2 colonies)		
213		
Hurunui R.	c.230	
Ashburton R.	c.3865	
Rakaia R. mouth 4		
Orari R.	c.1200	
Opihi R. (2 colonies)		
c.3824		
Ashley R.	383	c.9960
Otago		
Waitaki R. (2 colonies)		
c.952		c.952
Southland		
Aparima R. (2 colonies)		
c.12030		
Oreti R. (5 colonies)		
c.16737		
Wairau R. mouth	c.446	
Upukerora R.	c.178	
Mararoa R.	c.178	c.29569
TOTAL		c.41182

White-fronted Tern

Northland		
Three Kings Island	50+	
Motuora Islands	50	
Walker Island	133	
Mahinepua Peninsula	1	
Black Rocks	33	
Tapeka Point	57	
Motutara Island	47	
Te Hue Point	5	
Elliotts Bay	17	
Hokianga Harbour	3	
Whangarei	50	
Mangawhai Estuary	3	449+
Auckland		
Rat Island	58	
Okahu Bay	94	
Shell Island	36	
Karekare	40	
Muriwai	70	
Gannet Rocks	4	
Papakanui	300	
Great Barrier Island	16	c.620
South Auckland		
Kidds	92	
Miranda	71	
Alderman Islands	25	188
Waikato		
Woody Head	34+	
Taharoa	10+	44+
Taranaki		
Port Taranaki	57	57
Volcanic Plateau	nil	
Bay of Plenty		
Sulphur Point	89	89
Gisborne/Wairoa		
Long Point	c.25	

Marau Point	c.35	
Portland Island	c.750	c.810
Hawkes Bay		
Napier Wharf	c.15	
Ngaruroro R.	1	
Porangahau Estuary	c.50	c.66
Wanganui	nil	
Manawatu	nil	
Wairarapa		
Castle Point	c.75	c.75
Wellington		
Ward Island	36	
Kapiti Island	17	53
Nelson		
Bells Island	185	
White Rocks	38	
Bird Island	65	
Chetwode Islands	97	
South Trio	34	
Paddock Rocks	5	424
Marlborough		
Coast Road, Kaikoura	2+	
First tunnel, Kaikoura	c.33	
Barney's Rock, Kaikoura	132	
Ure R. mouth	50	c.217
West Coast		
Punakaiki	30+	30+
Canterbury		
Rakaia R. mouth	13	
Ashley R.	192	205
Otago		
Waitaki R.	c.968	
Long Beach	120	c.1088
Southland		
Jacob's R. estuary	c.50	
Joey's Island	168	
New River estuary	20	c.238
	TOTAL	c.4653

Many thanks to participating members who made the survey such a success.

RALPH POWLESLAND
Convenor

From the President's Desk (Suitcase)

Your President's life continues to be dominated by travel, although not just around a small, rocky island to avoid the breezes. By the time you receive this issue of *OSNZ News* I expect to have seen close to 35% of the current New Zealand membership of the Society during my tour of the North Island and the AGM at Foxton. Though not a great opportunity to see many birds, the chance

to speak to members in Wanganui, Hamilton, Whangarei, Auckland, Rotorua, Matata (Bay of Plenty) and Napier has proven to be most stimulating and an opportunity to discuss future activities. These snippets will have been very useful at the Council and RRs' meeting at the AGM.

The most noticeable thing about the membership attending the meetings was probably the lack of young faces until I got to Hawkes Bay. Judging by the entertaining accounts and enthusiasm of the junior training course earlier in the year, we could all be stimulated by some younger legs and activity. In a recent survey of 120 Auckland members, some 40 replied, none of whom were under 20, and more than half were over 60. This suggests that the general structure of the membership may have aged somewhat since a general membership survey of the mid 1980s. Most of those who responded in Auckland preferred to watch birds on their own or in small groups, which again reflected the 1980s.

There were plenty of snippets of interesting ornithological information at most meetings, such as the comments about sparrows eating cicadas, and various observations of albino or isabelline birds in at least three different species. These and others were examples of observations which were not immediately being shared with the wider membership through the publications of the Society. It represents, I suspect, a growing (and probably unconscious) tendency in recent years to look inwards towards regional activity and with less focus on the Society as a national (and international) group of people interested in birds. This is an area which the first combined meeting of RRs and Council at the AGM will have addressed. This joint consideration of the Society and its needs is a new process and will, I hope, ensure that in the future there is much more focusing of activity with the new Constitution as a basis (assuming that this was passed at the AGM).

I continue to stress the need to add value to each of our birding or ornithological efforts, and the new constitution spells out various objects which reinforce the wider use of information everyone can gain each time they look at a bird. While all birding should be entertaining to the individual, the value comes in ensuring that the observation is not just the simple presence or absence of a species. Observations of numbers, behaviour, interaction with other species, use of habitat, feeding etc. are all simple things which every observer can record, with or without specific programmes for study. The development of these skills (along with the recording and sharing of information) means useful and constructive participation in national or regional projects which operate from time to time.

Possibly we need to have an ongoing education programme within the So-

ciety aimed at members to assist them in developing individual skills. Training courses are useful, but there seems to be a need for more personal attention or study opportunities in some cases. As a step towards this (and a result of a request made during my travels) we will be starting a questions corner in *OSNZ News* where members may ask short questions for expert answer by members of the Society or outside specialists. These may even involve asking an author of a paper in *Notornis* for a more detailed explanation of a specific point from a published paper.

During July I hope to visit members in the South Island, which will enable me to make observations on the birding behaviour of "Mainlanders" when compared to their northern cousins. Hopefully along the way I can have some birding experiences to match those I had at Tiritiri Matangi Island and at Matata. The first is a must if you are in Auckland, not only to see the dramatic revegetation results, but for the opportunities to see the marvellous range of bush birds and close-ups of Takahe in the "wild". Regular boat trips are run for the general public from Whangaparaoa. The long term trend counts done by Auckland OSNZ are proving a real boon to managers and researchers as a measure of change, in much the same way as the counts being done on Kapiti and Mana Islands, also by Society members. At the Matata wetlands, right by the main road and opposite the shops, there is a remarkably diverse display of wetland birds - Grey Duck, Mallard, Shoveller, Grey Teal, NZ Scaup, Canada Goose, Black Swan, NZ Dabchick and two species of shag regularly and other rarities as visitors. Well worth a visit - the local pies are great as well.

Finally I have to record with considerable sadness the death of Jenny Hawkins. An RR for Nelson for many years and a current Councillor, she has been an enthusiastic and cheerful friend and mentor to many members. The field of waders was her primary love, but in recent times this had been combined at Farewell Spit with promoting the monitoring and study of the developing gannet colony. After all, as the colony is often below sea level they could rightly be called waders at times. The Society expresses its condolences to Brian and the family

C.J.R. ROBERTSON - *President*

Small Terns, Large Dotterels

This year, Auckland OSNZ members have assisted with DoC's threatened species recovery programmes by counting post-breeding flocks of NZ Fairy Terns and NZ Dotterels in the region. Two surveys were undertaken, one on 23 March and the other on 20 April. We also kept

an eye out for any Shore Plover that may have wandered to the mainland from their release site on Motuora Island, but found none.

Most (if not all) of the Fairy Terns in New Zealand spend the autumn and winter around the Kaipara Harbour. Many of them breed on the North Auckland east coast however, so both areas were covered in the surveys. The March trip was a disaster, with terrible weather conditions denying us access to the main flock sites at Bird Island and Shell Island, both near Tabora on the Kaipara Harbour. By contrast, the April survey was highly successful and recorded a minimum of 25 birds and a maximum of 33 (we could not be sure that seven birds seen at Shell Island were not also counted at nearby Bird Island). At least 11 of the birds seen were colour-banded. The total population of the NZ Fairy Tern was estimated at around 28 birds in 1994, so our April count suggests that the subspecies has at least held its own in the past two years and may have increased slightly.

One question remains however. In 1993/94 there were nine known breeding pairs (seven of them in our region). In the following season there were also nine pairs (six in our region), but in 1995/96 only five pairs were found (four in our region). However our autumn count suggests that the population as a whole has not declined to the same extent. Has the number of pairs really fallen, or are a few pairs now breeding at undiscovered sites, possibly somewhere around the Kaipara Harbour?

The NZ Dotterel counts are designed to provide a quick annual check on the status of the species - by counting about 15-20 post-breeding flocks around the North Island each year, we can survey a large proportion of the population and should get early warning of any major decline in numbers. Unfortunately not all flocks are suitable for this purpose; at some, numbers fluctuate markedly within a few weeks or even days, probably because the birds have alternative roosts nearby. This year's survey provided no real surprises, although it was pleasing to see that over 100 dotterels now flock at Mangawhai Estuary.

The counts confirmed that we have four sites in the region (Mangawhai, Omaha, Tabora Sand Island and Te Matuku Bay, Waiheke Island) which give consistent results. Each autumn we can therefore monitor about 200 NZ Dotterels, a little over 15% of the entire North Island subspecies, by just checking four localities.

Two migrant waders of interest seen during the surveys were a Sanderling at Mangawhai and a Large Sand Dotterel in breeding plumage at Tabora.

GWENDA PULHAM/JOHN
DOWDING

Canterbury Rooks

Canterbury Regional Council's Pest Services announcement that all known Rooks in the Banks Peninsula area had been eradicated was greeted with applause at a March meeting of the Council's Resource Services Committee. Committee chairperson Cr Bill Penno said the serious damage to crops, pasture land and orchards caused by Rooks led to severe financial losses for landholders. The top priority is now to eradicate all remaining Rooks still to be found in the region, and to remain vigilant for Rooks which may fly in from rookeries just to the south of the region's southern boundary.

Work by the Pest Management Service's team had seen Rook numbers drop from around 5,500 three years ago to less than 50, while rookeries had dropped from about 50 to three. Killing methods included suspending a pest operator from a helicopter, to allow them to drop poison directly into a nest. Other regional councils have sought advice on successful Rook control methods.

This is believed to be the first time that Banks Peninsula has been free of Rooks since colonies appeared in the area in the late 1930s. Birds came from rookeries which became established in the greater Christchurch area following their liberation in the 1870s to control pasture pests. In the mid 1940s between 7,000 and 10,000 birds were reported to be living in Christchurch city itself.

IAN LUCAS

Canterbury Regional Council

Aerial Feeding of Young Swallows

While walking around Hamilton Lake on 8 December 1995, we watched three young Welcome Swallows being fed by their parents in mid-air. The recently fledged youngsters still showed traces of down on the sides of the breast and had pale gapes. They were by the water's edge, perched on stems of *Baumea articulata*, watching alertly for the adult birds. Each adult would call as it flew in with food. Immediately, one or more of the young birds would fly up and receive the prey in a brief aerial pass, before returning to its original perch. The action was too swift to see exactly how the food was passed on. In ten minutes or so, many aerial passes were made by the adults, but twice an adult landed near a juvenile and fed it while it perched.

STELLA & JOHN ROWE

A similar finding to the above was observed by my neighbours and myself in

early February, when three fledged Welcome Swallows were perched on power lines in front of the houses. Although both parent birds returned regularly with prey and called, only one chick at a time flew up to receive it. Occasionally one of the chicks would fly up and make a tentative, not always successful attempt to catch its own prey, before a parent returned. The tails of the young were noticeably shorter than those of their parents.

BEV WOOLLEY

Central Otago Grebes

In a short article in *Mountain Scene* of 29 December 1995, Dawn Palmer of DoC noted that "a pair of Southern Crested Grebes has successfully bred in the reeds at the southern end of Lake Hayes, while another pair has been seen sharing water space". More was to follow in a letter to Peter Schweigman from Don Hadden who had observed a pair of grebes on Moke Lake on 23 January 1996. After careful searching he found a nest with three eggs. We found the birds on 9 February but as the day progressed it was apparent that their nesting attempt had failed. On 25 February there was no sign of the grebes. Later we checked Lake Dispute without success.

On 11 February I located an adult grebe and three juveniles on Lake Hayes, and later three adults with the juveniles. Two of the juveniles were younger, while the older bird obviously did not require the attention of both parents. Further checks of various parts of the lake up to early March eventually revealed four breeding pairs which had produced seven young.

Lake Hayes would appear to have been colonised during the past year or two from Mt Nicholas Lagoon, which is from the hill above in line of sight from Queenstown. Robert Butson, the owner of Mt Nicholas Station, has known of their presence since he purchased the property some twenty years ago. Phil Hunt, the previous owner, became aware of grebes on the lagoon in about 1970.

We were pleased to be allowed to visit Mt Nicholas on 8 March 1996 and found on the lagoon seven adult grebes and three juveniles belonging to two breeding pairs. Perhaps grebes have always been on this private and secluded lagoon, although it would be presumptuous to make such an assumption. It is of interest however to look at the history of an area that was not included in the grebe census of 1980.

James Hector collected and identified the birds on which Buller based his *Podiceps hectori* at "Whakatipu Lake" in April 1863, but the precise localities are not known. Another reference is found on the plate prepared from the water-

colour of the crested grebe by George Edward Lodge which is labelled "Lake Wakatipu Otago New Zealand". The specimen from which the painting was made was further labelled "Otago, originally from Anatole von Hugel collection, referred to as a female from Lake Wakatipu, December 1874" (Westerskov 1977 and Falla 1977).

Nowhere common, this handsome bird famous for its courtship ceremonies is a welcome addition to Lake Hayes.

GEORGE CHANCE

Beach Patrol Scheme in 1995 - preliminary report

This report covers the results from 513 cards up until 1 May 1996. In 1995 3,324 km were patrolled by OSNZ members and friends. This distance is under the average of 4,136 km per year travelled during the period 1971-1992. No cards were received from Canterbury South, Fiordland and Outlying Islands regions. Eight regions patrolled more than 100 km of beaches in 1995. From 1 January 1995, two new regions (Northland West and Northland East) were formed by splitting the old Auckland East and Auckland West regions. The new Northland West region had the highest number of kilometres travelled in 1995. Most of the 999 km were travelled on regular patrols of Dargaville and Ninety Mile beaches. The new Northland East region had 349 km of patrols, but in contrast to previous years very few patrols were undertaken on Auckland East beaches.

Dead seabirds found in 1995 totalled 6,794. Although this total was larger than in recent years of beach patrolling, it was still fewer than the average of 9,865 found per year in 1971-92. Of the coastal regions where greater than 50 km were covered in 1995, Southland had the highest rate of recovery at 16.54 birds per km. The main contributor to this rate were Sooty Shearwaters which were picked up on three patrols of Mason Bay, Stewart Island, in May. Some of these birds were reported to have been victims of the southern muttonbird harvest. The lowest rate of recovery was on East Coast North Island beaches with 0.54 birds per km.

Unusual finds included two Kermadec Petrels, one on a Hawkes Bay beach in May and another on an Auckland West beach in July. A Soft-plumaged Petrel was picked up on a Bay of Plenty beach in October. One Long-tailed Skua was found on an Auckland West beach in March and a Grey-backed Storm Petrel was picked up on an Auckland West beach in June.

The 1994 record of a Manx Shearwater has now been confirmed as a Newell's Shearwater (this species

breeds in Hawaii) and is a new record for the beach patrol scheme. Also in 1994, a Common Tern was picked up on Muriwai Beach in December. This is also a new record for the beach patrol scheme.

Although fewer birds than average were picked up in 1995, several species had larger wrecks than normal. The total of 630 Australasian Gannets was the highest recorded since the start of the beach patrol scheme. Most of these birds came up on Auckland West and Northland West beaches from August to October. Other regions also reported higher than usual numbers of gannets ashore in 1995. This wreck may have some relationship with the large die-off of pilchards reported in July and August. White-headed Petrels were wrecked in large numbers in 1995 and 119 came ashore in October at a rate of 30 birds per 100 km. Sooty Shearwaters were also wrecked in higher numbers than usual. A total of 1,542 birds were found in May 1995. Most of these came ashore on Southland beaches.

GRAEME TAYLOR
Convenor

Nest Record Scheme - report for the year ending 30 March 1996

This year, 32 members and friends contributed 504 cards covering 51 species, bringing the grand total to 23,815 cards. To date, 144 species are included in the scheme. 67 of the cards were Colonial Cards covering: Black Shag 3, Little Shag 3, Red-billed Gull 18, Black-billed Gull 3, Caspian Tern 26, and White-fronted Tern 14.

There was a higher than usual number of Colonial Nest Record Cards this year, but disappointingly few given the number of colonies visited as part of national surveys of gull and tern colonies. Again the number of contributors to the scheme was relatively low (only about 3% of New Zealand members). The diversity of species was moderately good. Of note this year was a good collection of cards from Northland: for Brown Kiwi from a study by Pat Miller and others, for New Zealand Dotterel, Variable Oystercatcher and Caspian Tern from Chrissy Wickes and Richard Parrish, and colonial terns and gulls from Richard Parrish. Peter Reese and Raewyn Empson contributed a good collection of cards on North Island Robins from Kapiti Island.

The major contributors in terms of numbers of cards were: Chrissy Wickes (180), Pat Miller (64), Richard Parrish (64), Don Hadden (35), Bev Woolley (27), and Raewyn Empson (21).

Information from the Nest Records Scheme has been used extensively in

the new Field Guide, to be published later in 1996. More progress has been made on computerising the Nest Record Scheme data. Mary Powlesland was completed a programme to input, summarise and analyse nest record card data. Her work was supported by very generous assistance from the Science Committee of the Lottery Grants Board. I have been too busy writing the new Field Guide to be able to work with the programme, but should make a start in 1996/97.

Many thanks to all of the contributors to the scheme and to those who have encouraged members to take part.

List of Contributors in 1994/95.

Paul Bell, Simon Chamberlain, Rogan Colbourne, Jack Cowie, Peter de Lange, Bev Elliot, Raewyn Empson, Brian Gill, Mike Graham, Don Hadden, Hazel Harty, Bruce Mackereth, Pat Miller, David Mudge, Bev North, Kerry Oates, Richard Parrish, Mary and Ralph Powlesland, Gwenda Pulham, Peter Reese, Phil Rhodes, Hugh Robertson, Barbara Taylor, L. Tuft. M. Turner, T. Turner, S. Uren, Roger Wasley, Chrissy Wickes, Erika Woodger and Bev Woolley.

HUGH ROBERTSON

Nest Record Scheme Convenor

Due to his heavy work commitment, notably on the new Field Guide, the report by Hugh Robertson on the Projects Assistance Officer's activities will appear in the September issue of OSNZ News.

Banding Liaison Report - April 1996

During the past year I have received nine applications for banding permits from the Banding Officer for my comment. Most have been from OSNZ members and it is very pleasing to see the time and thought going into these individual and group banding projects. All of these will add to our present knowledge of bird populations, habitat and behaviour, so very necessary if we are to maintain and hopefully increase our dwindling populations.

It is also important that members complete these projects and write them up so the knowledge is available for future use.

I have answered a number of members' queries about band returns and what to do to start projects.

There has been no meeting of the Banding Liaison Committee.

JENNY HAWKINS
Banding Liaison Officer

Snippets...

From John Warham's publisher, T & AD Poyser: "All birds look like sparrows to me. There are big sparrows, small sparrows and gaily coloured sparrows. But they all look like sparrows. Last summer I realised that this was a no-nothing attitude, so I bought two bird books. They were filled with every conceivable kind of sparrow" (attributed to Andy Rooney).

Seen in a recent regional Newsletter: "Due to impending retirement of current, aging incumbent, this position (Regional Rep.) will become available in April. Would suit energetic person keen on trying to organise activities, chair meetings, and write local newsletters. Knowledge of birds not necessarily a disadvantage...."

Heard on the Holmes show - that the Fairy Tern is one of the world's (sic) most endangered species.

And from a mildly biased, eminent Australian visitor: "Where there are prisons, there is life!"

Moult Recording Scheme

I thank those members who offered constructive comments on the proposed new format of the Moult Card that was published in *OSNZ News* last year (Nos 75, 76). As a result, a slightly modified format is now being produced and will be ready for circulation later in the year. The main change is that more space will be given for recording the moult of the secondaries in non-passerine species - for example seabirds - with an instruction to "overflow" into the Comments section of the card if there are 30 or more secondaries. Tail feathers may also exceed the number allowed for (12 boxes), so again I ask that recorders modify the existing boxes - using vertical lines - should this situation arise.

Contributions continued to be received during the past year, and my thanks again to those who have submitted them. An interesting crop of 20 cards from Kapiti Island came from Raewyn Empson and a group of OSNZ members. They comprised 17 North Island Robin records and three Stitchbird records. Among others, Jenny Hawkins sent in a very useful batch of Australasian Gannet records from Farewell Spit, from a wreck plus live birds banded at the colony.

During the year information on the Moult Recording Scheme was forwarded to the Department of Statistics for their national inventory of such information databases.

I look forward to more records from members and I hope that the supply of new format cards with instructions on

the back will encourage greater participation among OSNZ members.

BEN BELL

Moult Recording Scheme Convenor

J.S. Watson Conservation Trust

This trust is administered by the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of NZ (Inc.). Applications are invited from individuals or conservation groups for financial assistance for conservation projects over the 1996/97 year.

The criteria for assistance are:

- the conservation of plants and animals and natural features of New Zealand

- the advancement of knowledge in these matters by way of research, literary contribution, essay or articles, or other effort

- general; education of the public to give them an understanding and love of the earth in which they live.

A total of \$10,000.00 is available. It may be awarded to one or more applicants, or held over for a subsequent year.

For further information and application forms, write to the Secretary, Forest and Bird, P.O. Box 631, Wellington. Applications close 31 July.

CSN - a reminder

The deadline for material to be in the hands of the island collators is 31 August. Anything received later will be held over until next year.

In the first instance, members should send their material to the appropriate Regional Recorder, who is responsible for collating the region's contribution. In order to have time to complete this task, Regional Recorders need to receive members' contributions by 31 July.

The CSN year runs from 1 July to 30 June, so now is the time to extract all those observations from your notebooks. To assist with the process, below is a list of the Regional Recorders to whom the appropriate observations should be sent.

Far North: Isobella Godbert, Waipapa West Road, RD2, Kerikeri, Ph. (09) 407 8058.

Northland: Pauline Smith, 15 McLintock St, Whau Valley, Whangarei, Ph. (09) 437 2974.

Auckland: Mel Galbreath, 62 Holyoake Place, Birkenhead,

Auckland, Ph. (09) 480 1958.

Southern Auckland: Pam Agnew, 3 Dianne-Louise Drive, Bucklands Beach, Auckland, Ph. (09) 535 4222.

Waikato: David Riddell, Gordonton Road, Taupiri R.D.1, Ph. (07) 824 3877.

Bay of Plenty: Paddy Latham, 72 Simpson Road, Papamoa, Ph. (07) 542 0406.

Volcanic Plateau: Keith Owen, 24 Sloane Ave, Rotorua, Ph. (07) 347 7134.

Gisborne/Wairoa: Geoff Foreman, 6 Rimu Drive, Wairoa, Ph. (06) 838 8370.

Taranaki: Erika Woodger, Egmont Road, R.D. 6, Inglewood, Ph. (06) 752 2524.

Manawatu: Ian Andrew, 6 Eton Place, Palmerston North, Ph. (06) 358 1183.

Wanganui: Tom Teasdale, 33 Paterson Street, Aramono, Wanganui, Ph. (06) 343 9992.

Hawkes Bay: Margaret Twydale, 124 Nelson Crescent, Napier, Ph. (06) 835 6563.

Wairarapa: M. King, C/o Colin Scadden, 15 Madden Place, Masterton.

Wellington: Max Falconer, 188 Miromiro Road, Lower Hutt, Ph. (04) 586 2702.

Nelson: Gail Quayle, 6 Tressillian Ave, Nelson, Ph. (03) 545 0456.

Marlborough: Beverley North, 107 Redwood Street, Blenheim, Ph. (03) 578 8585.

West Coast: Bruce Stuart-Menteith, P.O. Box 36, Punakaiki, Ph. (03) 731 1826.

Canterbury: Tony Crocker, 117 Paparoa Street, Christchurch 5, Ph. (03) 352 4530.

Otago: Alun Baines, 41 Marion Street, MacAndrew Bay, Dunedin, Ph. (03) 476 1022.

Southland: Lloyd Esler, 64 Herriot Street, Invercargill, Ph. (03) 217 9060.

QSM for Pauline Jenkins

Pauline Jenkins, a previous RR for Marlborough, received a Queen's Service Medal for public service in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours List. She has devoted a large part of her life in Marlborough to areas of social service, education and the environment.

As part of this she has been an active member of the Marlborough region of the OSNZ for 30 years, including a

significant period as RR and recently has been a member of the Nelson Lakes Park Board. She has also in the past served as President of the Marlborough National Council for Women and on various school and education boards and the kindergarten association.

OSNZ warmly congratulates Pauline on this achievement.

CHRISTOPHER ROBERTSON

Mystery Bird # 23

At first the Mystery Bird doesn't seem too difficult - its sleek body, sturdy legs, cryptic colouring and strong, dagger-like bill would probably quickly be recognised New Zealand birders as a Weka of some sort (there are four described races comprising six forms). Visitors to this country may not be so immediately sure however, as there are two other native species with which confusion could arise - Banded Rail and Marsh Crake.

In shape and colouring, the Banded Rail looks superficially similar to a Weka, but at 30 cm long, compared to 53 cm, it is little more than half the size. Banded Rails have a distinctive pattern of broken black and white barring on their breast and undersides - this is diagnostic and is a feature never present in Weka. The Marsh Crake at 18 cm is almost half again the size of a Banded Rail. Size alone would make it very difficult to ever confuse Marsh Crake and Weka. If, however, such confusion did occur, a finer bill, combined with black and white barring similar to Banded Rail but restricted to belly and flanks only, would indicate Marsh Crake. A final test would be to see if the bird flies. If it does, then you can be pretty certain that it is not a Weka!

It should be mentioned that real life birding is not about identifying birds in photographs. In addition, what a bird looks like is not all that we have to go on. Just as important as our identification skills can be our knowledge of range and habitat. We should ask questions such as "Where in New Zealand am I?" Each one of these three species has a restricted distribution. Knowledge of

habitat is useful also. Banded Rail and Marsh Crake are both generally restricted to wetland habitats where there is ample tall cover vegetation. I say 'generally' because some years ago, for example, a very confused Banded Rail turned up on the steps of the Christchurch railway station, 300 km away from the nearest Banded Rail population! The mystery bird in our photograph is not, however, in a wetland habitat, and is therefore not in the sort of place that one would expect a Marsh Crake or Banded Rail.

So let's accept that we have a Weka - but which one? There are four races - North Island Weka; Buff (Eastern Weka); Western Weka and Stewart Island Weka. The latter two occur in two colour phases. Again, knowledge of distribution is useful and if we knew where the photograph was taken we could almost make an identification based on that alone. But nothing is fool-proof, and in the South Island in particular one should be cautious. Over recent decades many unofficial introductions of Western Weka have been attempted east of the Southern Alps, and wild birds have occasionally been reported living within valleys east of the Main Divide. Although reintroductions of Buff Weka in the 1960s failed, new attempts in the 1990s will hopefully see these birds return to parts of the Canterbury countryside. In future, a Weka seen in Canterbury could just as easily be Eastern or Western, so identification should always be based on plumage, not locality.

Looking closely at the mystery bird, we can see that it is overall dark in colour with extensive streaking on the crown, neck, breast, back and upperparts. It has dark lores and ear coverts, contrasting with paler, unstreaked broad superciliary stripe and cheek. It also appears to have an area of unstreaked feathers on its side. North Island Weka can easily be discounted because in that race streaking is absent from the breast and underparts. Buff Weka can also be discounted as it has lighter overall colouring than the bird in the photograph and is not so heavily marked on the breast.

Western and Stewart Island Weka look very similar. They both have a light (chestnut) and a dark (black) phase. The main differences are size (Stewart Island birds are smaller) and that dark phase Stewart Island birds are less "black" than their South Island counterparts. A study of Plate 23 in Falla, Sibson and Turbott (the "old" field guide) shows that the mystery bird corresponds closely with the depiction of Stewart Island Weka (chestnut phase) - note particularly the head pattern,

streaked breast and the unstreaked area on the sides. What the field guide does not say is that this plate is also a fair representation of the same phase of the South Island Weka.

Without adequate information on the exact size of the bird it cannot be precisely identified from the photograph. Paul Sagar, who took the photo, reveals that it was on the Open Bay Islands in Westland. We can be happy therefore that it is a chestnut phase of the Western Weka *Gallirallus australis australis*.

ANDREW CROSSLAND

Morepork Volunteers Wanted

As many people are probably aware, I am conducting a project on Moreporks on Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua. My fieldwork started in November last until February, during which time I studied the birds' breeding behaviour at five nests. I also captured 25 birds and fitted 13 with transmitters in order to follow them around and locate their daytime roosts.

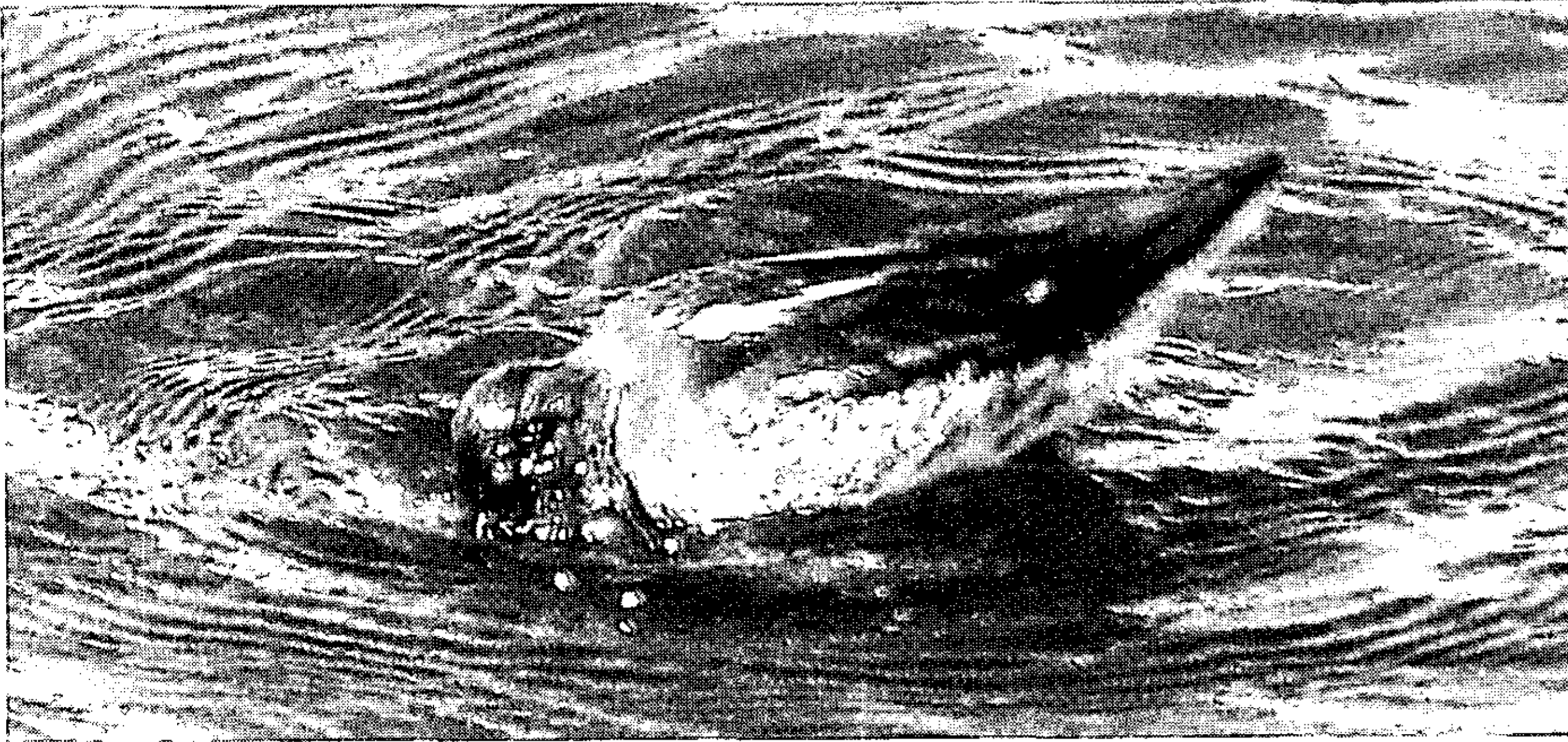
During the summer several interesting things happened. Firstly, one of the nests I had under observation had two chicks. When I checked it one morning the larger of the two was all right but what was left of the other chick was sufficient for me to realise that cannibalism had taken place. I was also able to observe some of the birds really easily in the evening, particularly a male bird who fed around Christmas-time in a flowering pohutukawa right outside the hut. His main prey was moths which were obviously feeding on the nectar.

My study will continue for a further twelve months, and I will be returning every month until October, before being based on the island for the summer. There will be an aerial poison drop at the end of July and I will be on the island for a week before and two weeks after this event. The drop is designed to eradicate mice, the last introduced mammal on the island, and I want to see what effect this will have on the Moreporks. We will also be monitoring Hihi at that time, although no effects are expected on them.

For the work over the next twelve months I will require volunteers to assist with observations, mist netting, banding birds and fitting transmitters. The island is a wonderful place to stay, with Saddleback and Hihi (Stitchbird) being common, along with Tui, Fantail, Grey Warbler and NZ Robin. There is a hot pool on the island and access is with a commercial operator most days.

Anyone wishing to come out and help can contact me at the Department of Ecology, Massey University, P.O. Box





Mystery Bird # 24

Identify this bird. Answer next issue

11-222, Palmerston North, or phone (06) 350 5315 during the day or (06) 359 5305 after hours, or Email: B.M.Stephenson@massey.ac.nz.

BRENT STEPHENSON

More Moreporks

I am a MSc student at the University of Auckland and I am undertaking a study of the diet of Moreporks as a thesis topic. If any members know of Morepork roost sites I would be grateful if they could collect regurgitated pellets and post them to me. They can be packed in a tightly sealed plastic bag. Please note where and when they were found.

If anyone finds a dead Morepork I would be pleased to have it for stomach analysis. Please label and freeze, and advise me. Thank you.

JAMES HAW

9 Eclipse Place Bucklands Beach
Auckland Ph. (09) 535 8392

Megapode Symposium

The third International Megapode Symposium will be held at The Little Desert Lodge, Nhill, Victoria, Australia on 6-9 December 1997, amid the Malleefowl of central Victoria.

Following successful symposia held in conjunction with the IOC of 1990 in Christchurch and 1994 in Vienna, the third IMS is designed to bring together the world's foremost authorities on this unique family of birds to discuss the latest developments and issues in their conservation, taxonomy and relationships, interactions with humans, ecophysiology, evolution and adaptations and natural history.

This time we are keen to emphasise the personal experiences and adventures

of those involved in studying the birds in some of the most remote and exciting regions of the world. Speakers and experts from around the world will include academics, professional ornithologists, field ecologists, wildlife managers and naturalists.

The four day event will include a wide variety of presentations, field trips, entertainment and free time to enjoy the mallee environment. Malleefowl and their enormous incubation mounds are a feature of the Little Desert Lodge.

To express your interest in attending the Third Megapode Symposium, please write by 1 October 1996 to:

Dr Darryl Jones, Megapode Specialist Group, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Griffith University, Nathan, Qld 4111, Australia. Ph. (07) 3875 7451,

Fax 3875 7459,

Email: D.Jones@ens.gu.edu.au

Skimming Gull

On 18 February 1996 at the new hide at Miranda I observed an immature Black-billed Gull feeding in an innovative manner. The tide was swiftly exiting the bay at about 3 or 4 knots. The gull walked to the shallows and was promptly carried 'downstream' by the tide. It pecked ineffectively into the water a few times. Maybe considering this a waste of time, it then lifted the rear half of its body out of the water, leaving its bill in, and flew against the tide in the manner of African, American or Indian Skimmers.

This was more successful as it struck small fish more often. Once it had gone some 50 metres, it settled down in the water and the tide brought it back in front of me. It then repeated this activity until I left some 15 minutes later. Other immature Black-billed Gulls were associating with it but took no notice of this particular activity. The bird was colour-banded, having been processed at a nesting site at Karaka on the Manukau Harbour two summers ago (1994/95). Most of the immature gulls with it were also colour-banded.

Has anybody else seen this activity? I have not come across any previous articles on similar behaviour.

PAUL CUMING

Gannet Decoys

The Department of Conservation has a cunning plan to attract gullible gannets to Mana Island. DoC reckons 50 concrete gannet lookalikes perched on the cliff tops could lure the real thing. Decoys have tricked puffins and albatrosses into establishing colonies overseas.

"I've got a hunch that gannets are very stupid and probably won't recognise a hunk of concrete" said DoC advisory scientist Colin Miskelly, who has prepared a draft plan to restore the island to its natural state.

The nearest big gannet colony is Farewell Spit at the top of the South Island but hungry birds wing their way across Cook Strait to feed along the Wellington shoreline. Mana Island would make a predator-free zone for nesting gannets and a colony would supply nutrients to help support a fertile ecosystem which sustained insects, lizards and, at the top of the food chain, the tuatara.

Those interested in helping can contact Colin Ryder, ph. (04) 478 4391 (home) or 472 3550 (work).

Courtesy of the *EVENING POST*

Review

Birds of South-Western Australia, by Denis Saunders and John Ingram. Surrey, Beatty & Sons, 1995. 296 pp. ISBN 0949324 57 4 (paperpack).

The authors are ecologists with the Division of Wildlife of CSIRO and the gist of this book is in its subtitle *An atlas of the changes in the distribution and abundance of the wheatbelt avifauna*. The land in question is part of Western Australia extending 300 km inland from Perth and bounded by a line from north-east to south-west to intersect near Cape Arid.

Short chapters discuss the development history and environmental changes of the study region, and the way in which community-based observers were used to collect the data for the atlas. Appropriate conservation actions to support the goal of sustainable development form another four page chapter.

The body of the work (250 pp.) consists of species accounts, usually one per page. Here we find a series of maps labelled Distribution 1987-1990 derived from the records of the present survey. The species are indicated by the common name or names (thus White Swan or Mute Swan) as well as the scientific name, but are not illustrated. Each has

two paragraphs of text; brief remarks on the status and habits of the bird, followed by a note on any evident changes in distribution and abundance over the past 50 years.

The book is a useful addition to the OSNZ library. It will be valuable to ecologists and ornithologists working on the problems of mapping species and studying their distribution, who will also appreciate the detailed index and extensive references.

This is not a book for the touring birdwatcher. For OSNZ members wishing to examine the occurrence of birds in Western Australia it adds little to the information provided by the excellent RAOU Atlas of Australian Birds (Blakers, Davies and Reilley, 1984).

MICHAEL TAYLOR

Regional Roundup

Northland

Early in February, Ray Pierce and his team carried out a low tide survey of Parengarenga Harbour and findings were consistent with earlier years. No further oyster farms will be allowed to be set up in areas important to bird usage. A Sanderling and a Large Sand Dotterel were sighted during the survey.

At the end of February we carried out our annual survey of the Poutu Peninsula lakes. Water levels were higher than is usual for the time of the year and dabchick numbers were also higher. On Sunday we travelled up the beach towards Bayley's Beach in the "Bigfoot" bus and were dropped at intervals to walk into the dune lakes. We counted birds as we drove - about 20 Bar-tailed Godwits, and two flocks of White-fronted Terns, about 85 birds in the first flock and 900 plus in the second, which was a *fantastic sight*. We all agreed that it sure beats walking in across paddocks, hills and scrub to the lakes.

On the first weekend in March 16 members came to roost for the weekend at Miranda where Keith proved a helpful host. On Saturday the high tide wasn't until 6 pm, so people spent time visiting historic Thames, the fascinating rock shop at Ngatea and the Miranda hot pools, until about 3 pm when we gathered to hear an interesting talk on identifying waders by Adrian Reigen. We then took our binoculars and telescopes and went to look at the flocks of roosting birds with Adrian and Keith to clarify any points raised.

On Sunday David Lawrie and Tony Habraken invited us to Kidds which most of us had never visited. It was a beautiful day with a good variety of species to watch and we all enjoyed it immensely. The cows found us equally interesting as we sat having afternoon tea.

The next weekend we carried out our annual March census of Whangarei Harbour with similar results to last year.

The planned day trip to Little Barrier Island was cancelled due to big swells which would have prevented us landing, so it was rebooked for 3 November and I have ordered a fine day!

We were fortunate to have Chris and Jillian Robertson attend the shared meal at our March meeting. Chris then gave an interesting talk, accompanied by slides, on his work with albatrosses on Tairaroa Head and the islands off Chatham Island. He also enlightened us on aspects of the proposed constitution.

Beach patrols have continued as usual, with Marie Smith being lucky enough to recover two banded gannets in four days, both from White Island.

Over the past two months two Kaka have been flying and calling around the Whau Valley area. Ray Pierce has a recent unconfirmed sighting of two Girl Buntings which settled on his lawn.

The last weekend in April some Far North members joined us for a survey of the central Northland lakes. It was great to see Lake Omapere looking clear and beautiful after the pollution problems caused by farm run-off of a few years ago.

The White-fronted Tern survey showed 449 breeding pairs in our area - 1996 was not a good year as about a thousand pairs was the expected figure based on other information. Many people noticed the low numbers of immature birds within the post-breeding flocks this season. Richard Parrish will organise a further survey at the end of this year so that we can continue to monitor the situation.

(Lorna Simpkin)

Auckland

The Cornwall Park Trust Board requested an update of the bird species in the park and One Tree Hill. On 24 February 18 members combed the park and 1800 birds were counted, comprising 21 species. Virtually all of the park was covered. Our Honorary Treasurer was so carried away with checking every tree that he had difficulty remembering which direction he had left his car!

Dr Pavel Tomkovich, Curator of Ornithology at the Moscow University Museum, spoke at our March meeting on the waders of the Siberian tundra. He has studied the breeding biology of many Arctic waders including Red Knot, Great Knot and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Excellent slides showed the marbled mahogany breeding plumage of some of the waders which provided wonderful camouflage for the nesting birds. We were indeed privileged to have Pavel at our meeting, and are indebted to the Miranda Naturalists' Trust and Adrian Reigen for making this possible.

The six monthly survey of Tiritiri Matangi Island took place in March, with the new bird on the island being the Stitchbird, which was observed at very close quarters. On the Sunday, our President Christopher Robertson joined a party visiting the island. Christopher also gave a talk entitled "The Albatross - what ails the World's Greatest Travellers?" at a specially arranged meeting. The subject was a most thought-provoking one and left members considering how long it would be before albatrosses are placed on the endangered list. Members were also updated on the affairs of the Society and what the future holds.

At our April meeting Alison Davies gave an illustrated talk on the status of the Shore Plover. The habitat in the Chathams was compared with Motuora Island, where birds have been released over the past two years. Members have patrolled local beaches looking for and finding some of the Shore Plovers which have "migrated" from Motuora. Alison's talk was informative and most helpful for the latest information on the new bird in our region.

Ponui Island, one of the islands in the Hauraki Gulf, was visited by a party to see Galahs and kiwis! 34 Galahs were counted and kiwis were seen and heard at nightfall. Spotless Crakes were also observed on the island. Misfortune overtook four members when they were caught by darkness and spent a miserable, wet night out in the open doing their best to keep warm. One of the members was our leader!

In April a party under the leadership of Gwenda Pulham and Chris Bindon set up listening posts on Motuora Island in order to monitor bird numbers over the coming years and as different habitats change. A first for the island was a pair of Spur-winged Plovers, and 56 Grey-faced Petrels were banded. 14 Shore Plovers were seen over the weekend.

Strange terns are being reported around the Kaipara Harbour. First reported was a Sooty Tern, then a Common Tern and then a Lesser Crested Tern - what gives? These reports have yet to be studied and confirmed, but there does appear to be a number of terns visiting the area which need carefully recorded observations. There have also been large numbers of Arctic Skuas, said to be 30-40 harassing White-fronted Terns on one occasion.

More and more sightings of Kaka are being recorded in the greater Auckland metropolitan area. No doubt these birds are from Little Barrier Island. One report was of an adult bird feeding a juvenile in Cornwall Park.

(Doug Booth)

South Auckland

The time of the year is here again when our migrating waders get all excited about

taking to the air, leaving behind all those nosy birdwatchers. A record in excess of 58,000 birds visited the Manukau this summer, most of which appear to have descended upon the airport roost, causing great concern to the devoted workers there during the higher spring tides of summer. Since the birds have departed, the sudden fall in members has been noted - they, too, are stretching their limbs.

Our appetite for Siberia was well whetted when Nick Green, accompanied by his good slides and sense of humour, spoke to us in February about his travels through this relatively new area for ornithologists. David Lawrie and Hugh Clifford's perspective of Raoul Island was interesting at the March meeting. After a planned private trip to the island fell through, the opportunity to join the annual DoC trip to change over staff was quickly snapped up and obviously enjoyed by both as they got to yet another remote corner of New Zealand.

North-west Australia was on the agenda for April and Dick Veitch kindly twitched his camera in the right directions in order to enlighten us as to the marvels of that beautiful place. Seemingly inhospitable at times, the birds just love it, and so where the birds go those fascinated with them follow - even to the sought-after waterholes where White-bummed Wallowers could be seen by passing passerines brave enough to take a peek! All part of the experience, we're told.

Continuing with speakers in the region, with great pleasure the Miranda Naturalists' Trust was able to assist Dr Pavel Tomkovich to New Zealand as an add-on to a visit to Australia. As Curator of Ornithology at Moscow University Museum, his knowledge and photographs of the flora and fauna of the Arctic tundra were breathtaking to say the least. Golden Plover, newly hatched Spoon-billed Sandpiper chicks and Great Knot, all in breeding plumage, were just some of a splendid collection. Unfortunately he departed a few days too early, as a Great Knot graced Miranda's shore for the first time after a long absence - perhaps the bird had heard who was in town!

Other sightings from Miranda include Banded Rail, Bittern and a Royal Spoon-bill near the Trust centre. The presence of up to two Black-tailed Godwits continues to entertain visitors, and the recent arrival of an Arctic Tern amongst the White-fronted Tern flock at Taramaire excited a passer-by or two - thanks Gwenda!

The absence of a small flock of Far-eastern Curlews of late brings possibly to an end three years of overwintering - the long return journey beckons.

Further up the coast at Mataitai a Common Tern was seen on 30 March. Unfortunately the presence of skuas around our coast can play havoc with

the terns, as an Arctic Skua did the day I was there.

The flock of 30-40 Galahs have been seen near Mangatawhiri, probably getting small pickings from the maize harvest.

Another nil return on a beach patrol was pleasantly compensated for by a flock of 61 Variable Oystercatchers on Port Waikato's Sunset Beach - probably an autumn flocking site this year.

The arrival of Cattle Egrets and Glossy Ibis near Clevedon reminds us that winter is not far away, as does the presence of Red-billed Gulls as they venture inland in search of worms. Once again this year a juvenile Black-billed Gull has joined such a flock, when a green-banded bird was sighted at Pukekohe in April. There has been a recent report of one at Matheson Bay near Leigh, also with Red-billed Gulls, and the furthest move to date. Our first casualty comes from Manukau City, an odd place for this species to roam, but a valued return all the same. Do check flocks of Red-billed Gulls throughout the country as Black-bills appear most likely to roam with this species at this time of year. Send any records to the Banding Office, or to me via the RR.

(Tony Habraken)

Waikato

Bev Woolley is polishing up her British birds this month, leaving me to tell you about some New Zealand ones.

January found Tom Buckley and I down at Ward banding birds left, right and centre. The first 1996 evening meeting was, as is traditional, devoted to members - where they went, what they did and who they did it with. Hugh Clifford related some good news on the Grey-faced Petrel front with higher percentages of chicks surviving this season. This may be the result of predator trapping on Mount Maunganui.

February found a select group attending a wader study field trip to Kidds farm on the Manukau Harbour. Of note were the large numbers of feeding Banded Dotterels on ploughed fields, 13 Little

Terns, 400 Wrybills, 29 Pacific Golden Plovers and 90 Turnstones, the latter two species in resplendent breeding plumage.

The best breeding year for coots was realised on Hamilton Lake, with eight chicks fledged. It was noted by Barry et al that a part-albino specimen was again present on the lake, and has since attracted that attention of the media.

A motivating March meeting was held with Chris Robertson, who kept us all "constitutionally" alert, while at the same sitting revealed some secrets about the lifestyles of albatrosses - from the Sisters, north of the Chathams, to Taiaroa Head - and why some have declined, sometimes for less than obvious reasons, such as soil erosion on the Sisters.

A joint DoC/OSNZ trip to Opoutere was attended by only two members, and focused on dunes and dotterels. An April adventure on Lake Waahi netted only one bittern - water levels were high, it was marking day for duck shooters and the New Zealand jet-ski champs were held during the week, or such were our excuses. Waterfowl were counted, with high numbers of Black Swans and Canada Geese present.

The local AGM was held in April and was memorable for adding a few more committee members to what must be one of the larger committees in OSNZ history. This was followed by a close-up look at Stitchbirds, shags and waders through the lens of Ian Reid's unique video camera with binoculars attached to the zoom lens.

Bird sightings were looking run-of-the-mill recently until a White Heron showed up at a University of Waikato lake. This had an electric effect on local photographers like myself. Phil Battley and Bev Woolley identified the bird, which had apparently been at the lake for several weeks prior to the mid April sighting. It has since moved on, perhaps assisted by the total clearance of its raupo cover from the lake! Birds, perhaps the same, have also been seen at the Hamilton Rose Gardens and at Island Block by the Whangamarino Swamp.



White Heron at University of Waikato. Photo: Paul Cuming

Other sightings of note were several Red-crowned Parakeets in the rose gardens and an albino fantail at Taupo in January. In February the highlights were a Royal Spoonbill at Raglan and a Shining Cuckoo trapped in a Horsham Downs garage. I have recently checked out the Rangiriri and Lake Ngaroto Cattle Egret flocking spots to no avail, but single birds have recently been spotted at nearby Lake Ngaroto south and at Ruapuke. Let's hope for a resurrection of Cattle Egret numbers to whet our appetites!

(Paul Cuming)

Hawkes Bay

In February members visited the Tukituki Estuary. Little and Little Black Shags were seen roosting on branches sticking out of the water while others fished and stood on the shingle bank. A view of the estuary from Waikahu Road, Clive, revealed 30 plus godwits and Pied Stilts scattered along the riverside, Caspian and White-fronted Terns, Banded Dotterels, White-faced Herons and a Little Egret up-river from the Clive bridge.

On Waitangi Day a small group visited Craig's Walk at Boundary Stream - a pleasant walk through kamahi forest at the beginning, then on downhill looking over the reserve. Whiteheads, Riflemen, Tomtits, Bellbirds and Tui were seen and heard. Long-tailed Cuckoos were notable for their constant calling.

At the beginning of March we visited the Ahuriri Estuary. We walked up onto Embankment Bridge, where we saw around 250 or more Bar-tailed Godwits, some very coloured up. 17 Pacific Golden Plovers in varying degrees of breeding plumage were camouflaged in the *Salicornia*. The Southern Marsh was quite full for this time of year - not much of a muddy edge, but Banded Dotterels, Black-fronted Dotterels, Pied Stilts and Black Swans were seen.

In April we had a meeting at the Ahuriri Education Centre. Chris Robertson gave us a talk on albatrosses and brought us up to date on OSNZ matters.

We held an AGM on 28 April at which we discussed local matters and held elections for Regional Representative and Regional Recorder positions.

(Christine McRae)

Taranaki

High numbers of some species of birds have been noticed lately. They were 70+ Spur-winged Plovers near New Plymouth, 50-70 Canada Geese flying over New Plymouth and Omata and 4-500 Paradise Shelducks at a lake near Waitara.

Other recent reports are 19 Pied Stilts and Spotless Crakes at Mohakatino, a Royal Spoonbill at Mokau, a Grey Teal in a South Taranaki lake, silvereyes at Mt Egmont's summit and four Rooks in

New Plymouth. Among the 17 birds recovered during a beach patrol was a Black-winged Petrel at Cape Egmont, probably the first for the region.

Some interesting bird behaviour snippets - two Mallards were diving like scaup at Pukekura lake, Fantails that were eating spiders from webs on a window, Starlings searching for and eating stick insects and a kingfisher feeding young on tadpoles and koura.

(Erika Woodger)

Wellington

At a well attended AGM on 1 April, Gavin Woodward was elected as our new Regional Representative, to replace Allan Munro who has stepped down after five busy years in the position. Our thanks to Allan for his hard work and efforts, and our congratulations to Gavin.

A new project was initiated under the guidance of Colin Miskelly. The managers at Otari Plant Museum and Wilton bush intend lowering the local population of Australian Magpies, but in order to measure the effect of that activity, it is necessary to obtain a set of baseline data first. We agreed to do two sets of five minute counts this year before the anti-Australian campaign takes place. The first was done in March, following some background information supplied to us by Anita Benbrook of the Otari staff. Monitoring Otari will be of value to record any changes that may result from the Karori Reservoir development.

The final visit to Kapiti for kiwi counts took place on 22-23 March, the counts being affected by incessant drizzle. Raewyn comments that all the counts this year have been down on those of the previous two years.

A trip to the outer reaches of Queen Charlotte Sound was initiated by Nelson branch and an invitation extended to us. Eight North Islanders crossed the strait on the Straitrunner and met the Mainlanders at Ship Cove. They visited Motuara Island in search for hiding Saddlebacks, White Rocks to see King Shags and Endeavour Inlet to be entertained by a pod of dolphins.

The March meeting brought Ricardo Palma who gave an interesting account of his work in the Galapagos Islands. From his base at Charles Darwin Research Station near Puerto Ayora, Ricardo was able to visit a large number of the islands in the group, collecting and studying lice from a wide range of the local fauna. We enjoyed some splendid slides and gained an excellent insight into the landforms of the islands as well as their birds and other wildlife.

Hugh Robertson described the results of the kiwi recovery programme which started in 1991. There has continued to be a decline in numbers of Brown and Great Spotted Kiwi. Little Spotted Kiwi, while remaining static on Kapiti Island,

have increased slightly on Hen, Red Mercury and Long Islands. The number one enemy is stoats. The focus for the immediate future will be the reduction of threats to the birds and the release of captive-bred birds after the age of six months.

The evening meeting for May was entitled "A Cormorant Colloquium" - a general discussion about local shags presented by Ralph Powlesland, Raewyn Empson, Peter Reese, Allan Munro and others. All species of shag are well represented in this the Cormorant Capital of New Zealand [now there's a challenge -ed.]. Spotted, Pied, Little and Black Shags all nest around this area, and the harbour and other water areas provide ample opportunity to observe the habits of these birds.

(Ros Batcheler)

Canterbury

My report concentrates on the major event in Christchurch in recent times - an oil spill affecting birds. As the Ornithological Society was contacted to help, all members should be aware of the enormity of the task. The spill was diesel, which is the worst of all oils due to the nature of the product.

There was a fault in the automatic control system for fuel to heat the greenhouses in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, resulting in some 8,000 litres of diesel being discharged, the bulk of it entering the information kiosk pond, where it was fortunately contained, with none escaping to the nearby Avon River.

Little Cormorants nest in trees overhanging the pond and are a great attraction to visitors.

161 birds were affected, principally Mallard and Grey Ducks, along with a Red-billed Gull and five Little Cormorants. The diesel penetrates the skin and is ingested as the birds preen. Local authorities had no contingency plan for such an event. Marine Watch was called in, despite not knowing themselves what to do in this emergency.

A hand cleaning solution was used initially to wash the birds, but they were still highly contaminated with diesel and suffering from shock. In addition the birds were cold, and loss of waterproofing of the plumage, leading to hypothermia, plus emaciation from respiratory and digestive complications added to problems.

Darroch Donald from the New Zealand Wildlife Rehabilitation Trust in Auckland arrived later during the first day. He alone knew that the birds had to be conditioned before they could withstand further washing. They needed constant warmth and dry conditions, and were medicated twice a day. Each bird received orally Vybrate liquid concentrate and Scourban, plus intramuscular injections of Multijet B, Amoxil and Dexa, and Achromycin ointment applied to the eyes.

A hastily constructed site was set up at the home of John Andrews from DoC. Pens were outfitted with infrared lamps and needed good food and constant changing to keep the birds as dry as possible. Constant monitoring saw critical birds placed in intensive care. Days 1-4 saw a high mortality rate, with only ducks surviving.

When the remaining birds were strong enough, thorough cleaning under Darroch's supervision began to take place, the strongest birds first. Three people were required; one to hold the bird, one to wash and rinse and the other to keep up a constant supply of towels and hand-hot water and detergent. A reputable detergent was required, determined to be Mobilsuds. Not a feather was to be missed and the rinsing was just as thorough. This took 1-1 1/2 hours per bird and six days in total. The birds were held in separate pens for the day following, then transferred to the open where they were encouraged to preen by a constant spray of water. Birds were only ready for release when the spray of water no longer flattened the plumage, which took days.

Only 35 birds survived for release, 12 days later for the earliest and 30 for the last.

Without Darroch Donald and Marine Watch none would have survived. Our regions should have a core of members who are familiar with oiled bird rescue, especially as there could easily be rarer birds involved than in this instance. We are fortunate to have an expert in Darroch Donald in the country.

(Sheila Petch)

Southland

Our Black-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern survey was reasonably successful, although we have since learned of several colonies that we missed. From the data gathered, it seems that numbers of Black-billed Gulls are well down on numbers recorded in previous surveys. The extensive coastline makes it probable that there are many colonies of White-fronted Terns nesting around the Fiordland and Stewart Island coasts and on the islands in Foveaux Strait.

Beach patrols have continued on an almost weekly basis. There is a lull over summer but we expect a large number of young Sooty Shearwaters in early May.

We had an influx of Cattle Egrets at Easter with small flocks scattered over much of Southland. A dead one was found floating in Breaksea Sound.

Three junior members had an excellent time at the field study course at Ward in January.

Over the summer, 24 Far-eastern Curlews were seen at Awarua Bay. Other results of the wader census were a high number of godwits, three tattlers, a Pacific Golden Plover, three Curlew Sand-

pipers and eight New Zealand Dotterels. At Easter 72 New Zealand Dotterels were counted at Mason Bay. Visitors to Mason Bay are always delighted at the kiwi population.

Recent reports have included a White-winged Black Tern and a hybrid stilt. A Rook has been reported from Stewart Island, but it has a short life expectancy - Rooks and magpies are vigorously persecuted on the island.

It was another good breeding season for our spoonbills. Small flocks have become a regular part of the birdlife on the Invercargill Estuary.

At a recent evening meeting, Pete McClelland gave an account of his visit to the Antipodes Islands.

(Lloyd Esler)

What's On

This is to be a new section of OSNZ News, useful for members travelling around the country or visiting adjoining regions to take part in their activities, and hopefully of interest to all members wanting to know what the rest of the country is up to!. The aim is to have as full coverage as possible of all regions' activities for the coming months appearing in each quarterly issue. Details, please, to the Editor by the August deadline.

Northland/Far North

22/23 June
Far North wader census.
Ph. Janet Snell (09) 409 8892

22/23 June
Spoonbill/Cattle Egret census.
Ph. Richard Parrish (09) 436 1988

11 July
evening meeting, Education Advisory Service, Alexander Street, Whangarei.
Ph. Lorna Simpkin (09) 437 2076

20/21 July
planting and survey on Motukawanui Island.
Ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954, or Janet Snell (09) 409 8892

8 August - evening meeting.

30/31 August
Bird Race.
Ph. Graham Searle (09) 438 9872

12 September - evening meeting.

14 or 21 September
Bream Bay boat trip if we have a permit to land on Hen Island.
Ph. Karen Searle (09) 438 9872.

10 October - evening meeting.
19 October
Wetland birds survey, Mangakahia R.
Ph. Peter Anderson (09) 436 0155.

Monthly beach patrols of Dargaville beaches (Prue Cozens (09) 437 0127),

90 Mile Beach and Karikari (Isobela Godbert (09) 407 8058, John Dawn (09) 407 8653) and the east coast (Jean Hawken (09) 438 1985, Lorna Simpkin (09) 437 2076).

Wairarapa

11 July
evening meeting, St John's Hall, Greytown. Waders - video and slides. Ph. Colin Scadden (06) 378 6423.

20 July
trip to Natural History section, National Museum to study wader skins.
Ph. Brian Boeson (06) 304 9074.

14 August - evening meeting, Bush Birds.

25 August
field trip to Kiriwhakapapa.
Ph. Ailsa Harrison (06) 377 3904.

Wellington

1 July - evening meeting,
DoC Conservation Sciences Centre, First Floor, 58 Tory Street. Gannets - status and distribution.
Ph. Gavin Woodward (04) 389 5285.

7 July
mapping trip, Karori Reservoir count.
Ph. Colin Miskelly (04) 472 5821 (work).

5 August
evening meeting, Stephens Island.

2 September
evening meeting, Antipodes Island.

7 October
evening meeting, Nga Manu Sanctuary.

Canterbury

13 July, weather permitting
Southern Crested Grebe survey, Ashburton Lakes. Ph. Tony Crocker (03) 352 4530.

29 July
evening meeting, Middleton Grange School, Acacia Ave, Riccarton. Seabirds, plus visit by Chris Robertson.
Ph. Sheila Petch (03) 348 1889.

26 August
evening meeting, Albatrosses of Campbell Island.

30 September
evening meeting, Shining Cuckoo study.

Otago

21 August
evening meeting, Otago Art Society building, corner of Great King and Albany Streets. Papua New Guinea megapodes.
Ph. Peter Schweigman (03) 455 2790.

12 October
Yellow-eyed Penguin count. Ph. John Darby (03) 476 1676.

16 October
evening meeting, Mallards and Grey Ducks.

DEADLINE FOR THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE IS 10th AUGUST