

No.86

March 1998

Note: Deadline for the June issue will be 10th May.

Edited by TONY CROCKER

118 Cones Road, Ashley RD2 Rangiora.

Phone: 03-313 4995, Fax: 03-364 2057

Email: t.crocker@cont.canterbury.ac.nz

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

Supplement to NOTORNIS • Vol. 45, Part 1
March 1998 • ISSN 0111-2686

Motorway Waders

The northern end of the Auckland Harbour bridge and the adjoining stretch of motorway along the Northcote-Takapuna coastline might at first sound like strange habitat for waders, but a variety of them find plenty of sites that suit their needs.

Spur-winged Plovers have found secure nesting and feeding within the Northcote motorway cloverleaf and fledged several clutches of chicks this year. Breeding success was helped by the motorway mowing crews avoiding the nest sites. New Zealand Dotterels also sometimes roost in this area.

A little further along to the north a long shellbank parallels the motorway, about 120 m. offshore. This is a major roosting site for the local Pied Stilts, godwits, gulls, SIPO and others that feed on the adjacent mudflats. A few also nest there. This year two pairs of Pied Stilts, two of Black-backed Gulls and a pair of Variable Oystercatchers and Caspian Terns nested there, with reasonable success.

To the south end of the base of the harbour bridge the tides have pushed a small mound of shelly sand up against the motorway-retaining seawall. To call this mound a beach is to pay it the ultimate compliment. Here, just 15 m. or so from where tens of thousands of cars drive by everyday, small flocks of South Island Pied Oystercatchers, Wrybills and Banded Dotterels regularly roost. Most surprising of all is that a pair of New Zealand Dotterels selected this site as their nesting ground.

The male of this pair of dotterels is a banded bird, hatched at Langs Beach 90 km north of Auckland and now in his first breeding season at two years of age. Their first nest in September 1997 was too low down on the "beach" and was washed away shortly before the eggs were due to hatch. Perhaps learning from this, their second attempt in November was higher up and survived the tides,



Wader habitat, Auckland motorway.

Photo: Dan D. Pye

predators, dogs and humans, so that the eggs duly hatched. After one week however only a single chick remained.

This one chick soon learned how to survive in the city. By swimming the nearby stream each day it found a safe low tide feeding ground, cut off from danger by the motorway and the stream. At high tide back on the beach it could hide in a storm water pipe in the seawall or amongst the scrappy vegetation. It would also climb up the seawall to join the House Sparrows and Starlings and feed on the grass and tarseal edges of the motorway. This in fact caused problems for those intent on catching and banding the chick, as it threatened to run out and get itself or its pursuer run down by a passing car. All the while of course its parents would guard and hide it, performing their distractions and broken wing displays along the motorway seawall.

It was with great satisfaction that this chick was seen flying strongly in late January. This sort of adaptability must be a plus for the species.

Many thanks to John Dowding for his patience and knowledge, and Gwen Pulham and OSNZ for their support and use of the Society telescope.

DAVID PYE

Bay of Plenty seabirds

On Saturday 13 December a party of nine OSNZ members and friends took part in a boat trip on the *Kaburangi* from Whakatane out to White Island, and for some of us to the Volkner Rocks just beyond White Island, where we hoped to see Grey Ternlets which had supposedly been nesting on the rocks around this time last year.

The purpose of the trip was to look for seabirds and other wildlife. We had a similar trip last year which was most successful, and several people around the Auckland region requested that we repeat this trip so that they could take part. Not many actually took advantage of the opportunity.

On the way out to White Island we enjoyed seeing a large pod of common dolphins at close quarters, with young animals being carefully guarded by the adults. We saw only occasional single birds until we were in the vicinity of White Island. Then large flocks were evident, comprising gannets, White-fronted Terns, Red-billed and Black-backed Gulls.

A party of five who had never been on White Island before left the boat to experience the craters of the active volcano. The remaining four carried on by boat to the Volkner Rocks. As we approached the rocks large flocks of birds were seen fishing and sitting on the water. These were identified by the experts, ~~Paddy Latham, Malcolm Hutton and Hugh Clifford~~, and included mainly Buller's Shearwaters (c.100), Flesh-footed Shearwaters (c.10), Short-tailed Shearwaters (c.50) and White-fronted Terns (lots). We stayed with this flock for about half an hour, looking hopefully for the mystical Grey Ternlets, but without success. And then suddenly we were rewarded when two Grey Ternlets did appear, with possible sightings of others. They were fishing and returning to a rocky island, just west of the main rock. Possibly they were nesting but we were unable to confirm this. White-fronted Terns may also have just begun to nest, though there were only a few pairs.

Another winter boat trip is being organised, probably in July of this year. Any members interested in this trip, please contact John Brierley or Paddy Latham (see *What's On* for details).

JOHN BRIERLEY

Species sighted - Whakatane to White Island

September 1996

Black-browed Mollmawk
Yellow-nosed Mollmawk
Wandering Albatross
Northern Giant Petrel
Salvin's Mollmawk
Fluttering Shearwater
White-faced Storm Petrel
Fairy Prion
Cape Pigeon
Grey-faced Petrel
Blue Penguin
Black-backed Gull
Australasian Gannet
White-fronted Tern
Red-billed Gull

December 1997

Buller's Shearwater
Flesh-footed Shearwater
Short-tailed Shearwater
Petrel sp. (probably Cook's)
Fluttering Shearwater
White-faced Storm Petrel
Pied Shag
Arctic Skua
Grey Ternlet
Blue Penguin
Black-backed Gull
Australasian Gannet
White-fronted Tern
Red-billed Gull
Australasian Harrier (on Whale Island)



Colour-banded Black-billed gulls at Access Bay Miranda.

Photo: P. Cuming

Banded gulls

In contrast to most Canterbury (and other) colonies of Black-billed Gulls this season, the Peacocks Springs colony, near Christchurch, produced a great many chicks. It was therefore gratifying that there was an excellent turn-out of members and associates to help band Black-billed Gull chicks on a fine and warm November morning.

With military precision and in little over an hour, 669 chicks were herded, caught and banded, and returned to their anxious parents, and relative calm returned to the colony. The birds were banded with a single blue band on the left leg and metal on the right. A further five chicks were banded with a white band from a largely unsuccessful colony on the Ashley River.

The aim is to band birds over several seasons, varying the leg and combination of the colour and metal bands. Given the good numbers of birds banded, we expect to gather valuable data in years to come on movements during the year, dispersal, evidence of assortative mating (as may be the case with Black-billed Gulls - see *OSNZ News* No. 82), aspects of breeding success with known-age birds, and other elements of the birds' biology. Canterbury members are looking forward to an interesting and rewarding long-term project.

Birds have dispersed from the colonies and been seen at the Ashley Estuary - including three white-banded birds, a remarkable 60% return rate! - and the Ashley River near Rangiora, along the Avon River and in Hagley Park. They are doubtless present at other sites, and a watch will be kept further afield to see how far they roam.

Black-billed Gulls have also been banded over several years in the Kaipara Harbour and in South Auckland, and the Southlanders banded 120 chicks this year.

So please assist by keeping an eye out for banded gulls anywhere in the country, and send details to the Banding Office, Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

TONY CROCKER

Falla Memorial Award & A.T. Edgar Junior Award - 1998

Nominations are called for the above awards and should be with the Secretary, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, by 30 June 1998. 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)

Black-billed Gulls were first recorded nesting at Miranda in 1968. This was then the northernmost colony of a predominantly South Island species. While breeding at this colony had not been particularly prolific in recent years, birds appeared to be ranging about the region.

The first successful breeding season for the banding project for the species was at Karaka in the summer of 1994/95, when a total of 231 chicks was banded. As there was no breeding at Miranda that year, it was suspected that many of the birds were originally from the Miranda colony. This seemed to be confirmed by the arrival back at Miranda, within six weeks of banding, of many of the juveniles and adults from Karaka. Breeding has occurred at Miranda every season since. Since 1994 over 900 birds have been banded.

First year birds have been sighted at Waiuku, Tuakau, Mangere airport, Pahurehure Inlet, Howick, Miranda, and the Thames coast. In addition at least one bird was seen in Wairoa, some 290 km away. Dead birds have been recovered from Weymouth, Kawakawa Bay, Miranda, Thames, Netherton and Waihi Beach.

Such records, along with regular counts at favoured roost sites, provide much interesting information. For instance, it would seem that the first few months after fledging are the most difficult for young birds to survive. Successful birds are those which manage to remain bonded to, and fed by, their parents, even into the next breeding season. Some young birds seem to range widely, one being recorded at Rotorua and Taupo before returning to the Manukau. Chicks from the 1997/98 season have already been recorded on the Manukau, some only 30 days after banding.

Eight birds have been recorded breeding before the end of their second year, all with mates in the same age range. All eggs hatched but no chicks fledged, due largely to the effects of Cyclone Fergus which decimated the youngest chicks in January 1997. Meanwhile, during the most recent nesting season, all the birds present at the Miranda colony bearing bands from Karaka nested. This means they were all breeding before the end of their third year. At least one pair that nested in the previous season retained their pair bond. However some other pairs were of mixed ages.

At the time the study was commenced, there had been no record of Black-billed Gulls from the Kaipara Harbour. When they were first seen there in 1992 a small breeding colony had already been established. Only five chicks from this colony were banded last year, but already at least one of these has appeared at Miranda over the winter, and at least one Miranda bird has appeared at the Kaipara.

Three significant observations have been made from this study so far:

a) young birds are able to move from their natal colony to another harbour soon after fledging. In the case of the Karaka birds it was virtually a mass exodus to Miranda.

b) during their first winter Black-billed Gulls seem to wander freely, sometimes in association with Red-billed Gulls. They are often seen foraging in wet paddocks.

c) non-breeding birds present at the colony early in the season almost all disappear as the season progresses. The Thames coast seems to be the favoured site for these birds.

Of particular interest was an observation from the colony last season. A juvenile from the previous year was seen begging food from an adult which appeared to be attached to a new nest site. Not only did the adult feed the beggar, but it also appeared to defend the juvenile in proximity to the colony and from other birds nearby.

TONY HABRAKEN

What's in a name?

Over time a number of members have sent in compilations of nouns for assemblages of birds. Here is a selection from Audrey Eagle and Betty Baldock from New Plymouth.

Bitterns - sedge, siege.

Coots - covery, raft, cover, rasp, shoal.

Cormorants - gulp, flight.

Curlews - herd.

Cygnets - team, crash.

Dotterels - trip.

Ducks - plump, flush, raft, dopping, baddling, paddling, bunch, team, trip, badelying, brood, column, fleet, knob, skein, string, badling, brace.

Falcons - cast.

Finches - charm, chirm, trimming, trembling.

Godwits - skein.

Gulls - colony, chevron, excitement.

Hérons - siege, sedge, sege, brood, flight.

Larks - exaltation, bevy, flight, wisp, springful.

Plovers - congregation, wing, leash, stand, deceit, desert.

Sandpipers - fling.

Sparrows - host, quarrel, tribe, murmuration.

Starlings - murmuration, cloud, chattering, clattering, congregation, mustering.

Swallows - flight, rush.

Thrushes - mutation, company.

Collective puffins

Seen on the Seabird listserver on the Internet: "I was asked by a member of the public what the colloquial term was for a group of puffins and I have been unable to find an answer elsewhere. I think what they are after is the equivalent of a parliament of owls or a gaggle of geese. If anyone is aware of such a term for puffins, I'd be grateful if they'd pass it on."

Suggestions were: a blow-out, a gasp, or, with pleasing alliteration, a huffin of puffins, or "in the Faroe Islands this would probably be a casserole of puffins (available at all good hotels)". The correct term appears to be an improbability of puffins, while Tim Markwell, Victoria University of Wellington, suggested a library of puffins.

Rumours of my death...

Nobody was more surprised than the man himself when he received an email message addressed to "colleagues of the late Prof. John Warham."

Dr Warham, who retired as reader in the Department of Zoology in 1985, was sent the email in May by Dr Jevgeni Shergalin, the Scientific director of an Estonian ornithological translation company.

After his stunning opening gambit, Dr Shergalin continued: "If anybody of You will be able to continue work on compiling of "A Bibliography of the Procellariiformes", may be, our firm will be of use for You."

There were red faces in Estonia when Dr Warham replied that he was, in fact, very much "alive and kicking".

The response was shot back: "I am very sorry for my wrong thoughts. Excuse me please 1000 times! In such delicate situation I am in the first time of my life. At the beginning of March I visited Your WWW in the first time and could observe only text. Then I visited Your WWW again one month later, browser began to draw You large-sized photo inside black frame. What could I think? Anyway I am happy, that You are alive and have a beautiful sence of humour."

No doubt Dr Warham is too.

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
CHRONICLE

Tern Identification

Until I had to sell my boat in 1992 I regularly got out to the Bowentown shellbanks in Tauranga Harbour. Among the usual White-fronted Terns I saw Common Terns regularly over three to four years, with occasional sightings of Arctic Terns, the odd Black-fronted and White-winged Black Tern, as well as regular Little Terns, with a maximum six of the latter at one time.

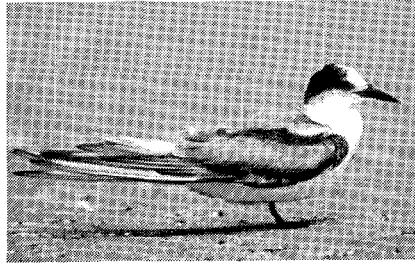
Identification of Common Terns is particularly nasty, as White-fronted Terns are described in most books as having an all white underwing pattern. However I have photographed many with near black outer primaries, particularly first year birds in December, but also occasional breeding plumaged adults.

Arctic-Common Terns are even worse. Reading Peter Harrison's *Seabirds* the juvenile Arctic Tern here seems to be plumaged nearer to Common Tern, but experts assure me it is an Arctic. Beak shape is certainly different, but leg length seems much the same.

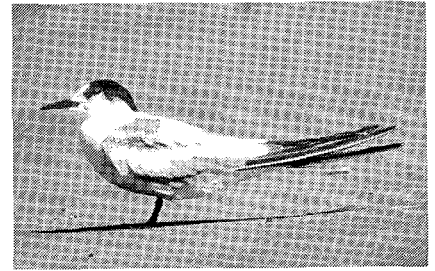
Common Terns often arrive at Tauranga Harbour with some, occasionally a lot, of retained breeding plumage. The one shown here with lots of breeding plumage was seen with two other Common Terns on the same day which had moulted almost completely, though one was faintly darker than the other.

What do readers make of these?

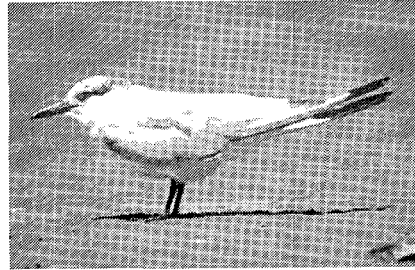
BRIAN CHUDLEIGH



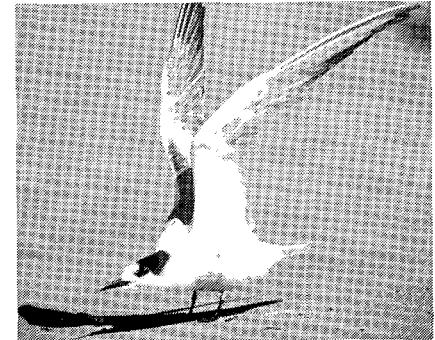
Juvenile Arctic Tern Bowentown Shellbanks. Nov 1988



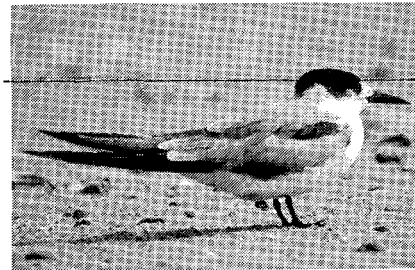
Common Tern Bowentown Shellbanks. Nov 1988.



Whiskered Tern.



Common Tern Bowentown Shellbanks. Nov. 1988.



Common Tern Bowentown Shellbanks. Dec. 1988.



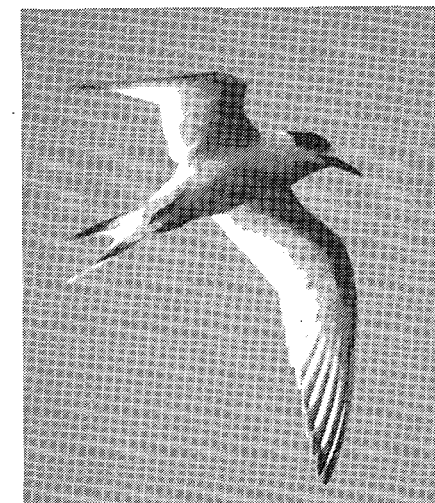
Common Tern Bowentown Shellbank. Nov. 1988.



1st year White-fronted tern. Dec 1988.



1st year White-fronted Tern. Jan 1988.



W.F. Tern, July note Black edged primaries

All photos by Brian Chudleigh



Rarebits

North Is. Brown Kiwi - At Trounson Park Tom Herbert and Jos Deeming have lost four out of ten first brood kiwi chicks to stoats so far this season. In the Research by Management areas near Whangarei Pat Miller is getting similar results with 13 of 24 radio tagged chicks dead to date, at least ten to predators including at least five to mustelids.

Northland terns - This El Nino year is looking good for Fairy Terns. Currently we have six chicks in Northland, four at Mangawhai and two at Waipu. Two have been banded and have fledged and the other four will be banded in mid January. If two others in Auckland Conservancy also make it to fledging this will be our best year and will go a long way to making up for last summer, our worst year. Tentatively it looks like El Nino is good for fairies as our best years have coincided with this event (1992-94 and 1997/98) and our worst a La Nina event (1996/97).

New Zealand Dotterels, Variable Oystercatchers, White-fronted Terns and Caspian Terns have also had a good year. The Caspian Tern colonies at Mangawhai, Whangarei and Rangaunu have all produced good numbers of chicks and the OSNZ count of White-fronted Terns is in excess of 1,700 pairs compared to counts during previous years of 449 and 1,172. Over 500 chicks were seen at the Rangaunu colony with many more birds still on eggs.

Kaka - Getting bitten seems to be part of the Kaka capture initiation process. In September Whirinaki Kaka got their first chance ever to remind people how strong their bite is...and survive! Utilising Pureora equipment and experience, eleven birds were caught, weighed, measured, banded and then ten of them (eight males, two females) had transmitters fitted.

Our initial capture attempts proved frustratingly fruitless. It wasn't until a couple of days had been spent recording Whirinaki Love Songs Vol. 1 that we finally managed to lure birds into the mist net with some "catchy" tunes. (Whirinaki Waiata Aroha Vol. 2 is now available on CD.) Since then Andrew August has been full time on tracking birds, mapping home ranges, recording feeding observations and looking for breeding behaviour.

The main focus of the study is to monitor breeding success or otherwise in a population of Kaka that live in podocarp forest where no intensive animal control has been done. Possum

numbers are moderate, rats, stoats and cats are known to be present.

Some interesting observations have been recorded so far, including an apparent seasonal dependency on adjacent exotic forest compartments for sustenance. Early spring bark stripping of *lucitanica*, Douglas fir and *Pinus radiata* seemed to be a mainly female behaviour. More recently the males, which have larger beaks, have been spending a lot of time on *radiata* pine seed extraction, with individual birds observed systematically working up and down a pine tree prising open ripe cones. One pair of transmitters birds has established a nest and another two putukaka (nest holes) have been located with unbanded females in incubating mode.

This spring has been an exceptional one for flowers: kowhai, ti kouka, kamahi, rewarewa and manuka have been especially noticeable. On windy days, matai pollen has been visible drifting through the trees, with many male trees covered in yellow pollen bracts. If this flowering is followed by a similar abundance of fruit than it could be a good year for Kaka.

The Whirinaki and its Ngahere Tuahine Pureora are the last main forests in the North Island with reasonable numbers of Kaka. It is hoped that this study will significantly add to our knowledge of this bird and perhaps provide some clues as to how population numbers can be enhanced. In the meantime fingers have long since healed and beeping transmitters continue to be preened beneath a layer of dark brown feathers.

Eastern Rosella - This spring has seen the first recorded sightings of Eastern Rosellas along the western fringe of Urewera Forest tract. There is some concern on the effect of the manuhiri on kakariki. Do they compete for habitat, food, nest sites? Do they interbreed? Are rosellas confined to the forest margins and perhaps avoid the large forest tracts as appears to be the current situation on the eastern flanks of the Kaimai-Mamaku tract?

This information is needed urgently to determine once and for all whether they have a direct impact on kakariki distribution. Kakariki are still in good numbers throughout Whirinaki Forest Park. The situation warrants further study, perhaps by an MSc student?

Diving petrels - In November and December 92 Common Diving Petrel chicks were transferred to Mana Island to establish a new colony of these small burrowing petrels. Forty chicks were transferred from North Brothers Island on 24 November and 52 were collected from the Sugarloaf Islands, New Plymouth, on 11 December. Chicks were fed daily with "krill smoothies".

The transferred chicks fledged from artificial burrows at intervals of between one and thirty days, with a total of 50 chicks successfully hand-reared. The remaining chicks mainly died in two abrupt episodes, probably from food poisoning. Two factors identified were 1) adapting to the initial diet which was modified from a North American seabird rehabilitation diet, and 2) partial defrosting of krill blocks in a freezer that only operated when the island generator was operational. Both these problems should be resolvable in future years.

On the positive side the chicks responded well to hand-feeding and readily accepted their artificial burrows. The contract staff of Rex Williams, Enfy's Graham and Sian Robinson did a great job of nurturing their tiny babies.

On the first transfer, non-breeding adults were also captured and transferred. However some losses were experienced as the adults did not settle very well in the transfer boxes, with stress or overheating contributing to the death of some birds. After this traumatic episode, it was decided to abandon plans to carry out future transfers of adult diving petrels.

The chick transfer project will continue for at least three years and will hopefully result in the establishment of a new colony of diving petrels and provide information on the age at which petrel chicks should be collected for transfer to new colony sites.

Fluttering Shearwaters - The colony of Fluttering Shearwaters on Maud Island continues to grow. We have five pairs resident this year, each with a chick. Four of these pairs includes one unbanded bird, which means that the chicks originally transferred to the island are mating with birds which were raised elsewhere. Assuming that all pairing takes place in the colony, these strangers must be lured to the island pretty much solely by the amplified petrel calls played each night.

Last season Mike Bell found some evidence of the converse happening, with one of the chicks originally transferred to Maud back as a breeding adult on the colony where it hatched. We need to search for these again this season.

Hutton's Shearwater - Richard Cuthbert is now well into the second year of his PhD. Significant differences are already apparent between the weights of those birds (and their eggs) which breed earlier and at lower altitudes and those which have to wait for the snow to melt to gain access to their burrows. Perhaps further work will reveal to what extent that predation and other pressures have forced these birds higher into the mountains into less favourable habitat.

As this note goes to press we hear that the first stoat has been captured live and fitted with a radio transmitter. This

aspect of the study should shed light on just how much impact the stoats are having.

Meanwhile Faith Barber has the unenviable task of managing volunteers and research assistants going in and out of the colony, with weather that invariably delays the flights and radio communication that suffers the serious attention of fifteen Kea.

Okarito Brown Kiwi - the first consignment of three young Okarito Brown Kiwi arrived on Motuara Island with Lynn Adams in late November. They now have free range on the island - getting bushwise in a safe environment before return to the reality of life with vermin and adult kiwi on the mainland.

In preparation for this transfer (and to ease the concerns of our herpetologists) the new 20 m. x 20 m. frog habitat was fenced to keep the birds out.

White Heron - Wet, cold, westerly weather (El Nino) since the end of October has had a big impact on the breeding success of White Heron and Royal Spoonbill nesting in the Waitangiroto Nature Reserve. 48 heron nests were established at the peak of the season, with most hatching successfully. Most of these nests have now failed with only nine chicks surviving. Thirteen nests have been recently re-established. However the prognosis for these nests looks grim with the present weather pattern expected to continue long into the new year.

The Royal Spoonbills have established 23 nests, the most recorded for several years. The first of them are beginning to hatch now. Unfortunately the relentless weather is killing most of the chicks as they hatch. Tours to the colony are still popular with visitors, with numbers being similar to previous years.

Mohua - News on the Mohua front is good and bad. From the Tuatapere Field Centre the Rowallan Mohua densities have dropped by 40% in the areas where stoat control was carried out and by up to 90% in the areas where stoat control was not carried out. These declines are not isolated, as there was a very serious drop in Mohua numbers in the Eglinton Valley last summer, despite stoat control. All these declines have occurred in non-beech mast years, so they are a very real cause for concern, particularly if the trend continues.

In October 1995, 32 Mohua were transferred from the Blue Mountains to Breaksea Island in Fiordland in an effort to further test island translocation with this species. Earlier successful test transfers had been carried out from Eglinton Valley to Centre Island (Te Anau) and from the Dart Valley to Pigeon Island (Wakatipu).

Each year since the transfer to Breaksea there had been a visit to Breaksea to monitor the progress of the

colonisation. In September 1996 a flock of 20-25 birds was sighted and in April 1997 a flock of at least six birds was seen. The Mohua Recovery Group then requested a more intensive survey, and in October 1997 a team visited the island. The result has been very encouraging, with 20 banded birds (out of 32 transferred) seen and at least 22 unbanded birds recorded.

This result is very helpful in the Mohua recovery programme and points to a further experimental transfer of Mohua to a small podocarp island (Ulva?) prior to a transfer to hopefully kiore-free Codfish Island sometime around the year 2000.

Takahe - Poor weather, cold, snow falls etc. have blighted the field portion of the Takahe project this season. Several pairs that nested in October have chicks and some eggs were transferred to Burwood for rearing. Most of the Takahe pairs had not nested, even as of mid-December. The results of this season may be disappointing, although it is promising that the number of pairs in the Murchison Mountains this season has increased over last year.

New incubators and improvements to the rearing regime at Burwood look like bringing real results into the programme, with healthier birds at hatching and at release for their first winter. It is predicted that the quality of captive reared Takahe which are released in the Murchison Mountains will increase over the next few years. The credit for the continuous improvement over the past ten years must go to the various staff who have been at Burwood Bush, as well as to the whole Takahe team.

New Zealand Dotterels - Once again the El Nino weather has made dotterel work on Stewart Island very difficult. Cat control has continued but the number of suspected cat bait takes has been very low. A survey team has carried out a dotterel nesting survey over the alpine tops of Stewart Island and recorded at least twelve definite nests (including a six egg nest which may be from a female-female pair), and three probables, although some later re-nesting may be occurring.

The dotterel project is still waiting for a year when cat predation of dotterels outside the treatment areas is significantly higher than inside. Given the small number of nests and the randomness of cat-dotterel encounters we may be waiting some time. The dotterel population still appears to be increasing as there are at least five dotterel nests at the Table Hill cat control site, as opposed to one in 1994.

Shore Plovers - A big season on the Shore Plover front at Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre with the current strategy of multiple clutching captive pairs, artificial incubation and hand rearing chicks to fledging, and then transfer straight from the brooder to Motuara

Island for a month's orientation in the island aviaries before release.

The idea is to expose these juveniles to their first wild site *in situ* where we want them to stay, and also to test a possible trend towards increased site fidelity in previously released hand reared release samples compared to parent reared samples. This strategy is boosting productivity sharply, with the most experienced Mt Bruce pairs currently starting incubation of their fourth clutches and a total season release target of 40 fluffies well within reach.

We are boosting the essential elements of the pairs' diets in recognition of the increased physiological stress this places on the females in particular. We are also running an incubation trial on a clutch of fresh eggs to see if we can develop this technique further as a means of adding more flexibility and options for future egg collections from South East Island. Previous attempts in the 1980s on fresh eggs were unsuccessful - only eggs collected after at least eight days of natural incubation have been successful. Two of these fresh eggs are pipping in the hatcher now, so we may be about to crack this technique.

Residency of birds released on Motuara Island has been extremely fluid since September 1997. At the beginning of September eight birds from three releases were resident. Several birds have since disappeared, including the established pair which was showing every sign of breeding on the island this season. Other individuals have dispersed and returned intermittently, and one bird has remained staunch with feet firmly on the island. He has paired late in the season with a young female, and although she is younger than the known breeding age of females on South East Island, this pair has been actively defending their territory adjacent to the release aviaries, courting and nest prospecting.

The first of this year's multiple releases took place on 10 December, with six birds (three with transmitters) released from the aviaries. Two predations of transmitted birds by Moreporks were recorded by 15 December. Currently two are resident and two missing.

Auckland meetings

Because of reconstruction at Auckland Museum, meetings of the Auckland region will not be able to take place there in 1998. Members and friends are therefore welcome at Auckland meetings at Kohia Teachers' Centre, 272 Jervois Road, Herne Bay at the usual time of 7.45 pm. Meetings will still take place on the first Tuesday of the month.

GWENDA PULHAM

Regional Roundup

Northland

The primary object of our November meeting was to plan the 1998 programme, followed by a video on albatrosses. The planning session went smoothly but the video was uncooperative and it was a case of coffee, biscuits and talk. Albatrosses next meeting perhaps.

November's Far North harbour survey of Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu netted 20,719 birds. Notable were a Little Egret and 18 Little Terns at Rangaunu, 56 Whimbrels at Parengarenga and an impressive total of 706 Turnstones.

Richard Parrish and Tony Beauchamp took to the air again to spot White-fronted Tern nesting sites. These were subsequently checked out by OSNZ members and DoC staff. During early December members looked for possible new Fairy Tern nesting sites but none were found. The year was rounded off with a get-together and barbecue hosted by Jean Hawkins.

Our monthly east and west coast beach patrols have continued, the moderate weather resulting in limited numbers and species being found, although one west coast patrol in December found 24 Mottled Petrels and 126 Sooty Shearwaters. For added value and interest, patrollers are now noting live birds as well as the dead and decaying.

The Far North region got the year off to a quick start with Isobella and Derry Godbert banding thirteen Black-backed Gulls on the Black Rocks on 1 January.

4 January saw four host and thirsty members (Claire Burt, Lorna Simpkin, her young nephew Craig Crocombe and Den Carter) endeavouring to outwit Black-backed Gull chicks among the sand dunes, gorse and pampas adjoining the Waipu oxidation ponds. Noel Coward may well have sung "Mad dogs and New Zealanders". 79 chicks were banded. Two birds were found with swellings on their bills and one with a broken swelling on a middle toe - there were mutterings of migrants from Hong Kong. This problem has not been seen here before.

In spite of numbers banded at this site in previous years no banded adults were seen. A dead adult found by a transformer had a green band. The banding office has yet to confirm the origin of this bird.

Audrey Williams organised members to relieve the DoC staff monitoring the Fairy Terns at Waipu and Mangawhai. As there have been no storms this year our services were only required to allow Leigh and Katrina to have the odd break. Due to cyclones and high winds no chicks were fledged last year but, happily, this year two have fledged at Waipu and four at Mangawhai.

Janet Snell organised the annual anniversary weekend Far North lakes survey. Two of the lakes are now dry and have rows of pine trees planted through them, and others are becoming choked with rushes etc. Good numbers of Grey Ducks, Grey Teal and NZ Shovellers were found on the surviving lakes.

The Sunday included a patrol on 90 Mile Beach organised by David Crockett and helped by Ken Clarke with his 4WD vehicle. The twelve members stayed at the Paua Station shearers' quarters which are in dire need of some TLC - the early arrivals did a good clean up job. A swarm of bees had taken over the roof area. While obviously finding the building to their liking, they were not always appreciated by the temporary residents. In spite of the "hardships" this is always an interesting and enjoyable weekend.

(Den Carter)

Auckland

At our December meeting, Auckland members were treated to another of Tony Beauchamp's fascinating talks about Weka, and we enjoyed a festive supper.

Unfortunately Sandy Bartle was denied release time from the Museum of New Zealand to speak at our February meeting, but Professor Wolfgang and Dr Rosie Wiltshko from Frankfurt University were back in New Zealand, continuing their experiments on sun compass orientation in homing pigeons. Rosie kindly updated us on their work. Adrian Riegen also spoke on South Island braided river beds, John Dowding on the Wrybill project, Doug Booth on Kookaburra sightings in the region and David Wright on the Fairy Tern project. All in all an excellent *pot pourri* evening.

With three major wader harbours in or adjacent to Auckland our region, the new format of the Manukau and the south Kaipara Harbour on consecutive days of the same weekend is working well. It allows members to count their "regular" site on the one day and "visit" another harbour on the other. Many thanks to Adrian, Connie and Tony for coordinating the weekends.

OSNZ members from as far away as Coromandel and one from Mt Bruce joined Aucklanders for the Fairy Tern breeding census weekend in December. The New Zealand total was seven pairs plus two itinerant birds. Sixteen birds were accounted for - where were the other ten? Highlights of the weekend were a Greenshank at Tauhoa, a Large Sand Dotterel at Tāpora, a Sanderling at Waikiri Creek, and of course the Saturday night barbecue.

In spite of the El Nino weather pattern, our shorebirds in particular appear to have had an outstanding season, with many species nesting early. New Zealand Dotterel nests were recorded on 27 August at Pollen Island and Mangawhai, and record numbers

fledged from both Mangawhai and Papakanui spits. Omaha Spit fledged two chicks, the first for six years, and even populated Waiwera rivermouth fledged a chick. We are anticipating higher than usual numbers on 29 March, post breeding census day.

Variable Oystercatchers have bred successfully all around the region, with the first nest recorded at Mangawhai on 5 October.

The Mangawhai Caspian Tern colony was underway on 21 September, with three one egg nests and 27 scrapes. However Leigh Honnor reported only about forty pairs nesting there over the summer, which is down on previous years. Even an increase in the number of pairs at the Rat Island colony, 57 nests and 73 scrapes, on 17 October did not account for the missing Mangawhai birds. The riddle was solved on 6 December, when Sylvia Watson, Shawn O'Connor and Tony Habraken spotted a new sandbar covered in Caspian Terns rising out of the Kaipara Harbour just north of Big Sand Island, Tāpora. A visit there on 23 December revealed the missing forty pairs.

Yet again Ted Kitching and Lauren Alston coordinated the White-fronted Tern survey for our region. Numbers were down on the east coast but the west coast colonies were as healthy as ever. Fish offering and copulation were observed at the Muriwai colony on 17 October, and the c.800 pairs at Papakanui Spit fledged nearly a thousand chicks, probably because of the predator control undertaken by the Department of Conservation at that site.

New Zealand's northernmost successful colony of Black-billed Gulls also occurred at Papakanui Spit and seven chicks were banded on 31 January. Here's hoping that Tony Habraken will write up the northward spread of this species in the future.

Fairy Terns in our region had an amazing season. Four chicks were fledged by the three pairs at Mangawhai and the first confirmed chick in ten years was fledged by one of the two pairs at Papakanui Spit. Each of the Papakanui pairs had three attempts at nesting, which has not been recorded before. The shortest re-nest interval was eleven days - sometimes good information can be gained from losses.

Other interesting sightings over the summer were a Glossy Ibis at Whatipu, a parakeet in the Waitakeres, a Gull-billed Tern at Waiwera Estuary, an immature Sooty Tern live on Muriwai Beach and a couple of Common Terns at Rat Island in the Kaipara Harbour.

All three OSNZ telescopes are currently out on loan: to Sandra Morris for a Pied Stilt plumage node study, Sara Treadgold for her MSc on Fairy Terns and David Pye for his Big Shoal Bay wetland study. Our thanks to Council for providing these assets for members' use.

Mel Galbreath is back teaching this year after twelve months as an honorary research fellow at the University of Auckland looking into ecological restoration options for certain reserves. Mel was awarded a Science and Technology Teacher Fellowship by the Royal Society for 1997.

Several of our members have departed Auckland for other parts of the country. Rodd Orange, Judith and Brian Tyler, Wayne and Nelda Taylor will all be missed, but we are thankful that our loss is another region's gain.

(Gwenda Pulham)

South Auckland

The beach patrol in December was a good one, with 19 different species collected. Three Mottled Petrels and a White-headed Petrel were of particular note as they are usually recorded in winter months. Even later were two Mottled Petrels and a White-headed Petrel found in January. Picked up in addition in December were 31 Sooty Shearwaters, six Short-tailed Shearwaters, an Antarctic Fulmar, two Cape Pigeons, a Kerguelen Petrel and a White-chinned Petrel.

The signs of summer passing are seen in godwits, knots and other northern waders as some have begun to assume breeding plumage as they contemplate a return for another northern summer. By the time you get to read this, some will have departed and many near their peak about to go - it is not too late however to enjoy their climax of readiness. During the summer there have been sightings of a Broad-billed Sandpiper at Karaka, probably the same bird Ray Clough saw early at Mangere, as well as a Marsh Sandpiper, a Terek Sandpiper, six Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 24 Red-necked Stints, 18 Curlew Sandpipers, seven Little Terns and a possible Fairy Tern.

Miranda has hosted three Marsh Sandpipers recently, a species not often recorded here. New Zealand Dotterels have had a good breeding season along Miranda's chenier ridges, with 19 at Rangipo on 7 February. Other waders in the area include Sharp-tailed, Terek and Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, 1200 Wrybills, along with Little Terns. A bittern and Banded Rails with chicks seem to be doing well and are best seen at the pond around the Miranda Trust Centre, though not since the pond dried out.

The Black-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern colony was very successful at Miranda this season. The gulls started two and a half weeks earlier than in previous seasons and were well ahead of the terns - the latter grew from 2-300 pairs in mid-November to c.1,300 pairs in December. Their season has extended into February when a small number of tiny chicks were still being brooded. 326 White-fronted Tern chicks were banded, only a small portion of the number raised at the colony which would have been in excess

of 800. Everybody who visited the colony and helped with the banding this year were pleased to see such success, as in past years we've learnt to accept that only a small number fledge.

The Black-billed Gulls had their best year yet, and 380 chicks were banded. Within one month some individuals have been sighted on the Manukau at one of their favourite roosts. A further seven chicks were banded at Papakanui Spit, Kaipara Harbour. A bird from the Miranda colony in its second year decided to breed there after an earlier report of two that had been seen.

February's meeting was the AGM where everything gets aired! We followed with a session of measuring wings, bills and legs to assist with identification of beach specimens, thanks to the help of a few frozen birds. This was followed by a chance for those who haven't plied a band or two to discover how easy or difficult it is, and to encourage more participation in ornithological activities.

(Tony Habraken)

Waikato

The Kuaotunu Kiwi Sanctuary was the topic for our November meeting. It was great to hear about the all-out effort to help the birds, which is the result of local enterprise and outside support. Our December meeting was the traditional pot-luck Christmas dinner. Humorous-entertainment/instruction was provided by Frank Bailey, including fascinating and mind-bending quizzes. Then he and Paul Cuming collaborated to tease us with a contest to identify birds from feathers, and from fuzzy photos - you know, the sort we all take plenty of.

Our field trip for December was a Mystery Trip but such was our faith in our RR Bev Woolley that a full and expectant bus set out on the day. At each turn of the road the speculation on our destination continued, but as we neared the Miranda Shorebird Centre our destination was obvious - or was it? No, we continued past and on further north. The destination was still a mystery when we alighted under the trees at what turned out to be Banner's Theatre, north of Kaiawa. Those with binoculars around their necks and expecting birds felt a bit silly when we were ushered into one man's dream come true - a hobby which has now turned into a business. It is a proper though very small theatre, complete with stage, organ and all the trimmings of yesteryear. The performance comprised both live show and film. Are birders a shy lot? Quite happy to watch and listen and laugh, but try to get participation in the show from us and we all clam up. Except for singing. We don't mind singing anonymously in the crowd, but not solo. As for dancing, it turned out that there was only one of us that didn't claim at

least one injured leg and was prepared to take the opportunity to dance with a professional. And after that visit which was something completely different, yes, we did visit the Shorebird Centre on the way home!

Beach patrolling has been very interesting over the September to December period, with up to sixteen species being found in a single patrol. Most numerous were Sooty Shearwaters, including one which had been banded at the Snares Islands. Fairy Prions, gannets and Fluttering Shearwaters were next in order of abundance, followed by diving petrels, Blue Penguins, Short-tailed Shearwaters and Buller's Shearwaters. There was a big range of other species, including two Northern Royal Albatrosses and five Shy Mollymawks. During a patrol on 7 January seven small flocks of South Island Pied Oystercatchers were seen flying north from their summer breeding grounds to their winter quarters.

Almost the largest body which could be found on a beach patrol was found by John and Stella Rowe recently - a Sperm Whale! Fortunately they were able to readily identify it, so didn't have to pop it into the boot of the car and bring it back to consult others about it.

Five minute bird counts were continued regularly at Mt Karioi and initiated at Mt Kakepuku where goat, possum and rat control are expected to show beneficial results soon.

The national gull and tern survey in the region was carried out between late October and early January. There are no Black-billed Gull colonies in our region, but the elusive White-fronted Terns were tracked down on the west coast cliffs. They didn't breed this year at two of the locations where they had bred last season. On the other hand they appeared to have concentrated all their efforts at the third site, near Albatross Point, with 413 occupied nests. This was more than the total at the three sites last season. During the search for tern nesting sites we saw Spotted Shag parents and juveniles on a rock stack south of Port Waikato.

Our summer harbour census at Raglan, Kawhia and Aotea was carried out in mostly good conditions on 15 November. The Raglan count was lower than usual but the other two harbours were "normal". Godwits were the most numerous (about 6,000), followed by South Island Pied Oystercatchers (about 1,000) and Black Swans. Nesting species included Caspian Terns, Red-billed Gulls and Pied Shags. Three Royal Spoonbills had evidently decided not to head south for the summer breeding season.

Monthly counts have continued at Hamilton Lake and Forest Lake. At Forest Lake, too much water in spring may have been the cause of less breeding of Pied Stilts than usual, and this has been followed by too little water now in the hot, dry summer. The duck population at Hamilton Lake in January was about

a thousand. Any child arriving with a bag of bread to feed them becomes quickly surrounded by a huge number of ducks and some geese. It is interesting to watch some children's view of them change from lovable fluffy ducks to a menacing horde which is pecking at their bags and hands. Potential future OSNZ members being put off for life?

The season's work in the Grey-faced Petrel project ended with 33 chicks banded at Mauao (Mt Maunganui) and 124 at Motuotau Island. Both figures are the highest to date but the Mauao figure is especially pleasing and appears to indicate that predator control has again been successful this year. A major fire at Mauao on 13/14 December gave cause for concern for chicks close to fledging, but fortunately the fire did not burn across the known burrow areas, though it did burn right up to the edge of one of them.

(Hugh Clifford)

Bay of Plenty

The summer wader census was carried out in November and December, covering sixteen sites throughout the region. Nine sites produced a total of 13,041 Bar-tailed Godwits and there were a smattering of uncommon species - an Australasian Bittern at Kaituna, Pacific Golden Plovers at Kaituna and Ohiwa, a Red-necked Stint at Kaituna, an Eastern Curlew at Ohiwa and Whimbrels at two sites in the southern part of Tauranga Harbour. 36 species of wader and waterbirds were recorded in total. Many thanks to the nineteen people who contributed.

A party of nineteen members and friends were led by Keith Owen for a very rewarding trip into the Rotoehu Forest on 7 December to observe Kokako. Three birds were seen with the aid of tapes and Keith provided information on the conservation programme for forest habitat which is having some success with possum and other predator controls.

Eleven members took part in a beach patrol from Ohiwa to Waiotahi on 18 January. The group split into two, one from Ohiwa to Bryan's Beach and the other from Bryan's Beach to the Waiotahi rivermouth and back again. The second group had a longer walk but they also had more success with the number of wrecks found. The wrecks were mainly diving petrels and penguins, and were probably the result of a storm which occurred about two weeks earlier.

Interesting sightings include the Grey Ternlets seen around the Volkner Rocks (see this issue). These birds have been seen in the Bay of Plenty before, though it is some years since any positive sightings.

A Fairy Martin was seen on 15 January, in the Tasman grounds at Kawerau. Two adult Banded Dotterels with a chick were near the summit of Mt Tarawera on 26 December, and two Banded Rails were

seen in Ohiwa Harbour on 18 January. There were three Spotless Crakes at Lake Tamarenuui on 25 January.

(John Brierley)

Taranaki

In spite of a strong westerly, a visit to the Waiongana rivermouth on 15 November was rewarding as 23 species were seen. Two pairs of Variable Oystercatchers were nesting and small numbers of various waders were present. After seeing two Red-necked Stints the members present felt the trip worthwhile.

The December meeting saw the return of two members from trips to Finland, Poland and Namibia while a third is in India. Our congratulations to our RR David Medway on his appointment to the Rare Birds Committee.

It was decided to return to the Waitaanga Forest for the monthly outing. This is an excellent area to view NZ Robins. DoC always includes a visit to this forest in their summer programme and the officers have located plants of a red variety of native mistletoe. Attempts to grow this plant on monitored host plants have not been successful to date.

Records for January include a Spotless Crake caught by a cat in the New Plymouth city area. Banded Dotterels are returning to the Waiongana rivermouth (48 on 21 January), and small groups of SIPO have been seen flying north. One pair of the previously mentioned Variable Oystercatchers were successful in hatching two chicks which fledged in late January. Eggs from the other nest were lost. Two Pied Stilt chicks were hatched in the same area and in the marine park two Reef Heron chicks were seen.

Early in December our local DoC staff selected 52 young Common Diving Petrels from a thriving colony of 6-8,000 birds on Motumahanga Island in the marine park, and these birds, within two weeks of fledging, were transferred to Mana Island with the hopes of re-establishing a colony there. All the birds were banded, and during the exercise only one bird was lost. This will be an interesting project to follow. Our thanks to DoC officer Bryan Williams for the information. We hope to hear of the successful outcome.

(Rosemary Messenger)

Manawatu

As might be expected over summer, the majority of interesting sightings from the region concern the Foxton Beach area.

At the Manawatu Estuary there has been the usual variety of migrant waders. The Grey-tailed Tattler has been resident throughout, as have four Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and 20-23 Pacific Golden Plovers. Turnstone numbers peaked at eleven in mid-November, trickling down

to just two before Christmas as the birds, presumably, made their way further south. Though none were present in January, four were seen (returning north?) on 2 February.

Numbers of Wrybills increased steadily from a handful pre-Christmas to 37 on 2 February, and included a banded bird that has been present each summer for the past five years. There have been up to five Red-necked Stints present, and the timing of the sightings and plumage details lead me to believe that at least eleven different individuals have been involved. Numbers of Red Knots have been fairly static, but several leg-flagged individuals indicate that at least some movement, in and out, has been occurring - a yellow flagged (north west Australia) bird was present from 31 October - 21 November, then an orange (Victoria) one from 30 November - 21 December, and two green (Queensland) flags on 2 December, one remaining until 7 December. Finally for the waders a white (Auckland) Bar-tailed Godwit was seen on 2 February.

Away from the estuary, Foxton No. 1 Lake has produced two Australasian Bitterns together on 11 January, a breeding plumaged Cattle Egret on 17 December and the first records of Fernbirds since 1992. A Barbary Dove (of unknown provenance) was at Halcombe for two days in early December and again on 4 February, and last, but by no means least, there are two very unusual seabird records - a report of a young Wandering Albatross in farm paddocks close to Foxton in mid-January, and a live Fairy Prion on the Manawatu River at Massey on 24 January.

During 1997 Jim Moore recorded 75 species in the Foxton Beach area, while I had 73, including seven species that Jim did not see. Can anyone claim a higher total for any site in the country? And can any site claim more than 82 confirmed species? It would be very interesting to see a comparison with other prime birding localities, but I have a sneaky feeling that we would win hands down!

(Ian Saville)

Wairarapa

The last months of 1997 were busy and interesting. We continued our programme of coordinating meeting topics with our field trip subjects. There were field trips and meetings on the harrier - will RCD have an effect on their numbers? - plus Black-billed Gulls, White-fronted Terns, and crake calling, at which tape recordings were played without success.

El Nino has had a major effect on the Wairarapa, with severe wind, drought and heavy rain in the Tararuas. Coastal gales curtailed some of our tern and gull surveys.

Flooding in rivers flowing from the Tararua has caused repeated wash-outs of nesting Black-fronted Dotterels and Pied Stilts.

In late November a Greater Frigatebird was seen by Betty Watt at Ngawi near Cape Palliser. The year finished with a well attended barbecue.

(Miles King)

Wellington

Many hours of persistent beach patrolling on the sands north of Waikanae paid off for Jean Luke when she found a Bulwer's Petrel. These birds breed in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and spend the summer months around the tropics. It seems that this is the first time one has been reported from a New Zealand beach, though some have been reported from Australia. The bird is now at Te Papa, the Museum of New Zealand.

Three pairs of New Zealand Falcons living comparatively close to Wellington have fledged chicks this year. Steve Lawrence keeps an eye on two pairs in the Upper Hutt area, and a third pair has been observed in the hills behind Eastbourne. Each pair has fledged two chicks. We hope to get out to see them when they start to move into more open country.

Our first evening meeting was a whirlwind world tour with David Cornick. We started off on Mana Island with the concrete gannet luring project and the diving petrel relocation activities. Both of these projects were in action late last year. Then on to the resident shags and Royal Spoonbills of Pauatahanui Inlet. A quick change of country and we saw wonderful slides of the Shetland Islands and Fair Isle. These places would be a must to visit if in Britain. Across the water to Iceland where David spent a couple of weeks last year. What a spectacular country!

Remember the AGM - this year in WELLINGTON - not as spectacular as Iceland, but a pretty special place. Come and help us to have a great weekend. Send in your applications soon please. See you all in May-June.

(Ros Batcheler)

Nelson

The region's activities continue to focus on Farewell Spit with trips each month throughout the year. Trips during June and November have been for the wader census, but other activity centres on research on the gannet colony by a small and dedicated team. Adults have been banded with the usual metal band as well as a large (and expensive) numbered band which can be read easily without the need to capture the bird. Young birds are banded with a colour for the year.

The summer has seen the colony recover completely from the devastating effects of Cyclone Drena and it is likely to be the best breeding season so far. It has also seen the first of the juveniles return to the colony and the anticipated data on site fidelity should become available over the next few seasons.

The Farewell Spit team has also been recording the spacing of Variable Oystercatchers along the ocean beach - the location of each observation conveniently recorded from the odometer. While the Caspian Tern colony on the spit was not successful, Willie Cook's colony in the Waimea Inlet managed to fledge a good number of young.

Other members have been involved again in the White-fronted Tern survey. The long day at sea, which is needed to get to all the Cook Strait colonies, was more of an ordeal this year but had to be done despite the weather. The Spotted Shags remain a bit of a mystery, with many questions still to be unravelled on their seasonal fluctuations. However the next few months will hopefully see us spending more time better establishing the distribution of rails and crakes.

Several members are eagerly awaiting the return of a mapping scheme.

(Peter Gaze)

Canterbury

Over the last couple of months, three Far-eastern Curlews, two Whimbrels and a Grey-tailed Tattler were spotted at the Ashley Estuary, a Grey-tailed Tattler and two Pectoral Sandpipers were seen on Lake Ellesmere, a Whimbrel on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary and two Chestnut-breasted Shelducks at Lake Forsyth.

Waders in January-February at Lake Ellesmere have included a minimum of 400 Wrybills in January, Turnstones, Pacific Golden Plovers, Curlew Sandpipers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Red-necked Stints, Lesser Knots, Banded Dotterels, Pied and smudgy Stilts. A Red-necked Stint with an orange flag (banded in Victoria) was also spotted again this year.

The census of Black-billed Gull colonies around the region turned up a large colony on the Ashburton River of 3,637 nests and there were two more large colonies on the river with a combined total of 7,000 nests altogether. On the Opihi River, two colonies were counted of 870 and 160 nests, and 500 nests were at Peacock Springs. Things were not so good at other localities - colonies located by air on the Waiiau, Hurunui, Leader and Rakaia Rivers were either inaccessible or were washed out by floods. The Kaikoura Peninsula colony, re-established after an early failure, was smaller than past years'. The third attempt by a small number of birds on the Ashley River, twice put off by disturbance from

people on bikes and on foot, was largely unsuccessful.

The November meeting included an interesting variety of speakers and topics. Peter Langlands spoke on oceanic birds of the high seas, which included some sad photos and information on albatrosses killed by long lining operations. Blue Booth shared stories of her adventures during a recent birding trip to Australia. Colin Hill brought along a very interesting video on Blue Ducks, and Kathy Brumbley explained the procedures involved with regional planning and how input from the public or groups like OSNZ can be included. There were no meetings in December or January.

(Frances Schmechel)

Otago

Let's hope that El Nino stops having an effect on New Zealand, its climate, economy and wildlife soon.

A colour banding scheme for the New Zealand Robins at Flagstaff was suggested back in 1992 in order to find out their total population in a Douglas fir stand before the trees were felled. Felling has started, but I have been informed that total clearing will not take place for another two to three years. As a result of the rescheduled felling programme it is hoped to carry on with the scheme for further two years to find out where these banded birds end up. Will they stay in the area or move to the native vegetation in the Silverstream catchment?

The initial outcome of last year's census of Yellow-eyed Penguins is, according to John Darby, a slight decrease in the numbers on the Otago Peninsula compared with December 1996. In January we had a mortality of about 15%, so it looks as if recuperation is quicker than initially thought possible.

Most if not all records for the Black-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern survey have come in. A staggering 4,178 White-fronted Tern nests are reported from the Waitaki rivermouth. Unfortunately the nests were wiped out, thanks to El Nino and aided by neighbouring Red-billed Gulls. Black-billed Gulls were only reported breeding on the Waitaki and the Clutha Rivers.

A banded Pied Stilt has been found dead at Aramoana. It was banded left leg black/yellow, right leg red/green/red at Hoopers Inlet on 11 January 1993. This is the only one we know a little more about than most banded stilts in Otago. Seen at Aramoana on 19 and 24 April 1993, it turned up at the Manukau Harbour on 9 May 1993, was seen again at Aramoana on 10 January 1995, then again in the North Island, this time at Kawhia Harbour on 17 June 1995. It was not seen again until its demise on 12 December 1997. It surely has seen New Zealand.

El Nino had a distinct effect on the breeding success of Variable Oystercatchers. Victory Beach didn't do too badly - three pairs produced a total of five chicks, with one nest still occupied - but at the largest beaches from Brighton to Taieri mouth, with a total of 19 pairs, not one chick has hatched. All nests, except one, have been washed out. High winds, whipping up the surf, wiped out all nests on more than one occasion.

Despite El Nino the Otago Royal Spoonbills are doing well, with successful breeding at Maukiekie, Green Island and the Nuggets. The latest news is the establishment of a new colony this season, at Taieri Island. A conservative number of the nests in the four colonies was 84. We hope to cover once again all potential sites from Kakanui down to the Catlins post-breeding.

A Hampden garden was visited by a Tui on 20 November - only the second sighting here is 13 years. A Short-tailed Shearwater on a December beach patrol was a rare find for Otago. A first year White-winged Black Tern in January at Warrington was followed by another in full breeding plumage in the Waitaki River near Duntroon - the same place as a bird seen two years ago. 150 Lesser Knots at Aramoana was an unusually high number. A female Tomtit in Karitane was only the third sighting in seven years. January also saw a Siberian Tattler at Hoopers Inlet and two Eastern Rosellas were eyeing gooseberries from a fence at Saddle Hill.

(Peter Schweigman)

Southland

The dead kiwi described in the last Southland *Regional Roundup* is now a proud skeleton in the Southland Museum. Unusual dead seabirds from Oreti Beach during the course of the year were a Variable Oystercatcher, Royal Spoonbill, Hutton's Shearwater, Royal Albatross and a Black-bellied Storm Petrel. Eric Black also picked up two spoonbills (one of which had been banded as a chick in Blenheim in 1993) at Omaui, and there was a Snares Crested Penguin from Colac Bay.

Black-billed Gulls had a poor season due to prolonged foul weather in spring which repeatedly washed out the nesting colonies on our major rivers. We banded about 120 in two colonies. A strong gale on 30 November caused major disruption to nesting spoonbills, White-fronted terns, Caspian Terns and Black-billed Gulls.

A number of overseas ornithologists have passed through, mostly on their way to Stewart Island which continues to offer superb birding.

There has been a minor wreck of Blue Penguins along the south coast this summer. A small flock of Cattle Egrets has stayed over summer - no sign of breeding unfortunately. We have two Greenshanks in residence at Awarua Bay

- it is some years since we have seen any. A Ruff has been reported from the bay, and there are at least two tattlers and a Terek Sandpiper, along with the usual godwits, knots and turnstones.

A junior member has spent a fortnight on Codfish Island as a Kakapo minder.

(Lloyd Esler)

Chatham Islands

With the summer bringing the return of waders to the Chathams, we have spent quite a bit of time around the lagoon with the telescope. With the lake not being tidal and the water level very low, wader spotting here is particularly challenging. To date two Wandering Tattlers, four Pacific Golden Plovers, 120 Turnstones, 250 Bar-tailed Godwits and 700 Lesser Knots have been recorded. The highlight however has been two flagged knots, one banded in Victoria, the other in north west Australia, amongst a flock of 500.

With the help of local fishing boats, the census of Chatham Island and Pitt Island Shags has been completed. All of the islands in the group were surveyed. The results have proved to be very interesting, with Pitt Island Shags (670 breeding pairs) being rarer than Chatham Island Shags (840 breeding pairs). Because of the Pitt Island Shag's wider distribution across the islands it had always been assumed that the Chatham Island Shag was rarer.

The beaches have been relatively clean in the last few months. However some interesting sightings at sea have included Wandering Albatross, Salvin's and White-capped Mollymawk, Buller's Shearwater and high numbers of Arctic Skuas. On one boat trip we were hand-feeding Buller's Mollymawks crayfish bait.

The calm weather has sparked a good breeding season for endangered species in the Chathams. The Black Robins have had a very productive season; 18 young were raised to independence on Mangere, and on South East Island 52 young are at or are nearing independence. The Chatham Island Oystercatchers have so far fledged 17 young, with another five nests still on the go with eggs or young chicks. This is the best production for oystercatchers for several years.

The Chatham Island Petrel on South East Island has again been the focus of an intense work programme. As a result the number of known breeding burrows has risen to 50. With active management over the next few months it is hoped that most of these will fledge chicks this year. There are two pairs of Taiko with young chicks at present - two of last season's successful pairs did not attempt to breed this year. Cat, possum, Weka and rat control continues around the burrows and it is hoped that, despite El Nino conditions, both chicks will fledge.

As we did last year, colour flagging of juvenile White-fronted Tern chicks was carried out. Only 100 chicks were banded however due to a poor breeding season. The terns were banded with a yellow flag on the right leg (last season the yellow flag was on the left leg). Members are encouraged to keep an eye out for flagged terns in their regions.

(Mike Bell)

What's On



Northland/Far North

Evening meetings. Advisory Services, Alexander Street, Whangarei. Ph. Lorna Simpkin (09) 437 2076.

12 March - evening meeting, Northland AGM.

13-14 March - weekend at Miranda Naturalists' Trust. Ph. Lorna Simpkin.

April - Cavalli Islands survey. Ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954.

17-19 April - Fairy Tern post breeding census. Ph. Richard Parrish (09) 436 1988.

14 May - evening meeting.

28 June - winter census, Whangarei Harbour - ph. Richard Parrish; Kaipara Harbour - ph. David Crockett.

3-5 July - winter census, Far North. Ph. Richard Parrish.

9 July - evening meeting.

July - passerine mist netting. Ph. Ray Pierce (09) 437 5711.

July - Motukawanui Island planting. Ph. David Crockett.

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).



Auckland

Evening meetings - first Tuesday of the month (except January), Kohia Teachers' Centre, 272 Jervois Road, Herne Bay. Ph. Gwenda Pulham (09) 480 5535.

20-22 March - Tiritiri Matangi Island survey. Ph. Mike Graham (09) 817 5537.

29 March - NZ Dotterel post-breeding census. Ph. Gwenda Pulham (09) 480 5535, Mary and Allan McKenzie (09) 423 7016.

7 April - evening meeting, Gould's and Grey-faced Petrels.

12 April - beach patrol, Muriwai. Note date may change - Ph. Mike Graham (09) 817 5537.

10-13 April - trip to Great Barrier Island.
Ph. Ken Bond (09) 534 4048.

25 April - South Kaipara Head lakes/
dabchick survey. Ph. Chris Bindon (09)
836 6163.

5 May - evening meeting.

10 May - Muriwai beach patrol. Ph. Mike
Graham (09) 817 5537.

28 June - Kaipara Harbour winter
census. Ph. Adrian Riegen (09) 814 9741.



South Auckland

Evening meetings - Papakura Croquet
Clubrooms, Chapel Street, Papakura,
7.45 pm. Ph. David Lawrie (09) 238
8407.

14 April - evening meeting, searching for
South Island Kokako.

12 May - evening meeting, members'
night.

9 June - evening meeting, illustrating
children's natural history books.

14 June - Firth of Thames winter census.
Ph. Tony Habraken (09) 238 5284.

27 June - Manukau Harbour winter
census. Ph. Tony Habraken.

Beach patrols of Kariotahi and Sunset
Beaches, Port Waikato, on 22 March, 23
May, 20 June, 19 July. Ph. Pam (09) 535
4222 - also for details of April date.



Waikato

Evening meetings, third Wednesday of
the month (except January), DoC
Conference Room, London Street,
Hamilton. Ph. Hugh Clifford (07) 855
3751 for all activities.

18 March - evening meeting - AGM and
birds of paradise.

21-22 March - Kaka at Waipapa

29 March - 5 minute birds counts, Mt
Karioi.

4 April - Lake Waahi census.

18-19 April - Mokoia Island.

26 April - 5 minute bird counts, Mt
Kakepuku.

May - mist netting each weekend.

13 June - Raglan, Kawhia and Aotea
Harbours census.

Monthly beach patrols of west coast
beaches and Mt Karioi 5 minute counts.
Ph. Paul Cuming (07) 856 3891

Hamilton and Forest Lake monthly
counts - Ph. Barry Friend (07) 843 6729.

Bay of Plenty

13-14 March - overnight trip to Waimana
Valley - kiwi and other birds. Ph. John
Brierley (07) 323 7458.

June - winter wader census. Ph. John
Brierley.

July - pelagic trip to White Island and
Volkner Rocks. Ph. John Brierley.



Volcanic Plateau

Gisborne/Wairoa

Taranaki

Evening meetings - first Tuesday of the
month (excluding January), Taranaki
Museum, Ariki Street, New Plymouth.
Ph. David Medway (06) 758 0370.

Manawatu

Wanganui

Hawkes Bay

Wairarapa

11 March - evening meeting, Masterton.
Discussion on ducks in the Wairarapa
with guest speaker. Ph. Miles King (06)
377 5252.

15 March - visit Jim Campbell's duck lake.

16 April - evening meeting. Grevtown.
Cockatoos and other introduced parrots,
plus NZ parrots in the Wairarapa. Ph.
Miles King.

18 April - field trip to Clifton Groves to
see Sulphur-crested Cockatoos.

Wellington

Beach patrols - Jean Luke (04) 293 5601.

Mapping scheme - Hugh Robertson (04)
385 8407.

Karori reservoir - Colin Miskelly (04) 472
5821 (work).

Nelson

Marlborough

Canterbury

24 February - evening meeting. Middleton
Grange School, Riccarton.

West Coast

Otago

Evening meetings - 3rd Wednesday of
even months, Otago Art Society building,
8 pm. Ph. Peter Schweigman (03) 455
2790.

15 April - evening meeting, Birds of the
Southern Ocean.

21 June - winter wader count. Ph. Peter
Schweigman

15 November - summer wader count. Ph.
Peter Schweigman

Southland

Beach patrols - most Friday evenings. Ph.
Lloyd Esler (03) 217 9060

J S Watson Conservation Trust

This trust is administered by Forest and Bird. Applications are invited from individuals or conservation groups for financial assistance for conservation projects over the 1998-99 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 world in which they live.

A total of around \$20,000 is available for distribution. Individual applications should be limited to a maximum of \$4,000.

For further details and application forms write to:

Forest & Bird
PO Box 631
Wellington.

Applications close 31 July 1998.

DEADLINE FOR THE JUNE ISSUE IS 10 MAY