# Southern Bird

No. 33 March 2008 • ISSN 1175-1916

New Zealand's Seabirds in Focus

Satellite-tagged Godwits

Oystercatcher Studies

eBird New Zealand

# Southern Bird

*No. 33 March 2008. • ISSN 1175-1916*

## QUOTATION

*Little birds of the night*
*Aye, they have much to tell*
*Perching there in rows*
*Blinking at me with their serious eyes*
*Recounting of flowers they have seen and loved*
*Of meadows and groves of the distance*
*And pale sands at the foot of the sea*
*And breezes that fly in the leaves.*
*They are vast in experience*
*These little birds that come in the night*

*Stephen Crane (1871-1900)*

## CONTENTS



## COVER PHOTOS

*Front cover:* *Front cover: A male Wrybill clearly showing the right-hand bend in its beak, photographed on the Ashley River* by John Dowding

*Back cover:* *One of the wandering young Shore Plovers (banded RO-YO) from the Mana Island translocation photographed on the mainland at Green Point* by Ian Armitage

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

Articles for inclusion in Southern Bird are welcome in any form, though electronic is preferred. Material should be related to birds, birdwatchers, or ornithologists in the New Zealand and Pacific region, and can include news on birds, members, activities and bird study, literature/product reviews, letters to the editor, birdwatching sites, and identification. Illustrations are especially welcome, though they must be sharp. Copy deadlines are 10th February, May and August, and 1st November.

## FROM THE **PRESIDENT'S DECK...**

Global challenges to our environment and to birds in particular concern us all. Bird studies in New Zealand are increasingly part of the international effort to understand what is happening to birdlife and to limit the damage caused by human activities. Information collected here on groups such as waterfowl and other migrating birds is important to research programmes and government action on a global scale. We cannot be isolated or insulated from what happens elsewhere. Obvious examples of the contribution of New Zealanders – and OSNZ members in particular – are the internationally important studies of waders and seabirds that have characterised New Zealand ornithology over the past 75 years: without them, we would know far less about the pervasiveness of human influences on our planet.

With our limited membership, however, it is not always easy to fulfil the obligations of internationally co-ordinated research. Tensions do exist between groups who see 'their' group as being either more important, or, more often, neglected in the over all scheme of OSNZ activities.

OSNZ must tread a careful line between risking fragmentation resulting from perceived indifference to groups, and the blandness and irrelevance that will result from blind insistence on homogeneity. The Society fosters interest in all birds but particular interests by supporting interest groups within (preferably) but also outside the Society, where our technical and sometimes logistic support can benefit the group and through them, the birds. We cannot do everything, much as we would like to. Hence, our response to the challenges is to concentrate on the core issues of distribution and monitoring of our avifauna, dissemination of information on the avifauna, and encouraging research on, and enjoyment of, birds at all levels, to bring the issues to the widest audience.

Even more importantly, OSNZ can and does provide resources and advice, and those services are set to increase. By joining with the US-based and funded but international eBird system, we will now be able to accumulate, integrate, and analyse information on the patterns of distribution and abundance and integrate as much of the heritage information in notebooks and data files as we have the energy and interest to achieve.

The development costs of such systems are very high, and way beyond anything that can be garnered locally. Hence, we have chosen the international route in the belief that only ongoing significant funding can support the accumulation of records vital to our understanding of the patterns and processes of bird populations and distributions. Atlases are extremely important documents but the challenge now is to make, collect and analyse

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## Publisher

*Published on behalf of the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc),*
*Email: osnz@xtra.co.nz • Website: www.osnz.org.nz*
*Edited by Nick Allen, 65 Allin Drive, Waikuku Beach, North Canterbury 7402 • Tel (03) 312 7183 • Email nick_allen@xtra.co.nz*
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our data in real time and monitor changes as they happen.

Our concerns might seem unique to our small organisation, but across the Tasman, birds and the people who enjoy and study them feel the same pressures and face much the same problems of prioritisation and wise use of human and financial resources. As OSNZ liaison officer with Birds Australia, I want to improve trans-Tasman bird relations to our mutual benefit. I am writing this column in Melbourne where Nick's email gently reminded me that the column was late again found me visiting BA to see how we can help each other deal with the problems facing birds and bird study in Australasia. The welcome has been warm and generous, and if the birding gods are kind, Friday might see me tick Orange-bellied Parrot (but likely it will not!) and sample other Victorian birds in the company of BA's CEO, President, and conservation manager. But more importantly, the discussions so far have revealed many more similarities in experience and objectives than differences, and, surprising to me, in the demographics and trends within the organisations. And when I pay my (late) subscription to BA on Thursday, it will be a Kiwi employee who takes my money!

High profile international matters make the headlines, but we cannot and will not ignore the local issues. OSNZ can contribute well above its weight by insisting that the highest scientific standards are maintained when issues affecting birds are being decided. Our Constitution proscribes advocacy for conservation, but conservation rests on sound science and there we can, must, and do have a voice in national affairs. So, we will be speaking out when necessary, to insist that standards are observed and expediency does not mean the loss of more habitat and higher pressures on even more species. It is a sobering thought that species such as the black-billed gull, so abundant in my (not-so-distant!) youth are now vanishing before our eyes. In our zeal to deal with present issues, we should not lose sight of that fact that the causes may have been operating when we were young. Lack of breeding success takes time to appear as population collapse, so not all threats are new. But there are new threats every month now and we must demand the highest standards from everyone when new potential threats are being considered in and out of hearings and court rooms. How else can we look our grandchildren in the eye when they ask what their world used to be like?

Good birding!

*Richard*

## ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND **CANTERBURY REGION**

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held in Kaikoura during Queen's Birthday weekend 2008.

| | |
|---|---|
| *FRIDAY 30TH MAY* | *Registration, Council and RR's meetings* |
| *SATURDAY 31ST MAY* | *Scientific day*<br>*Dinner and AGM* |
| *SUNDAY 1ST JUNE* | *Field trips*<br>*Conference dinner* |
| *MONDAY 2ND JUNE* | *Morning field trip* |

Conference address: OSNZ AGM, PO Box 36-515, Merivale, Christchurch. member of Council.

## COUNCIL **NOMINATIONS**

No nominations were received by the deadline of 28th February. Thus there will be no election of councillors this year. Six positions on Council will become vacant at the end of the AGM this year as a consequence of the end of the one year co-option terms of Phil Battley and Bruce McKinlay, the end of the three-year terms of Paul Scofield, David Melville and Stuart Nicholson, and the retirement from Council of David Pye. Co-opted members are, of course, eligible to stand, as are Council members at the end of their three-year terms. The post of Secretary will also become vacant due to the resignation of Claudia Duncan effective at the end of the AGM.

## **NOMINATIONS** FOR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES 2009

Each RR serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, though incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms.

Nominations for the RR of each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040) on 31st July 2008. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a member of the Society. If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2009 year.

## **FALLA MEMORIAL** AWARD & **A.T. EDGAR JUNIOR** AWARD 2009

Nominations are called for the above awards and should be with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040) by 30th June. Nominations should be on the standard forms, which are available from RRs and the Secretary.

The Awards Committee will consider all nominations, and its recommendations will be forwarded to Council for consideration at its spring meeting

Contact your RR for further information on OSNZ award procedures. They are set out in the RR's Manual.

## NEW OSNZ **POSTAL ADDRESS**

The Society has a new postal address:

**Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.),**
**P.O. Box 834,**
**Nelson 7040.**

ALL mail, including the Secretary's, should now go to the address above.

The only OSNZ-related mail that should still be sent to P.O. Box 12397 in Wellington is correspondence concerning the Rare Birds Committee and to the Atlas Convenor.

## OSNZ CONFERENCE
### AND AGM 2008, KAIKOURA

Registration forms for this year's conference, which will be held at New Zealand's seabird capital, Kaikoura, are flowing in steadily. The organising committee is getting together a stimulating collection of Scientific Day presentations and exhilarating field trips.

If you haven't done so already please send in your form as soon as possible. As well as a financial penalty, choice of field trip is likely to be very limited to those registering late. Please note that this year delegates are required to book their own accommodation, and that this will book up with the conference being held over a holiday weekend.

Registration in Kaikoura will be held at the Lobster Inn on the Friday of the weekend. This is a highly recognisable building on the landward side of SH1 north of the town centre as it has a huge crayfish crawling up the side of it. On the Saturday (Scientific Day) registrations will be at the Memorial Hall near the District Council offices on the road to the peninsula seal colony. More details, a map, and a downloadable registration form are available at www.osnz.org.nz/osnzagm.htm . We hope to see you there.

## BIRD PEOPLE

George Chance, one of our older members, died on 17th January aged 91.

A Dunedin optician George was also a good photographer and took the photographs for the book The Royals of Taiaroa.

We also note with regret the passing of former Wairarapa RR Betty Watt, Lorna Simpkin, Dr Kenneth Thomson and John Brown.

On a happier note congratulations to Waikato RR Dai Morgan, who got married recently.

Your editor is also happy to announce the arrival of his daughter Olivia Rose Allen on 5th January.

## PERSONNEL CHANGES

The Society has a new Membership Secretary and Back-issues contact; Yvonne MacKenzie. Her contact details are PO Box 29532, Fendalton, Christchurch 8540. Phone (03) 351 3660 or mobile 021 713 934, email yvonnemackenzie@hotmail.com . Many thanks to Yvonne for taking on these important Society positions, and to Roger Sharp for doing such a fantastic job for many years.

President Richard Holdaway now has a mobile phone number that he is contactable on: 027 451 3464.

Secretary Claudia Duncan's email address is now her personal one printed in the September 2007 issue of Southern Bird and no longer osnz@xtra.co.nz

The editor of this magazine Southern Bird will be changing address and phone number on 28th March. Hopefully mail will be forwarded for a time, though email will be a safer alternative form of communication for a few weeks following the above date.

Many thanks to Phil Battley, who has taken on the Society's University Liaison role. His contact details are Ecology Group, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North. Phone (06) 356 9099 ext 2605 (w), email p.battley@massey.ac.nz

The Auckland, Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau, and Nelson regions have new Regional Reps. Mel Galbraith has taken over from Suzi Phillips in Auckland, Eila Lawton from Tim Barnard in BoP/Volcanic Plateau, and Stuart Wood from Steve Wood in Nelson. Many thanks to the outgoing RRs, who all served their regions for a number of years, and best wishes and thanks to the new incumbents. The contact details for Mel, Eila and Stuart can be found in the RRs and What's On section at the back of this issue of Southern Bird.

## *eBird* NEW ZEALAND


*eBird's front page will give contributors and OSNZ members up-to-date information on eBird and rare birds in New Zealand.*

Through a partnership with Cornell University in the USA, OSNZ is proud to be able to bring members, and the New Zealand public, a free real-time, online checklist program. The program will be available at www.ebird.com/nz/ from 30th April 2008.

In the USA eBird has revolutionised the way that the bird-watching community reports and accesses information about birds, and we hope that it will be similarly successful in New Zealand. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales.

eBird's goal is to maximise the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. It is amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence. For example, in 2006, participants reported more than 4.3 million bird observations across North America. In New Zealand we hope that following the incredibly successful Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand 1999-2004 this will be the way forward to allow us to document bird trends.



### WHAT CAN YOU DO ON EBIRD

You can use eBird to store and retrieve your bird observations and to explore where people are finding birds throughout New Zealand and its surrounding seas.

### VIEW PUBLIC DATA

View a map of any bird species available in the eBird database by selecting the 'View and Explore Data' tab. Under 'Explore the Entire eBird Database,' select 'View an Interactive Map.' Choose a species and a date range and we'll show you all of the observations currently available. Using the Zoom


*eBird Mapping features offer the utility of Google maps to map where people have bird watched and give information on hot spots*

Bar, zoom in to view specific locations or zoom out to look at the entire bird distribution. Continue to explore the database by switching species and dates (don't forget to click 'Update' to update the map).

### SUBMIT YOUR OBSERVATIONS

Once you've viewed other eBirder's observations, we hope you'll take a few minutes to contribute yours to the ever-expanding database. The process is easy.

First, tell us **where** you went bird-watching by choosing a location. If you were at a publicly accessible location, you may be able to find your location in our 'Bird-watching Hot Spots'. Otherwise, enter the latitude and longitude directly, find the location on the eBird interactive map, or simply enter your observations at the regional, or city level. You can store the location you select in your 'My Locations' list for easy access during future submissions.

Next, tell us **how and when** you were bird-watching. Select the Observation Type that most closely matches the type of bird-watching you did, then fill in the time, distance, or area fields when prompted. We'd also like to know the number of other observers, and if weather affected your ability to record birds.

Finally, tell us **what species** you saw and heard. To report a species, simply enter the number of individuals of each species that you identified. We encourage you to enter specific numbers. If you really have no idea how many individuals were there, just enter an 'X', which will be recorded as 'present'. Once you submit your checklist, it will be available for immediate retrieval.

### OBSERVATION TYPES

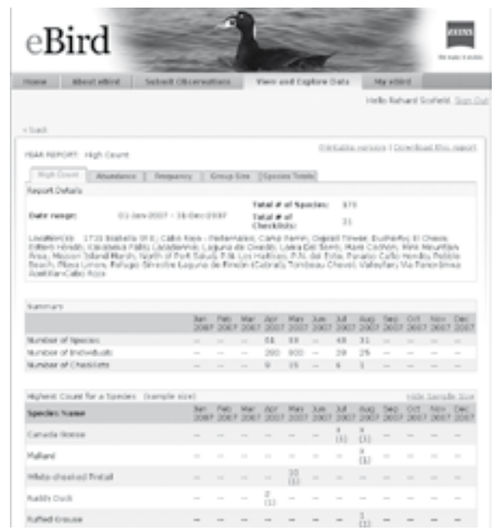
Although there are hundreds of ways to enjoy birds, there are four basic methods to report birds on eBird, each with a different set of required fields. The four observation types vary in the amount of effort that you used to make your bird-watching observations.

**Casual Sightings** – don't require any measure of time spent, distance travelled, or area searched. Casual Sightings simply denote that a given species was present at a particular location on a certain date. Examples include entering a Black Shag that flies by while you are checking your mail, or the Greenfinch feeding at your backyard feeder while you wash the dishes, or the New Zealand Falcon seen perched in a tree on your drive to work, or the flock of Silvereyes moving through your yard as you weed the garden.

**Stationary Counts** – made over a known period of time, but don't include any measure of distance travelled or area searched. Examples include a Godwit migration watch, lake watch, or sitting on your deck for a known period of time while identifying birds. Stationary Counts can be made while bird-watching from your car if you record the time you spent and species you identified at each stop along your journey. Individual stops are then submitted as Stationary Counts.

**Travelling Counts** – made when travelling a known distance and period of time while walking or using a horse, car, boat, or some other transportation. Examples include tramping through a National or Regional Park or participating in a pelagic bird-watching trip by boat. Remember that when you enter your data into eBird it is always more valuable if it has effort information (i.e. Stationary Counts, Travelling Counts, and Area Counts are preferable to Casual Observations).

To estimate mileage or area when eBird asks you to enter information for your Area Search or Travelling Count there are some excellent web-based tools that you can use to make your measurements much more accurate. To estimate distance travelled, visit www.MapMyRun.com. Enter a street address, nearest town or city and then zoom the map in on the area you




*eBird gives observers the option of summarising a year of bird observations*

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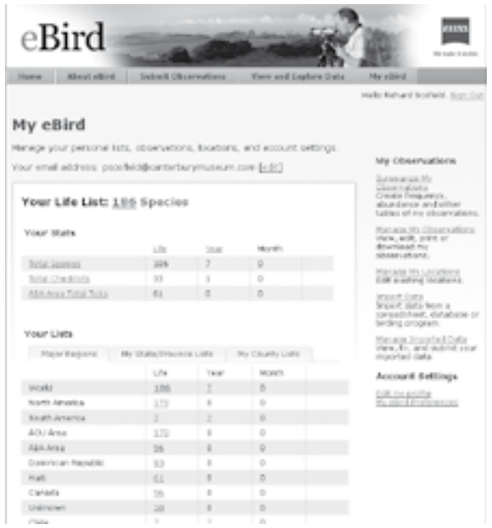
went bird-watching. Using your left mouse button plot your starting point and then plot your route, and your distance travelled will be shown when you mouse over each point along the route. Note that you can toggle between a map view, a satellite view, and a hybrid view (our personal favourite). The user-friendly tool bar provides a number of helpful




*eBird gives observers the ability to keep site, region and even life lists*

features. At the leftmost edge of the toolbar you can change settings to display distance in miles or kilometres. If you made a mapping error, you can clear the entire map or just the last point plotted. You can save or print a route, and can add areas of interest. There are several other additional features, but for birders the most interesting of these is an elevation chart for your bird-watching route!

**Exhaustive Area Counts** – made while thoroughly searching a given location or area. These counts are sometimes used by biologists when monitoring a specific site, but they can be appropriate for casual bird-watching if you are able to estimate the size (acres or hectares) of the area you searched. Examples include actively searching a local park or forest for breeding birds or canoeing back and forth through a marsh to count wading birds. A bird-watching trek around your neighbourhood or privately owned property can be an Exhaustive Area Count if you are able to estimate the size of the area you searched. To estimate area covered, try http://www.acme.com/planimeter/. You will be presented with a Google Maps interface similar to the one you see when plotting your location in eBird and you have the option of viewing this as a street map, satellite image, or even a topographical map! You will then be able to plot several points that describe the boundaries of the area you are measuring. The interface is similar to the one above – simply left-click your mouse to draw a polygon around the area you wish to measure. You can clear the map or just the last point using the buttons on the right. **NOTE:** The area calculation is a bit difficult to spot in some browsers--it shows up in small print at the bottom of the map image, but provides acres, hectares, square miles, and more (basically every measure of area that one could hope for).

**Beach Patrols** – dead birds found on beaches during OSNZ beach patrol monitoring. Distance traveled can now be accurately estimated using www.MapMyRun.com.

## WHAT DID YOU SEE/HEAR?

First, determine which checklist you would like to use. Then enter the birds you recorded on the interactive checklist generated by eBird.

## CHECKLIST OPTIONS

**OSNZ Regional Checklist** – all checklists on eBird stem from checklists tailored to each OSNZ region.

**Checklist Version** – currently two checklists are available for reporting observations:

- **Most Probable** – A checklist that shows only the birds you are likely to see at a specific location for the selected time of year. This checklist is shorter than the full regional checklist because it does not show rare, out-of-range, or out-of-season birds.
- **Full** – A checklist that shows the full list of all birds recorded in the region where you made your observations. It shows all birds regardless of season.

**Checklist Order** – a checklist of birds can be presented in two ways, Taxonomic Order or Alphabetic Order. Learning taxonomic order has many benefits, but you should use the order with which you are most comfortable.

## VIEW YOUR OBSERVATIONS

View your personal observations by selecting the 'View and Explore Data' tab. Under 'Explore Your Personal Observations' you can review specific checklists that you entered or create summaries of your entries across specific weeks, months, or even years. eBird makes it easy to start looking for trends and patterns at your favourite bird-watching locations!

## IMPORT FROM A SPREADSHEET!

Many New Zealand users will have bird records stored electronically in various forms on their personal computers. The eBird import tool is designed to provide an interface through which these records can be imported to eBird. The import tool has specific requirements in terms of the file type and format (e.g. the .xls file must be saved as a .csv file before importing). Importing data is a tricky process, and patience and an attention to detail are required. We allow users to format their data in two ways: 'eBird Checklist Format' and 'eBird Record Format'. These formats should conform roughly to the two major data set designs of most databases. With a little modification, your old records can now become part of the existing data archive at eBird! Document outlining formatting details for these files types, and instructions for guiding the user through the eBird Import Process are available at http://ebird.org/content/ebird/about/aboutimportingdata.html.

## THE 6TH **OAMARU** PENGUIN SYMPOSIUM

This will be held in Oamaru on Thursday 26th and Friday 27th June 2008. The meeting will focus on the penguins of New Zealand, Australia and their Subantarctic Islands. The symposium will be held at the Kingsgate Brydone Hotel in Oamaru, the same venue as in previous years. Registration is available online at http://oamaru.penguin.net.nz . The convenor, Philippa Agnew's address for enquiries is Oamaru Blue Penguin Colony, Waterfront Rd, Oamaru, or email research@penguins.co.nz



# NEW ZEALAND'S SEABIRDS IN FOCUS


Get out your cameras this summer with a plan to enter the Southern Seabird Solutions Trust's Seabird Photograph Competition. The overall winner receives a $3,000 prize with the winners of each of four categories receiving $1,000 prizes.

Robin Hapi, Southern Seabird Solutions Trustee and Chairman of Aotearoa Fisheries Ltd said "Southern Seabird Solutions Trust promotes fishing practices that avoid seabird deaths in southern hemisphere fisheries". "The photograph competition is one way we can remind people that 86 species of seabirds breed in New Zealand – more than anywhere else in the world."

The Trust held its first photo competition in 2005. That competition was open to fishermen and their families to help increase awareness of seabirds around their fishing vessels.

Leading ornithologist and Southern Seabird Solutions Trust management committee member Chris Robertson said "The photo competition is a good way to showcase New Zealand's seabirds and remind people about the importance of conservation efforts". "In our first competition we received a number of excellent entries from fishermen and their families. It was hard to select a winner from so many outstanding photographs, but John Barry's photograph of albatrosses perfectly captured not only seabirds, but also their activities around fishing vessels."

Chris, along with renowned wildlife photographers Kim Westerskov and Rod Morris, and New Zealand Geographic's editor, James Frankham, will be judging the competition.

The 2008 competition has been expanded to include four competition categories. These are:

1. **New Zealand seabirds (open only to fishermen and their immediate families)**
2. **New Zealand seabirds (open to everyone)**
3. **New Zealand seabirds (open to young people under 18 years of age on 5th June 2008)**
4. **Seabirds and fishing practices or by-catch mitigation efforts in action (open to everyone)**

Competition entries must be received by 5th June 2008.

For information on the conditions of entry and an entry form visit www.southernseabirds.org/photocomp.

Sponsors for the Seabird Photograph Competition are Aotearoa Fisheries Ltd, New Zealand Geographic, Te Ohu Kaimoana, and WWF New Zealand.

## A WORTHY USE FOR THOSE **UNUSED BINOCULARS**

Bird conservation programmes in the Pacific are developing with the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme's Island Conservation Programme and BirdLife's Pacific Programme. These programmes are about empowering local conservation officers with the ability to manage the conservation of their native bird fauna. In the past a colleague based in Oxford and I have arranged for the collection of unwanted binoculars from Britain, and when I was based in Apia I delivered them to needy Pacific colleagues who cannot afford to buy binoculars for their conservation work such as monitoring, surveying etc. Now the tables have turned and I am now in Wellington and I have a colleague in the Bird Life Pacific's programme based in Suva who is prepared to distribute binoculars to needy conservation officers in the Pacific.

If you have a pair of binoculars which are still functional but unused and you are prepared to give them away to a Pacific Island Conservation Officer or worker, then could you please get in touch. I can arrange for their collection, and will then organise their delivery to Suva. My contact details are gsherley@doc.govt.nz, phone 04 471 3251, postal address P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

Many thanks

**GREG SHERLEY**

*Threatened Species Science Section*
*Terrestrial Conservation Unit*
*Department of Conservation*

## **SUBMISSIONS CALLED** REGARDING CHANGES OF STATUS OF NEW ZEALAND BIRDS

The Department of Conservation is seeking submissions regarding any changes in status of New Zealand bird species. These will inform the three-yearly revision of the bird list in the New Zealand Threat Classification System.

Submissions by individual species can be made via the Department of Conservation website http://www.doc.govt.nz/birdslistreview which also provides information on the process, and URLs to relevant publications, including the recently revised New Zealand Threat Classification Manual (Townsend et al. 2008), and the 2005 bird threat listings (Hitchmough et al. 2007). Consultation closes 1st May 2008

If you do not have internet access and wish to make a submission, take a copy of this article (or just the weblink) to your local DoC office to download a submission form.

Submissions will be considered by a panel of OSNZ members (a mix of DoC and private individuals) during their meeting in early May.

We look forward to seeing your submissions

**COLIN MISKELLY**

*Panel convener*

# Fluttering Shearwater

## TRANSLOCATION SUCCESS

The raucous call could hardly be heard over the howling wind, but the glimpse of a small brown and white seabird crashing to the ground heralded a glimmer of hope for threatened seabirds worldwide. On a wet and windy spring night on Maud Island in 1996 a Fluttering Shearwater returned to land for the first time since fledging five years earlier. What made this bird remarkable was that it hatched on Long Island over 50 km away, had been transferred to Maud as a chick five years ago, and fed daily until fledging. This bird was the first petrel chick to be transferred, artificially housed and fed until fledging which had returned to its adopted home, hopefully to breed.

In response to the need to develop a method of translocating endangered seabirds, of which New Zealand has its fair share, members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand trialled a translocation method with Fluttering Shearwaters. In August 1996, with the capture of the first returned transferred chick, years of work had paid off. Translocating a seabird species looked possible. The Fluttering Shearwater is an endemic medium-sized shearwater, commonly seen feeding close to shore. Up to 100,000 pairs breed on islands from the Three Kings south to the Marlborough Sounds. The young disperse to southeast Australian waters after fledging, returning to their natal colony to breed when mature.

Previously, each January from 1991-96 Fluttering Shearwater chicks were collected from a large breeding colony on Long Island and were transferred to Maud. In a manoeuvre run with military precision, birds were removed from burrows, placed in cardboard pet transport boxes, taken by boat up Queen Charlotte Sound to Picton, driven to Havelock, followed by a further one-hour trip by boat down Pelorus Sound to Maud. On arrival birds were fed but left in the boxes overnight in the woolshed. The following morning they were carried out to the colony, where each was banded and fed before being placed in an artificial burrow.

For the following month, teams of OSNZ members remained on Maud to feed the chicks twice daily on a blended mixture of salmon smolt, muttonbird and vegetable oil until fledging. The mixture was heated to body temperature and fed to birds using catheter tubes attached to a large syringe. Although this sounds stressful for the birds, within a few days the birds tended to swallow the tube themselves at feeding time. Each day the chick's weight and amount of down was recorded to track their progress. Each night a solar-powered audio system played recorded Fluttering Shearwater calls to replicate the usually noisy activity of a typical petrel colony.

Throughout the transfer, 334 Fluttering Shearwater chicks were transferred to Maud, of which 273 (81.7%) fledged successfully. The chicks stayed on Maud for an average of 14 nights (range 0-36 nights) before fledging with an average weight of 364 g (range 205-495 g). Four shearwaters transferred to Maud were recovered dead in South Australia and Victoria after fledging, showing that the transferred chicks followed the normal dispersal of fledglings.

In order for the transfer to be a complete success, this first returning chick needed to find a partner and breed. So since 1996, OSNZ members have made regular trips to the island to check. Later in the season three more returning birds were found and one immigrant. These birds formed two breeding pairs which were found incubating single eggs, one of which went on to fledge a chick in February 1997. The cycle was complete: transferred chicks had returned and bred successfully.

To date a total of 32 transferred chicks have returned to Maud, of which 30 have attempted to breed. In addition eight unbanded birds have also been caught at the colony, these immigrants breeding with returned transferred chicks. The breeding population has steadily increased from two pairs in 1996/97 to 16 pairs in 2004/05 with over 60 chicks being successfully fledged, although as yet no banded parent-reared chicks have returned.

Analysis of fledging data has shown that the chicks that returned had a significantly higher mean fledging weight than those that did not return and also spent significantly longer on Maud. Basically, fatter chicks with a longer time to orientate to Maud had higher chances of survival to return to breed on Maud.

The successful establishment of a colony of Fluttering Shearwaters has shown for the first time that the transfer of chicks is a viable method of establishing new petrel colonies. It has demonstrated that petrel chicks moved before they become orientated to their natal site, artificially housed, and fed until fledging will return to breed at the transfer site. In addition, this transfer has shown that the recruitment rate can be affected by fledgling weight and duration of time spent at the new colony prior to fledging. In order to increase recruitment rate, and therefore success of petrel transfers, managers should aim for heavier-than-average fledging weights, even if this requires additional feeding, and should take chicks of a young enough age to enable them to spend sufficient time at the new colony site to become properly oriented.

*Young Fluttering Shearwater being fed via catheter tube. Photo by Biz Bell.*

*A returned chick incubating an egg in an artificial burrow on Maud Island. Photo by Mike Bell.*

The methods developed by OSNZ in this trial colony establishment have already been used to some degree in transfers of other species, including Common Diving Petrel, Fairy Prion and the endangered Chatham Petrel. Furthermore, these methods could be developed to provide supplementary food to endangered seabird chicks to improve recruitment rates aiding population increase. This work has created new potential in the conservation of threatened seabirds, and in restoring ravaged ecosystems.

I wish to thank all the OSNZ members who participated in this pioneering project. Without their contribution this success would not have been achievable.

This article is a summary of a detailed paper on this topic in the March 2005 issue of Notornis (vol 52, pp 11-15). Please refer to this for more details.

MIKE BELL



# Satellite-tagged godwits

## THE CONTINUING JOURNEY

*Photo: Female godwit Z0 on the breeding grounds in Alaska. Photo: Dan Ruthrauff, USGS*

When a group of New Zealand and American researchers met in February 2007 to satellite tag Bar-tailed Godwits at Miranda and Golden Bay, we had no idea of just how successful the work would be or how much public interest there would be in the project. Nine months down the track, despite the transmitters being off-air, the surprises continue to appear.

We were working as part of the Pacific Shorebird Migration Project, a joint initiative between the US Geology Survey (USGS) and PRBO Conservation Science funded largely by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. With Massey University as a partner in New Zealand, we were using satellite-transmitters to track the routes and flight lengths of northbound godwits. Earlier body composition analyses had indicated that godwits should be capable of very long flights, but whether these extended to just 6,000 km or up to 9,000 km was unclear. If the latter, it was possible that landfall for our godwits would be in eastern Asia around Japan or South Korea. Bob Gill from the USGS had shown in recent years that female godwits could migrate successfully with implanted transmitters, so we deployed eight implants into females: four at Miranda and four at Golden Bay. As male godwits are smaller than females, we gave four at each site much lighter external solar-powered units; a trade-off with these is the potential that they might increase drag during flight in a way that implants do not. Then we monitored the birds in the field as best we could, and waited for the show to begin.

In mid-March it did so. The first four godwits took off and winged their ways northwest, past the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea and into the western Pacific Ocean. As they continued on, other birds joined the migration and soon ten birds were in the air at once. The first four carried on direct to the Yellow Sea, and one of them, later to become a global superstar, carried on all the way to Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in China, a distance of just over 10,200 km. All four birds had broken then 10K barrier, spending around a week in non-stop flight in doing so. These were among the longest tracked non-stop migratory bird flights we knew of. Later on, another two females made it almost as far – one landing on Tsushima, an island between Japan and South Korea, another pitching up in South Korea itself.

It soon became evident that males were not performing so well. Several bailed out of migration and stopped – one in Papua New Guinea, two in Micronesia, one in the Philippines. After these birds had landed we soon lost track of them, when the transmitters and harnesses slid off the birds. We know this happened to E3 ('names' refer to their engraved black leg flags) as he was later seen in Queensland without a transmitter, and another bird lost his transmitter at Miranda before migration even started.

*Male godwit Z5 during his stopover in Okinawa. Photo:Ooshiro Kamenobu*

One male, Z5, carried on after a month spent on Yap, a small tropical island we would hardly consider classic godwit habitat. He had flown 6,775 km to get there, and then went another 2,200 km to Okinawa, southwest of Japan. Bob Gill quickly e-mailed a Japanese colleague who contacted local birders, and within a day we had a cracking photo of Z5 during his three-day stopover. After another 1,600 km Z5 was in China, though

>>> CONTINUED OVER PAGE

*The most famous individual bird in the world? E7, the record-setting godwit, in February 2008. Photo: Jesse Conklin*

potentially rather later than he had planned.

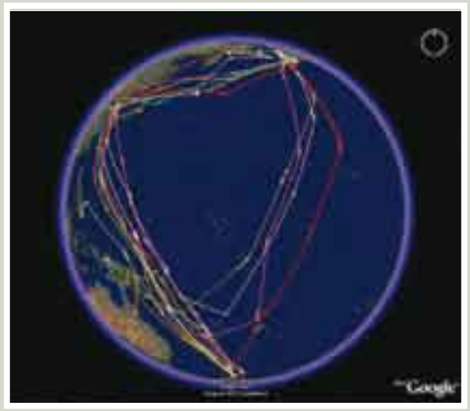
We had succeeded in showing that godwits (females at least) flew direct to the Yellow Sea, and the transmitters' batteries were lasting well. In May five females took off from the Yellow Sea and headed to the Yukon Delta in Alaska. While the shortest route would have been something over 5,000 km, these birds rode tailwinds out into the NW Pacific then headed up the back of a high pressure ridge, covering 6,200-6,500 km in the process. Z5 gave us another surprise, heading inland in eastern Russia. At times he was flying at over 110 km/h, using 50 km/h tailwinds between high and low pressure systems! E8 had it hard, flying into headwinds adjacent to Kamchatka Peninsula. She got to within 400 km of Alaska, turned tail and cruised 1,200 km downwind to Russia! Eventually she made it to the breeding grounds.

In a final twist, Z0 settled in Alaska southeast of the known breeding range. Her signals suggested that she was probably breeding, so Bob Gill and Dan Ruthrauff (USGS) helicoptered in and spent the day looking for her. After several hours they heard tell-tale calls from over a small ridge, and there was Z0, apparently paired up with a male who was busy seeing off another suitor. We later confirmed from photos that Bob had released that very bird during tagging on the shores of Golden Bay, 11,350 km away.

The batteries continued to amaze us, and soon we

*One of the 2008 batch of transmittered godwits: D8 from Miranda. Photo: Phil Battley*

began harbouring hopes that we might get a full track of a southbound bird, something that had eluded us in two years of attempts with birds tagged on the breeding grounds. Finally, on 31st August, E7 took to the skies again. When she was halfway 'home' word reached the media that something newsworthy was happening, and her journey was to become arguably the most publicised bird story of the year. Privately, we could see that her transmitter voltage was dropping daily and it was never clear whether she would arrive still transmitting or not. She was due to arrive on the evening on Friday 7th September but was off-air at that time. Only on the Sunday would we know if she had made it. Finally we could confirm that she was back safely on the muddy shores of the Firth of Thames, after a monumental 11,700 km flight lasting just over eight days. This is unequivocally the longest non-stop tracked bird flight and this record will hopefully stand for a long time, unless we discover that Hudsonian Godwits go



*Tracks of all satellite-tagged godwits from New Zealand. Source: USGS*

further…

It transpired that fate was on our side with E7 being the first to depart. Another three birds also migrated south across the Pacific, but all turned westwards and made landfall in the south-western Pacific – one on New Caledonia, one in the Solomons and one in Papua New Guinea. These movements tally with the presence of colour-banded godwits from New Zealand on the east coast of Australia during southward migration in 2006 and 2007. It seems that under some conditions it may be safer to head towards Melanesia and Australia than to continue south across the landless Pacific south of Fiji. Two of those birds continued to transmit for some weeks, and both seemed fairly settled in their habits. But once their transmitters finally stopped, all we could hope is that somebody spots them if they return to their non-breeding grounds. As seems to befit the luck of the project, E5 was seen and photographed on 8th December at Pretty Beach, north of Sydney in Australia. Our last record of her had been on 10th November in New Caledonia, so she seems to be heading back towards New Zealand.

There are a number of birds whose fates are currently unknown by us, as we lost their signals before or during migration. OSNZ members can help by keeping an eye out for godwits with large black flags with two-digit white codes (e.g. E4, Z3) on their right tibia.

There are now another nine newly-tagged birds at Miranda (February 2008) that we aim to track up to Alaska this year. Three of these are males with implanted transmitters, which we hope will confirm whether males make the same massive flight to Asia that the females do. We have also tagged 15 godwits of the subspecies menzbieri in Broome, northwest Australia. This population migrates through Asia to Siberia, and will provide a fascinating comparison with New Zealand's long-haul record-holders. So tune into the Pacific Shorebird Migration webpage in 2008 for more!

http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/pacific_migration.html

PHIL BATTLEY, Ecology Group, Massey University (p.battley@massey.ac.nz)

BOB GILL, Alaska Science Centre, USGS, USA (rgill@usgs.gov)

NILS WARNOCK, PRBO Conservation Science, California, USA (nwarnock@prbo.org)

# OYSTERCATCHER STUDIES IN TASMAN AND GOLDEN BAYS

Tasman and Golden Bays are of international importance for both Pied and Variable Oystercatchers. OSNZ has recently embarked on a long-term study of these birds including the marking of individuals with alpha/numeric leg flags (see photos 1 and 2). The study aims, amongst other things:

- To determine the distribution, abundance and age structure of Variable Oystercatchers within the Tasman and Golden Bay regions in both the breeding and non-breeding seasons.
- To investigate movements of juvenile Variable Oystercatchers and the possible role of Waimea Inlet as a 'nursery' site for this species.
- To determine the distribution, abundance and age structure of Pied Oystercatchers within the Tasman and Golden Bay regions in both summer (non-breeding birds) and winter.

A recent review (Dowding and Moore, 2006 Habitat networks of indigenous shorebirds in New Zealand. Science for Conservation 261.Department of Conservation) has highlighted the need for a better understanding of the movements of Variable Oystercatchers. It is possible that some coastal areas may act as 'nurseries' for young Variable Oystercatchers, as found in the South African Black Oystercatcher H. moquini. There is some evidence to suggest that the Waimea Inlet, Nelson may be used in this way since numbers of juveniles in Waimea Inlet are thought to substantially exceed local breeding output, suggesting immigration from a wider catchment. Waimea Inlet is of international importance for the Variable Oystercatcher and three other species of shorebird based on the number of birds present at the site. If the area also functions as a 'nursery' for chicks from a wider region than Tasman Bay it would increase its conservation significance and have implications for future management of the area.

The coastal area and adjacent waters of both Tasman and Golden Bays are under increasing pressure from human activities including direct and indirect habitat loss from coastal sub-division and development and associated disturbance, habitat modification through farming runoff and shellfish harvesting, and possible impacts on prey recruitment through inshore mariculture. Some, or all, of these activities have the potential to adversely affect oystercatcher and other shorebird populations.

The introduction of the cockle Austrovenus stutchburyi to the fisheries Quota Management System in 2002 highlighted how little is known about the relationships between cockles and shorebirds, in particular oystercatchers in New Zealand. Studies of the closely related European Oystercatcher H. ostralegus and its cockle Cerastoderma edule prey have demonstrated that such relationships may be finely balanced, and have shown that the manner in which a cockle stock is commercially exploited could result in increased mortality of oystercatchers.

Predictive models for investigating interactions between shorebirds and their prey have been developed, and have been used to advise policy for the management of shellfish stocks in Europe. It is likely that this model is applicable to conditions in New Zealand; however it would require parameterising before testing. Information on oystercatcher populations, including movements and survivorship, as well as distribution on the feeding grounds would all be of value in developing the model for possible use in New Zealand. Commercial cockle harvesting in Golden Bay is at relatively low levels at present but there is potential for considerable increase in future; informed consideration of the ecological impacts requires more data than currently available.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Sightings of both Pied and Variable Oystercatchers are needed to help us answerer questions about dispersal, migration, survival etc.

Please send ALL records of marked oystercatchers to:

*DAVID MELVILLE*
*Dovedale*
*R.D. 2 Wakefield, Nelson 7096*
*Email: david.melville@xtra.co.nz*

*The first bird to be flagged, AC on Rabbit Island 15th January 2007. Photo by Don Cooper*

*Birds AX and CA banded on Rabbit Island 17th December 2007. Photo by Don Cooper*

# Bird Song Archives

At last the project to transfer the recordings held in the McPherson Natural History Sound Archive to compact disc has been completed after nearly three years of intermittent work. The project itself arose out of the need to preserve audio recordings held here on older now outdated technology such as open reel magnetic tape and also cassette tapes. Both of these media have limited shelf lives depending on their storage conditions (temperature, humidity, etc). Even the type of backing material, such as cellulose, poly vinyl chloride, or even paper has a bearing on the longevity of magnetic tapes as do the type of oxides used in the manufacture of such tapes. The manufacturing process itself also has an effect, depending on whether the oxide was glued to the backing media (as per the earlier tapes) or whether it was impregnated into the backing (as is generally done with more modern tapes).

At the end of the duplicating effort 750 reels of tape were transferred onto around 180 compact discs. Old cassette tapes (which were done first because of known deterioration) took up roughly 300 CDs, whilst material on other media, such as vinyl and shellac, took another three hundred or so CDs.

Each sound bite was treated as a separate track and has a typed sleeve note to indicate what the species is and how long the clip runs for. Most field tapes have a verbal announcement stating the time, date, and locality of the recording, what species was involved, and who made the field recording. Behavioural data was also included if known.

One thing that surprised me during the transfer operation was the number of recordings that I had written off as being unusable due to background noise, etc, that improved markedly during the conversion from old analogue to new digital methods. A number of clips of species that are classified as rare were salvaged this way. When I processed some of the Pacific Island recordings further surprises were in store. During the editing process I noticed that a few clips that could not be edited properly under the old system could all be sorted out by following the switching noises made by the recordist in the field as their machine was turned on or off. The different wave patterns on screen also helped, particularly when editing was more complex due to overlapping calls etc.

Feeding the audio to the computer for conversion to digital and transfer to CD was not always plain sailing. There were a number of electronic mishaps and failures along the way. One that comes to mind was a fire in the main power supply of the amplifier. It was cheaper to replace the amp with a different make and model rather than rewind that failed transformer in the end. The big studio reel-to-reel recorder failed just as that part of the archive was being transferred to the computer, so a borrowed machine was used to complete job in the end. The computer audio system also failed, shorting the mains supply and necessitating a visit from the housing complex electrician to restore electricity to my unit. Then more recently a monitor failed when a relay inside switched off. I am now using an older monitor that was given to me by an OSNZ member that is actually better than the one that was purchased with the computer designed for this project four years ago.

Any new recordings that come to hand on tape are now dubbed to the computer as soon as practicable and edited to CD usually at the same session. The big effort now for the archive is to increase the holding of species and collections from Pacific Islands, particularly Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, and also the islands of both the Indian and Atlantic Oceans before any more birds found there become extinct. Recent acquisitions include material from the Juan Fernandez archipelago, the Chatham Islands, the Solomons (including the Bismarcks), Fiji, and Vanuatu to name just a few. New material from Norfolk Island has also been offered.

Whilst the transfer project was going on considerable amounts of published recordings, mostly on CD or CD-ROMs, and now on DVD-ROMs, were added to the archive as well. Notable publications include several CD sets from South America, particularly the Amazonian area of Columbia, a CD on Mongolia, another on Angola, one on Greenland and several on India, and a private one from Bangladesh. A DVD-ROM on South East Asian birds is now available with some thirty hours of viewing on it, and I have just been advised that a large Russian set of recordings is now available and being sent to this collection.

LES MCPHERSON

## COMMENSAL FORAGING BEHAVIOUR BY A **BLACK-FRONTED TERN**

On 7th December 2006, I was monitoring shorebirds in the Ashley River, North Canterbury. About 7 km upstream from Rangiora, I noticed a Black-fronted Tern hovering over a shallow braid. As I got closer, I noticed that it was hovering directly over a Pied Oystercatcher that was foraging in shallow water. The tern would remain over the oystercatcher (see photo) for 5-10 seconds at a time, then fly in a small circle and repeat the hovering. It did this non-stop for nearly 10 minutes, during which time the oystercatcher worked its way slowly upstream and the tern followed it, always hovering a few metres directly above it. Occasionally, the tern would swoop down to water level then resume the circle-and-hover routine.

The tern was not dive-bombing the oystercatcher, as it might have if it had a nest nearby, and it paid no attention to me as I searched the area for a nest. The oystercatcher completely ignored the tern throughout. It looked very much as though the tern was foraging, and waiting to swoop on prey dislodged by the oystercatcher as it walked and probed among the gravel and silt. I have not seen Black-fronted Terns 'using' another animal to flush prey like this before, and it reminded me of the way Robins and Fantails will follow a person through the bush, feeding on invertebrates disturbed by their passing.

JOHN DOWDING

*Photo by John Dowding*



## THE THRUSH AND THE **BLACKBIRD**

It takes a little discernment at first to recognise the difference between the songs of the Thrush and the Blackbird. Yet, even in song, the Thrush is everything that the Blackbird is not, and although full cousins, their lives are dissimilar in most respects. The Thrush sings his song (almost shouts it sometimes) with all the joy and zest of cheerful, active living, but the Blackbird's notes are played on the lute, at times tender and whimsical but more often in tones of sadness, suggesting the hopes and fears of mortal life, and bliss and happiness unattained. The song of the Thrush is bold, positive, sung in a major key with many repetitions and assertions. He sings in public, confident and gay. The Blackbird seldom repeats himself, makes indefinite statements in a cautious, minor key, and, far from being assertive ends nearly every line with a question mark of doubt and perplexity. He is apt to slink away and hide when he sees you watching him while singing. The one sings of light and love and joy, the other of tragedy and bitter-sweet memories.

So it is throughout their lives. The Thrush is clothed in a natty grey sports coat with his wife dressed so much like him as to be almost indistinguishable. But the Blackbird wears deepest mourning and though handsome and blessed with a fine long tail, does not carry himself with the bold assurance of the Thrush. His wife, poor dour little woman, is kept in her place by having to appear in a sombre brown outfit, quite unlike his glossy black suit. While the food of the Thrush and the Blackbird is much the same, the latter is more given to sly pilfering of fruit in season, and the Thrush rather gives one the impression that he is the early bird that catches the worm, looking very smug after just swallowing one – and who wouldn't? In fact, the Blackbird is the bad boy and the Thrush the good boy and they both know it and show it. The Blackbird is very quarrelsome, and although admittedly brave and quick to defend his family, is much given to petty bickering and domestic squabbles. At dusk you will often hear him raising alarms and refusing to go to sleep like a good boy at a time when all other birds are long abed. He loves to frequent thickets and dark undergrowth, to skulk in secret lairs throughout the day, but the Thrush is a lover of open lawns, and seldom seeks to hide himself away. Even their eggs give an indication of the differences in their characters – Thrush's eggs a bright sky blue with a few black spots to give distinction; Blackbird's eggs a duck egg green with numerous grey markings of studied sombreness. The Thrush goes to few pains to conceal his nest, the Blackbird is more secretive.

Yet, knowing all this, when the Blackbird begins to sing, I somehow find a deeper meaning in his song, a sweet touching of the inner chords, and a welling of feeling, which to me is the test of great music. Sure, I love the Thrush's song, too, but although it is a message of hope, and cheerful action, of promises and happy days, somehow the Blackbird's songs, eloquent of mortal fears and failings, of doubts, of joy and sadness sweetly mingled, has an immortal flavour of its own. For happiness is but a fleeting thing and ever and anon we turn out eyes towards that dim horizon and wonder what is hid beyond the veil of mortal understanding.

The late JACK TURNER, 1945

## **WANTED:** PEOPLE TO MONITOR FOR DEAD BIRDS ALONG ROADS

Native and exotic birds are frequently the victims of collisions with road vehicles. Preliminary observations indicate that avian road deaths are not distributed randomly in terms of season, sex, and location. As for people, road accidents may be skewed by the incidence of young males! We want to use the skills of birders to gather data on the incidence and nature of these deaths. With sufficient data we should be able to identify trends and, in particular, test whether naivety and sex are significant contributors to bird road mortality.

**Objective:** determine the species, number and sex of birds killed by vehicles along roads in order to document the monthly, seasonal and regional trends in bird mortality along New Zealand roads, to collect feather and/or tissue samples from introduced species for university genetic studies, and provide sufficiently intact native specimens to museums.

**Information needed:** observer's name and address, date of each survey, time, mode of travel (vehicle, bicycle, walking), location and length of road surveyed, type of road (single v double lane, metal v sealed), speed limit along road, and habitat associated with road (e.g. farmland, orchard, forestry, urban). Where the sex of a bird cannot easily be determined in the field, DNA-based sex determination can be used for this purpose from a tissue or feather sample.

**Wanted:** People (OSNZers, anybody) that regularly travel a particular route and are willing to: record their findings, remove dead birds so that they are not recounted subsequently, store intact specimens or portions of introduced species, and offer native species that are in suitable condition to the Massey University museum (MUNZ), local museum or DoC office.

So if you would like to take part in this study please get in touch with one of us:

*STEVE TREWICK*
*Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution*
*Institute for Molecular Biosciences*
*Massey University, Private Bag 11 222*
*Palmerston North 5301*
*s.trewick@massey.ac.nz*

*RALPH POWLESLAND*
*Research, Development & Improvement Division,*
*Department of Conservation*
*P.O. Box 10-420, Wellington 6143*
*rpowlesland@doc.govt.nz*

## **25TH IOC** BRAZIL 2010

The 25th International Ornithological Congress (25th IOC) will take place in Campos do Jordão, Brazil from the 22nd to 28th of August 2010. This is the first time that the IOC is being held in a Latin American country. More than 1,500 participants are expected to come from all over the world and the congress will present an ideal opportunity to meet fellow ornithologists and visit a mega-diverse country. The deadline for submitting proposals for Plenary speakers and Symposia is June 1st. More details can be found at www.i-o-c.org. The Local Committee looks forward to seeing many of our New Zealand colleagues in Campos do Jordão!

## AN 'EAGLE' TO THE RESCUE OF A SWALLOW – A SMALL MIRACLE

In the wide open spaces of Central Otago, and away from the main highways, signs of human habitation can be quite rare.

On a summer atlassing trip to one such area eighteen swallows were seen flying above a culvert. The leader and driver, Peter Schweigman stopped the car and suggested that we count the nests.

The culvert was high enough to stand in and after scrambling down the bank to join Peter I found that he had a fledgling swallow in his hand. All the other nests were empty but this bird had been tethered by a twelve-centimetre-long thread of wool enwrapped around its claws and leg while the other end had been firmly cemented to the nest during its mud and saliva construction.

The bird was vainly trying to fly away but becoming increasingly entangled. It appeared to be healthy and strong and we assumed that it was still being fed by the parents.

Back at the car the ubiquitous Swiss knife, fortunately of the smallest variety, came into play. One of us held the bird and the other disentangled the wool. It was a tricky operation with scissors and tweezers to slowly release that tiny, delicate foot.

The bird was then at liberty to take its first free flight and join its siblings. It was a miracle for the swallow and a source of wonder to us that we should have stopped at that particular culvert on that particular day.

AUDREY EAGLE



# Regional Roundup

### Far North

Far North membership continues to rise (at a rate second only to Auckland recently) and we hope that our new members will become actively involved in the Society. The January indoor meeting, at which we gave a presentation on Borneo, attracted 23 members and guests and went well despite some PowerPoint problems (don't worry, Auckland, they should be sorted by 1st April!).

George Watola, who normally lives in the UK but is a Far North member with parents in Kerikeri, has just published a book called The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. This contains a wealth of information, particularly about the history and early records of our birds and is well worth a read.

After a long spell of dry weather in our region, the weekend chosen for the wader count, 23rd and 24th February, produced gale-force north-easterly winds and torrential rain for most of Friday and Saturday. However, we were not deterred. On Friday, four of us, Adrian Riegen, Keith Woodley, Barry Stevens and I travelled as far as Te Hapua, one of the most northerly settlements in the country, and Keith gave a presentation to about 25 young schoolchildren on the Kuaka (Bar-tailed Godwit). This was very well received, made good use of the weather and also enlightened some local people on how to appreciate one of their special local migrant species as something other than what sometimes still ends up in the cooking pot!

With added help from Anthea Goodwin and Isabella Godbert we managed a count on Kowhai Beach on Saturday in driving rain, but Sunday on Kokota Sandspit was a treat in dry sunny conditions and the commoner species of waders were in good numbers. A Grey Plover and two Curlew Sandpipers were present with the flocks on the Sandspit, but the prize bird of the weekend was an adult Sooty Tern which flew past the campsite at Paua on Saturday morning.

DETLEF DAVIES

### Northland

Northland members are heading into autumn feeling the loss of a valued member and friend. Lorna Simpkin sadly passed away a long battle with illness. Despite her illness Lorna continued to join in with beach patrols and harbour surveys, and was recently putting the newsletter together. Her contribution to Northland birding will be greatly missed.

Last year ended with a Christmas pot luck tea at Jean Hawken's place before heading into another demanding summer, with several members volunteering to act as observers during the Fairy Tern breeding season. The volunteers spent a busy few months helping to look after the five chicks that were reared and banded at Waipu and Mangawhai.

At the first meeting this year, Gerry Brackenbury talked about the advocacy role that he had had with Environment Northland for the summer; talking to people on the beaches about the birds and environment.

During the last Whangarei Harbour survey a lower than expected number of birds was sighted due to very high tides and days of heavy rain covering all the main harbour roosting sites. A few birds were reported, but the main flocks were not found in the expected places.

Members will continue with beach patrols on the East and West coast beaches and will also take turns this year to organise activities and speakers for our meetings.

KATRINA HANSEN

### Auckland

Author Mary McEwen, daughter of the late Sir Charles Fleming, one of New Zealand's pre-eminent 20th century ornithologists, was our very special guest at October's meeting. She presented a fascinating insight into the book she edited, Charles Fleming's Cape Expedition Diary; Auckland Islands 1942-43: Albatrosses, mollymawks and other distractions. In 1942, Charles Fleming spent a year on the Auckland Island as a coast watcher with the secret wartime Cape Expedition. Mary offered a range of perspectives of the expedition and her father's interests through readings and images from the book, enhanced by recent photographs from the Auckland Islands, and personal reflections on her father's experiences. This wander through the archives of New Zealand ornithology was an absolute treat, and we are very grateful to Mary for taking the time to present her story.

In November, members of the Wildlife Enforcement Group (MAF) presented an overview of the illegal wildlife trade horrors that are encountered at our borders from time to time. From eggs taped to human bodies to animals concealed in freight packaging, the stories are a tragic insight into the drive of some people to make money. The intelligence of the perpetrators must be questioned. One gentleman purchased a parakeet in an Australian pet shop, and within a few hours tried to leave the country with the bird calling from his coat pocket! Most stories, however, do not have a funny side, and the evening was a sobering reminder of the risk that some species face from the international wildlife trade.

Our ornithological year culminated with an ornithological quiz and festive celebration that has become a tradition for the December meeting. Michael Taylor is the quiz-master, with questions from the discipline of ornithology that test general knowledge, current events, Latin taxonomy, identification skills and the ability to solve cryptic puzzles! As we approach the December meeting, anticipation of Michael's quiz generates a buzz of excitement amongst regulars, as there is intense rivalry between groups to compete for the winning trophy of a Pacific loon. Needless to say, the questions, official answers and possible answers generate endless debate. I won't list the members of the 'winning' group for fear that it might spark a call for a judicial recount of scores!

Also at the December meeting was the presentation of the Auckland Student Prize in Ornithology for 2007. This prize, intended to encourage student interest in ornithology, has been an initiative of the Auckland region since 2006. The 2007 prize was awarded to secondary school student Annette Evans from Marist College in Mt Albert. Two other biology students, Ellery McNaughton from Birkenhead College and Audrey Setiawan from Rangitoto College, were joint runners up. As prize winner, Annette attended the week-long ecology and bird study field course run by the Miranda Naturalists Trust in January. Initial feedback indicates that Annette was an enthusiastic participant in the field course, and we look forward to a formal report in due course. All three winners received a year's student membership to OSNZ.

Our year generally kicks off in late January with a gathering to take advantage of daylight saving for a picnic combined with a bird watching opportunity. This year, the site chosen was Ayrlies Lakes, a well-known private garden oasis in Whitford, South Auckland.

Michael Taylor launched our 2008 meetings in February, presenting information about the historical Caspian Tern banding project within the Auckland region. This talk was presented to the OSNZ Scientific Day in June 2007, but free of the constraints of the conference time limits, Michael added further detail for this talk.

Suzi Phillips stepped down as Regional Representative for the Auckland region at the end of 2007. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her contribution to the region as RR. Suzi will continue to play a significant part in the region's activities, including the production of our newsletter, Tara. I am grateful for her ongoing support and advice as I launch into the RR role for Auckland.

MEL GALBRAITH

### South Auckland

Bruce Shanks started the year off with a talk about his trip from the Subantarctic to the Chathams, showing some of the superb bird photos that he has entered into, and won, competitions with. This presentation was a little different from the others, as the photos were taken from a competition photographer's viewpoint, rather than from that of a bird watcher, and it was most interesting to see things from that perspective.

The first event of the year was the additional February Wader Census, for which Tony Habraken, in the middle of a drought, once again managed to arrange rain. We understand that he is being invited to central Australia to organise a census there, to see if he can break their drought! What added insult to injury was that he was not able to come himself!

For the Firth of Thames Census a very high tide meant our intrepid leader David Lawrie and his followers had to struggle through deep mud and water with a reward of only three Variable Oystercatchers, while others enjoyed the massed flocks at Miranda. The high tides do however push birds into Miranda, and on a number of occasions since January, and only on the higher tides, the world famous Bar-tailed Godwit E7 has been seen on the stilt ponds.

No true rarities have showed up yet this year, although there are presently some good birds at Miranda and on the Manukau Harbour with the waders now colouring up, getting ready for departure. A few more Godwits have been satellite-tagged, so look out for details as they start heading out.

Weka surveys are recommencing in March and we hope for a strong turnout to find out how the Weka at Kawakawa Bay have fared over this very dry summer.

GILLIAN VAUGHAN

### Waikato

As 2007 drew to a close, the Waikato Branch was treated to a trio of diverse and excellent speakers. In September, Pim de Monchy from the Maungatautari Ecological Trust talked about his past work with the Department of Conservation at the Moehau Kiwi Sanctuary looking at the impacts ship rats have on limiting resources for kiwi. He also gave us an update on the latest happenings at Maungatautari, undoubtedly one of the jewels in Waikato's crown.

# Regional Roundup

Karen Nutt, a post doctoral researcher based at the University of Waikato gave a very interesting talk in October on genetic diversity in kiwi populations. Karen has been analysing samples from numerous kiwi populations around the country using cutting-edge genetic techniques to investigate just how different our kiwi are.

Finally, in December Paul Cumming, our ex-Waikato RR now based in sunny Tauraunga, talked on the birds counted on Lake Rotoroa (or more commonly known as Hamilton Lake). This lake has been counted monthly (mainly by Waikato member, Barry Friend) for well over two decades, so as you may imagine, a vast database of bird trends has been collected. Paul has collated, summarised and analysed these excellent data, and it was great to find out more about the bird life on the most prominent lake in Hamilton.

Regular meetings have started again, and John Innes from Landcare Research gave us the latest news from the Kokako Recovery Group in February. We appreciate that preparing and presenting talks means giving up personal time, so we would sincerely like to thank all speakers that came to share their research with us over 2007.

The end of year Christmas dinner was held at the start of December in the DoC area office at Te Rapa. Approximately 25 members came and we enjoyed a delicious barbeque cooked by Bruce Postill. We all had a great time; however, John Rowe's quiz proved that some of us need to brush up on our bird trivia! Thanks to the Department of Conservation for continuing to allow us to use their facilities and audio visual equipment.

It appears that Hamilton, and perhaps the greater Waikato Region, is becoming a more bird friendly environment. Tui were regularly spotted in the city over the winter months feeding of the abundant supplies of exotic nectar. However, more encouragingly a pair that had been radio tagged by Landcare Research staff successfully bred in the Hamilton Gardens. This is excellent news as it is the first recorded breeding in the City for over 100 years. Hopefully Hamilton residents will be complaining about excessive Tui noise, like our Wellington neighbours, in the near future!

In other news, the Japanese Snipe that was spotted a couple of years ago by Brian Challinor and possibly seen last year, appears to be back at Forest Lake. Several members have reported seeing it this year, with photographs being taken on some occasions. Perhaps Forest Lake, which is situated in the north Hamilton, has become a regular stop off for this long-distance traveller. No doubt we will keep you posted.

DAI MORGAN

### Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau

Our region has been going through a sort of renaissance of late, with a new acting RR, Eila Lawton, and two meetings attracting over 60 attendees. The December 2007 meeting attracted a somewhat lower number, but still the figure was a respectable 19. The speaker was Greg Moorcroft from DoC, who outlined his involvement with a mainland island pest project in Te Urewera National Park. Greg stated that the existing avifauna in the 'island' contains all NZ mainland species of birds extant except for Weka, Stitchbird and Saddleback; quite an achievement for a mainland forest in these days of huge pest numbers. The main species the project focuses on are Blue Duck, and Kokako. Success has been backed up by the number of pairs of Kokako in the core pest control areas rising from eight in 1993 to over 90 in 2005.

Our second bimonthly meeting occurred in February, and attracted 63. Paddy Latham, OSNZ Bay of Plenty stalwart and long-time regional rep presented a workshop on beach patrols, and we received a run-down on this often unknown (to non-birders) activity of the society. Paddy presented us with a slide of each of the species you might find on our beaches, with a hands-on follow-up on measuring and identification of birds especially shipped in for the talk. Thanks also to Don Merton and Carole Long, our technicians for the evening.

Our field work in the Bay of Plenty has been solid too, as we conducted our first OSNZ Summer Wader Census for some years in November. Tauranga, Little Waihi/Maketu and Ohiwa were counted. Large numbers of Golden Plover were a highlight in Tauranga Harbour (75 for the entire harbour), and at Ohiwa there were good numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits, Variable Oystercatchers, six Whimbrels and a Turnstone. In total, 13,354 waders were counted, with a total of 11,267 Bar-tailed Godwits – more Godwits than Manukau Harbour or Firth of Thames. In fact, this was the second highest Godwit count in the country in November/December 2007, only behind Kaipara Harbour. Other species counted in the harbours

that represented the highest counts in the country were New Zealand Dotterel, Variable Oystercatcher, and Golden Plover. Thanks to Keith Owen, our DoC man and OSNZ member on the ground in Rotorua for the statistics and for running the days with Eila's help. The two-day survey is due to be repeated in February.

Other bird sightings this month include a record from me for once, when I came across two Weka on Motu Falls Road in January (between Opotiki and Gisborne). Twenty Grey-faced Petrel chicks fledged from Mauao this season. This was a greater number than first thought, as some areas of the colony had no chicks, and areas where there had been no action for a few seasons had chicks!

David Riddell saw some curious Rifleman behaviour in Tongariro National Park in January: "… the best sight was a pair (adult male and female) of Riflemen popping in and out of the front grille of a car in one of the campsites, presumably picking insects out of the radiator!" Learned behaviour from the Robins? He also saw a Fernbird behind the Chateau. In addition he saw a possible altitude record for Rock Pigeons in New Zealand, when nine flew over Red Crater, Mt Tongariro.

Brown Teal continue to be seen in the Bay of Plenty. Following Brian Chudleigh's record of one near Katikati two seasons ago, Tim Barnard pulled two out of the hat at Little Waihi in January. They were associating with 500 Grey Teal. Tim also had handed to him three independent reports of a Blue Duck on the Kaituna River near Lake Rotoiti. This is a good record for the Rotorua area. He reported lots of Long-tailed Cuckoos around the lakes in January.

Waihi resident Una Fuller reported that a pair of New Zealand Dotterels in a suburban development close to the Waihi Working Mens' Club appeared to be performing typical anti-predator displays to the observer on 30th December 2007, and she thought there may be a nest near by. However, none was found. Dotterels have been known to nest in the Martha Mine, on tailings, in recent years.

It was noted by Rosemary Tully, that this year's Red-billed Gulls had their colony washed off White Island by high seas in December. It was not known at the time of press if they re-laid. A small island 500 m off Moturiki/Leisure Island at Mount Maunganui has been home to around 50 pairs of nesting White-fronted Terns. If you would prefer your ornithological endeavours to be less extreme, a pair of White-fronted Terns raised a chick on a piling outside the main lounge of the Harbourside Restaurant, Tauranga this summer. Not quite armchair bird watching, but at least Dining Room chair…

The wader highlight of this summer was Tim Barnard seeing 320 Lesser Knots at Matahui Point, near Katikati, on the last day of 2007. Amongst them were six banded or colour-flagged birds which included birds that had been previously banded in Auckland, China and Australia. A big thanks to Tim who has been our RR for four years.

PAUL CUMING

### Hawkes Bay

Our summer activities have centred around the two censuses in November and February. Thanks to the great support of members, and some help from friends who came along to help out as recorders, we were able to fully cover all our areas on both occasions. In November some of the highlights included a New Zealand Dotterel at the Tukituki River Mouth, a Whimbrel at Ahuriri and a Fernbird at Porangahau. In February our census day was fine and calm, but the previous week had seen huge seas which had affected the coastal areas. Two Bitterns were seen at the Railway Wetland at Waitangi.

Over summer Ahuriri hasn't had the usual number or variety of waders, but the Grey-tailed Tattler has been seen a few times as well as up to four Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, one Red-necked Stint and 16 Golden Plover. In early December a colony of Black-billed Gulls had around 40 nests with eggs at the Waitangi River Mouth. There were no White-fronted Terns there at all. Usually they nest together in this area. On 5th January the site was abandoned with no indication of what had happened.

MARGARET TWYDLE

### Wairarapa

Rosemary and Bruce Vander Lee gave an illustrated presentation in September on two American birds: the Least Tern and Piping Plover. These two endangered species winter in the Gulf of Mexico and summer on the sand bars of the mighty Missouri River through the Dakotas and into Canada. When Piping Plovers leave Texas they split into three distinct populations: the Missouri River system; New England coast; and Canada. Piping Plovers bear a striking resemblance to our endangered Shore Plover in both size and behaviour. They are ground nesters with the nests within sight of each other, this being a defence against predators. The male makes four scrapes which the female inspects before choosing one as the nest, which may be decorated with pebbles. The usual clutch is four eggs.

Least Terns are more of a colonial nester with their nests situated quite close together on the ground. The species has a system of synchronised laying so that the chicks all hatch and fledge at the same time. The chicks are cryptically coloured like the Piping Plover chicks with the main difference being that they have webbed feet. The Least Tern is about he same size as the New Zealand Fairy Tern, and like the Fairy Tern leads a hazardous life in that the nests and chicks can be washed away in floods.

Rosemary and Bruce worked for the Environmental Section of the US Corps of Engineers, monitoring birds along the river system. Along the river there are seven dams which have a combined shoreline greater than that of the California coast. It was interesting to hear about the river dynamics and the effects of man on the ecology of the river. Fluctuating river levels have created or eroded sand bars used by birds and at the same time encouraged growth of vegetation to cover previous nesting sites. In an expensive experiment $3 million dollars was spent on creating artificial islands for birds, but the islands soon eroded or were covered by vegetation. The job of locating every nest on the river sand required a major effort but when a large volume of water was released from a dam it was possible to save the eggs before flooding. In one season 1,000 eggs were collected, with 800 being fertile and 700 hatching and fledging. Since no one knew about captive breeding before this it was a major triumph which was later repeated at other sites.

Our September field trip was to the Mt Bruce/Pukaha Wildlife Sanctuary. Nine members, including new members, Val and Des Cleghorn from Woodville, enjoyed a comprehensive tour ably-led by Colin Scadden, who has had a long association with Mt Bruce. Following a ranger's introductory talk on the Takahe, the group viewed a film created by Educational Officer Chris Day. Lunch was taken in the spacious cafe, overlooking the Takahe habitat.

During a forest walk at the sanctuary, Colin named trees, orchids and ferns, heightening our awareness of the habitat. A close-up view of two Riflemen cavorting low down in the trees was the first birding highlight. More highlights were to follow, charming little Stitchbirds, 'Kahurangi' the Kokako making a barely audible gentle contact call, and those avian clowns of the forest the Kaka, both those flying free and those in their aviary, noisily making their presence known throughout the forest. They were observed tearing moss and bark off trees. A destructive game or a search for food? Probably a combination of both. With the Campbell Island Teal enclosure now open to the public the group was able to observe a male teal at close quarters on the pond.

Donald Cameron shared his memories of Lake Pounui at the October meeting.

Donald's family had farmed the area for some generations. Donald presented a photograph of a dendroglyph, found on a tree in the vicinity of the lake. This was reminiscent of the Moriori dendroglyphs in the Chatham Islands and possible evidence of archaic Maori occupation.

Lake Pounui is situated near Palliser Bay, on the Western Side of Lake Wairarapa. It is approximately 180 acres in area, and surrounded by 530 acres of native bush covenanted with the QE2 Trust. Its depth of 35 ft was measured when Fishery Research, led by Don Jellyman (now at Canterbury University), were studying eels in the 1970s. Local knowledge is that the lake was originally formed by seismic activity, which tilted the lake-bed towards the hills, trapping the water. A quote from Graeme R. Steven's book Rugged Landscape (1974) states "The Wairarapa Plain has been depressed by downwarping along the West Wairarapa Fault, and at times in the past, its southern arm has been occupied by the sea. In modern times, the Ruamahanga River has built a natural dam across the seaward end of the depression, forming Lake Onoke, and converting Lake Wairarapa into a freshwater lake."

There are two other smaller lakes in the adjacent valley. They are thought to be all part of the same aquatic system, in that they all have a very dark appearance, possibly from forest tannin. Lake Pounui is still full of eels. It previously also contained leeches, but these were eradicated with the introduction of Perch. The introduction of trout failed because of insufficient flow in the waters, especially during periods of drought. A track around the lake was constructed during the Second World War to mill Manuka for firewood. It was not possible to join the two ends of the track due to an intervening ridge and swamp area.

In the 1970s the lake was leased to Victoria University Zoology Department, headed at the time by Dr John Salmon and George Gibbs (author of the recently released Ghosts of Gondwana). In the late 1980s a covenant was placed on the lake and surrounding bush, a total area of 710 acres. This protected the area in perpetuity, especially from potential developers, when the property passed out of the hands of the family. Our September field trip was to Lake Pounui, where four Wellington members joined the group to enjoy this 'jewel in the South Wairarapa'.

The birding highlight for this Regional Roundup must surely be the saga of a feisty wee Shore Plover. Captive-bred at Mount Bruce/Pukaha Wildlife Sanctuary, and released onto Mana Island in June 2007, it was sighted at Henley Lake in Masterton on September 15th, and returned, of its own volition, to its familiar aviary at Mount Bruce soon after.

Phil Battley spoke on 'The Migratory Patterns of Godwits' at the November meeting.

Phil gave a great presentation, so good that at times the person recording the talk forgot to take notes, and apologises for the report being 'pretty sketchy'. Birds migrating to New Zealand breed in Alaska. They leave New Zealand in dribs and drabs in March and April, not in one great massed migration as some earlier writers would have us believe. When they leave New Zealand they seem to fly via Asia and when they return they have been recorded flying direct, non-stop from Alaska across the middle of the Pacific to New Zealand. On northward migration from their stop-off on Asian estuaries they, after refuelling for some weeks, fly east to Alaska. This can be a difficult flight at times because of adverse weather and winds.

They gain weight rapidly before migration and have been described as 'bricks with wings'. There is marked sexual dimorphism. Only the males colour up; females retain their grey brown plumage. Females are much larger than males and have a much longer bill.

Polynesians used to harvest Godwits. It is said that the southerly migratory flights of

Godwits may have convinced Polynesians that there was a land mass to the south and may have encouraged them to migrate south themselves. On return flights with wind assistance the birds can frequently fly 9,000 km without stopping. Without wind assistance they may only fly 6,600 km, and can manage this in six to seven days.

Transmitters are getting smaller all the time. There is now a 9.5 g solar-powered transmitter that has been used on Wandering Albatrosses that can last for three years.

As well as attaching external transmitters to Godwits they are now being implanted into the birds' abdominal cavities. It is rather an invasive operation to insert these but once in place the birds seem to cope with them better than external appliances. External transmitters are lost when the bird lands at its destination. Some transmitters are now so small that scientists can fit them onto dragonflies.

Godwit E7 made ornithological history this year when it was recorded flying 11,000 km non-stop from Alaska. The species can fly at an altitude of up to 4 km when migrating. Godwits are very site faithful, returning to same nesting area each year.

We pay tribute to long-standing member Betty Watt, who died in November. Betty served as a committee member, RR, and latterly as Secretary/Treasurer in our Region. Betty had been a long-serving volunteer at Mt Bruce/Pukaha Wildlife Centre where she became possibly the most knowledgeable lay person on the Stitchbird. For six years, Betty represented Wairarapa OSNZ on the Board of Mt Bruce, and held office as the Board Secretary. Betty was one of the authors of the handbook Where to Find Birds of the Wairarapa. Even as her health failed Betty continued to take a keen interest in all things birding. Our region has lost one of our most dedicated members.

Our December annual pot-luck dinner at Barbara and Des Lovatt's home, was attended by 22 members, and was once again a very relaxing and convivial event.

The final fixture for the year was the annual banding of Black-backed Gull and Caspian Tern chicks on Onoke Spit, Palliser Bay. Reg Cotter from Wellington and Colin Scadden from Wairarapa were joined by 14 people from Wellington and Wairarapa, with a mix of OSNZ and Forest and Bird members, most wearing dual membership 'hats'. The Caspian Terns were late nesting, so only The Black-backed Gull chicks were banded (60 of them). Colin Scadden will return later to band the Caspian Tern chicks.

BARBARA LOVATT (from various members' submissions)

### Wellington

Being the last meeting of the year we commenced with some happy Christmas cheer – wine and Christmas cake – providing a pleasant start to the evening. Delia Small of DoC Head Office spoke to us about work in Canterbury on the Orange-fronted Parakeet. Delia explained that the Orange-fronted Parakeet is now regarded as a distinct species (since 2000) and is critically endangered, with probably fewer than 200 birds remaining. Although formerly widespread in the South Island it is now restricted to three forested central Canterbury valleys. Identification is difficult because the birds are highly active, have cryptic colouration, are non-territorial and live in forest canopies. The two main threats to the species are habitat modification and predation by mammals. Delia added that studies have focused on understanding the species' biology and developing a framework for conservation management.

Features of the recovery plan for the species include intensive predation control (using trapping and toxic baits), nest protection from predators, population assessments (five minute counts) and the establishment of captive populations near Christchurch and at Te Anau. Considerable success has been achieved and the next step is the establishment of a self-sustaining population of Orange-fronted Parakeets on Chalky Island, Fiordland.

Our February meeting was our Member's night. We were treated to eight separate presentations covering: Shore Plover and Fluttering Shearwaters on Mana Island; a trip to Antarctica; work on the Aga, a Pacific crow, in the Marianna Islands; visits to Breaksea and Mayor/Tuhua Islands; radar monitoring of bird migration in the Taharoa area, as part of planning for a potential wind farm site; and observations from local sites.

Ralph Powlesland of DoC gave two talks at the March meeting. Firstly he described observations of a bird bath next to native bush in Waikanae, using the branch's time-lapse video equipment. On some days in hot, dry weather there were up to 180 visits by birds. Thrushes, Starlings and Blackbirds stayed for 1-2 minutes, whereas Tui were in and out in less than half a minute. The number of visits per day correlates with the amount of local rainfall, or lack of. Ralph's second talk was much more exotic, an account of a trip to Sabah by a number of OSNZ members. As well as many beautiful birds the group saw several different species of monkeys, lizards, butterflies, and spiders big enough to the most of us nightmares. Particularly fascinating was the harvest of birds' nests for soup. The harvesters swing out and up 10-20 m on a rickety contraption to collect the nests, made mainly of swiftlet saliva. These are exported to China.

The region has formulated a plan that four meetings per year, in addition to those in Wellington, will be held on the Kapiti coast. The next meeting is at Paraparaumu Public Library on Monday May 12th at 7.30 pm.

White-fronted Terns have been discovered breeding on Ward Island in Wellington Harbour. A Bellbird has been seen and heard on Mana Island; the first to be seen there. A final batch of Fluttering Shearwater chicks have been translocated to Mana Island. Time lapse video has recorded unbanded Fluttering Shearwaters prospecting burrows near to the sound system.

A second group of Shore Plovers have been transferred to Mana Island. As a number of the first cohort has remained on the island it is hoped that these birds won't wander. Two birds from the first cohort have produced a chick, breeding at an unusually young age for this species. Single birds continue to be seen at Foxton and on Petone Beach.

ANDY FALSHAW

### Nelson

Pauline Samways has been observing White-fronted Terns for the third year in a row nesting on a mound at the end of the Motueka Sandspit. The first year that they nested there were 100 pairs, the second year 120 pairs and this year between 200 and 250 pairs. Nesting went well during November with the nests surviving high tides, and a constant stream of parent birds bringing food in their beaks. Then, just as the majority of young birds were ready to fly, we discovered the beach littered with dead chicks. There were at least 50 carcasses, with about 70 still alive. The dead birds had a full set of flight feathers, no sign of injury, but were very light and thin. After discussing the possible reasons for the deaths with a variety of experts, DoC sent a specimen for autopsy. The results showed that "the bird was in very poor body condition… severe pectoral muscle atrophy… no subcutaneous or abdominal fat reserves …the gizzard was empty as was the rest of intestinal tract"

Unfortunately the young terns had starved and it seems the area can't sustain such a large increase in population of these terns. It has been suggested that the La Nina weather pattern has caused a reduction in the level of nutrients in the sea leading to a collapse in the food chains for inshore feeding birds. It will be interesting to see whether the terns abandon the site next season, or give it another go.

On the 30th November and 15th December Caspian Tern chicks in the Bells Island (Waimea Inlet) colony were banded by Willie Cook,

# Regional Roundup

Beryl Wilkes, Stuart Wood and some of his grandchildren, altogether a useful team. A total of 58 birds were processed and a single nest remained with two eggs plus three small chicks. This has been one of the most successful breeding seasons for the species at this site and no mortality was seen.

In early December Steve Wood accompanied Willie Cook and Don Cooper into Golden Downs Forest (courtesy of its new owners Nelson Forests Ltd.) to view a New Zealand Falcon nesting site. Steve was rewarded with some stunning photos.

Three satellite-tracked Bar-tailed Godwits have now been located on or near the site on which they were captured in February 2007. Y3, a female which did not return to Alaska, was seen first by Henry Dixon near Pakawau, then on two other occasions by Sarah Lovibond. Ingrid Hutzler spotted YY-WR, the first satellite-tracked male known to have returned to New Zealand, and back to the spot where it was tagged. Rob Schuckard located Y7 on a sandbar just off Totara Avenue, the second male to be seen. These three birds have generated a lot of interest and the possibility of finding others is keeping observers on their 'toes'.

Banding of Variable Oystercatcher chicks with alpha flags started on the 17th December 2007, four to six weeks earlier than in previous years. Initially three pairs were banded on Rabbit Island, and in early January five birds were banded on the Bells Island shellbank.

Two captures of waders for banding took place at the eastern end of Rabbit Island in January. The first capture consisted of Bar-tailed Godwits, the second all Pied Oystercatchers.

The Top of the South summer wader count in February was one of the most successful, with 24 observers taking part. Fifteen shorebird species were recorded on Farewell Spit including a Mongolian Dotterel and a Red-necked Phalarope. The increase in numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots from the November count was most encouraging. Godwits up from 9,329 to 11,046 (an 18% increase) and Lesser Knots up from 3,500 to 10,290, the first time counts have exceeded 10,000 since November 1995. These figures tend to bear out that in November birds are still coming in from Australia to Farewell Spit.

Rob Schuckard surveyed the Farewell Spit Gannet colony and reported about 1,000 healthy chicks with no sign of mortality. Bands were also observed, some of which indicated birds aged 14 years. The Fernbird population on Farewell Spit attracted a lot of interest in the time not occupied by wader counting. Two pairs were seen near the old stock yards, while a further three or four birds were seen and heard in the scrub near the meteorological station. Looking at the large area of this habitat between these two points one can only wonder at what the population might be.

Willie Cook made a couple of excursions; the first in January to the Henderson Basin in the company of Chris Petyt and Alec Milne to check on the Rock Wren population there. I am not sure which impressed Willie the most; the stamina and dedication of these Golden Bay members in making regular visits throughout the year, plus servicing a trapping programme along the Cobb Valley, or the ability of the tiny Rock Wren to survive in this alpine environment with predators. Chris reported eight pairs were present. Two pairs didn't nest, two were very late and only two juveniles were seen. Willie was also the lone representative from Nelson to attend a field day with the Marlborough region at Cape Campbell.

On the social side we held an enjoyable Christmas party at Willie Cook's. In February David and Vicki Melville were generous hosts giving a barbecue at their Dovedale home where some local members were able to renew acquaintances with Bob Gill, Colleen Handel and Dan Mulcahy from the USGS Alaskan Science Centre team, who had just completed the latest transmitter placements on Bar-tailed Godwits at Miranda. Richard Holdaway was also present, a good opportunity for Nelson members to meet the President of OSNZ.

At the first monthly meeting of the year we were pleased to welcome Gillian Pollock back to our region.

DON COOPER

### Canterbury

The summer has cooled off quite a lot, especially at night now, but has been excellent in terms of breeding success of many species. For the first time a juvenile Bellbird has been seen on the Canterbury lowlands in the company of its parent, in Nick Allen's garden at Waikuku. North Canterbury seems better at getting bush birds onto the plains than my area just south of Christchurch, for Brown Creepers have also been observed well down the Cust River, away from the foothills. However, there are now a few Tomtit pairs in Kennedy's Bush reserve on the Port Hills, and these have been joined by two Brown Creepers, courtesy of a rescue effort by Christchurch City Council staff. Tui have again been reported from Banks Peninsula, though perhaps only one bird.

There is a great deal of interest in getting native birds well-established on Banks Peninsula. Landowners there are getting involved in monitoring their property at regular intervals by means of 5-minute bird counts. This programme is being run by the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust aided by the Regional Council, Christchurch City Council, OSNZ and others in terms of training and help with monitoring over several years.

In South Canterbury Tui continue to make incursions eastwards, near Geraldine and in the headwaters of the Selwyn in the Flagpole Hill area. At present it appears to be juvenile birds moving about in the autumn, but will hopefully become more persistent. Australasian Crested Grebes are again breeding in some numbers on Lake Alexandrina near Tekapo and continue to breed at Lake Ellesmere. One has even been seen within Christchurch, on the lower Heathcote River.

Black-fronted Terns continue to have trouble with setting up and maintaining nesting colonies. This was partly because of floods at the wrong time washing them out but also due to disturbance from river-users and probable predation. The plight of our three most-threatened riverbed birds has been taken by the horns locally with the establishment of an informal group of ecologists, conservationists and ornithologists, called BRaid. This will act as a forum for collection of data and resources about braided river ecosystems to aid the rational planning of resource allocation in the current climate of water shortage and changing land use.

Black-billed Gulls had a very successful breeding colony at Bexley Wetland next to the lowermost stretch of the Avon River in Christchurch and fledged about 250 young. This compensated for their lack of success on the Ashley River. They continue to do well on the Ashburton too, but their plight overall is still a concern and the arrival of didymo in Canterbury Rivers is also a worry. Caspian Terns had a small colony within a regular colony of Black-backed Gulls at Lake Ellesmere and produced 20-30 young.

In Arthur's Pass Orange-fronted Parakeets were evident on the left bank of the Hawdon River, with a few pairs present, and in the Poulter Valley also. Predator control is ongoing. Arthur's Pass Village is now host to New Zealand Robins and Riflemen with trapping making a lot of difference. All over the province local people are getting interested in native wildlife and are keen to help with planting, weeding, predator control and finding out stuff about birds.

Visits to the wonderful Pyramid Valley excavation were made with total fascination by a significant number of members. The Godwits were farewelled by OSNZers who let 400 people use their scopes, and lots of band records were logged. Nick Allen and his new family continue to flourish, and the Kaikoura Conference is well in hand. See you all then.

JAN WALKER

### Southland

We managed to turn on some excellent weather for Rob Schuckard as he recently covered all the major Southland wading sites for the February Wader Census. Rob visited Catlins Lake, Haldane Estuary, Waikawa Bay, Fortrose Estuary, Awarua Bay, New River Estuary and Riverton.

It was disappointing that Southland members were unable to lend a hand but I managed to spend a day with Rob at the head of Awarua Bay and enjoyed it very much.

While Rob managed to spot a few banded godwits it was a Turnstone banded in China that was of most interest, as it could be the first to be reported from New Zealand (this has yet to be confirmed).

While the head of Awarua Bay once again turned up its usual array of species including four Sanderlings and two Curlew Sandpipers, it was the New River Estuary that proved most rewarding with five Whimbrels, as well as Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a Pectoral sandpiper and a possible Large Sand Dotterel.

Other interesting sightings over the last few months have been a Falcon and parakeets heard at Piano Flat near Waikaia by Lloyd Esler, and approximately 100 Royal Spoonbills reported by Eric Black on Omaui Island near Bluff.

PHIL RHODES



# Regional Reps and What's On

### Far North

Detlef Davies, 180 Landing Road, Kerikeri 0470. Ph (09) 407 3874. Email detlefdavies@yahoo.com

### Northland

Katrina Hansen, 3 Harbour View Road, Onerahi, Whangarei. Ph (09) 430 2133. Email katrina.hansen@xtra.co.nz

Evening meetings, second Thursday of the month, ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954. West coast beach patrols ph. Prue Cozens (09) 437 7760. East coast beach patrols ph. Pauline Smith (09) 435 3060. Whangarei Harbour wader count ph. Tony Beauchamp (09) 436 2661. North Kaipara wader count ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954.

### Auckland

Mel Galbraith, 62 Holyoake Place, Birkenhead, Auckland. Ph (09) 480 1958. Email melgar62@slingshot.co.nz

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month (except January) at 7.45pm at Natural Science Building 23, Unitec, Point Chevalier.

### South Auckland

David Lawrie, 52 Mill Road, R D 2, Pukekohe, Auckland. Ph (09) 238 8407. Email lawrie@ps.gen.nz

Evening meetings are held at the Papakura Croquet Clubrooms, 5 Chapel Street, Papakura, on the second Tuesday of each month (Feb-Nov) at 7.45 pm. Beach patrols ph. Wendy Goad (09) 292 7838. Manukau and Firth of Thames censuses ph. Tony Habraken (09) 238 5284

### Waikato

Dai Morgan, 78 Grey Street, Cambridge. Ph (07) 823 1990. Email d.k.morgan@massey.ac.nz

Evening meetings, every third Wednesday 7.30pm, DoC Area Office, 5 Northway Street (off Te Rapa Road), Hamilton.

Beach Patrols and Cambridge Lake census, Hugh Clifford ph (07) 855 3751. Hamilton Lake Census, Barry Friend ph (07) 843 6729. Forest Lake Census, Brian Challinor ph (07) 855 2561. Kakepuku Bird Counts and West Coast Harbour Censuses, Laurie Hoverd ph (07) 871 8071. Bird Sightings, Dai Morgan

### Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau

Eila Lawton, 449 Lund Road, RD2 Katikati 3063. Ph (07) 549 3646 Email elawton@actrix.co.nz

### Gisborne/Wairoa

RR's position vacant.

### Hawke's Bay

Helen Andrews, 254 Mangatahi Rd, RD1, Hastings 4171. Ph (06) 874 9426.

Email helenandrews@xtra.co.nz

Indoor meetings are held on an irregular basis, but field trips are organised regularly. Please contact Helen Andrews for details.

### Taranaki

Barry Hartley, 12a Ronald Street, New Plymouth. Ph (06) 757 8644. Email Barry_Hartley@clear.net.nz

Evening meetings – first Tuesday of the month (exc Jan) 7.30 pm. Field trips on first conducive weekend thereafter.

### Wanganui

Tom Teasdale, 33 Paterson Street, Aramoho, Wanganui 4500. Ph (06) 343 9992. Email teasdale.family@clear.net.nz

Evening meetings – on hold at present.

### Manawatu

Ian Saville, 23 Duke Street, Feilding. Ph (06) 323 1441. Email binzsav@clear.net.nz

Evening meetings – second Wednesday of Feb, May, Aug and Nov, Lido Centre, Park Street, Palmerston North, 8pm. Beach patrols – first Wednesday of each month and also at other irregular times.

### Wairarapa

Barbara Lovatt, 4 Clara Anne Grove, Greytown. Ph (06) 304 9948. Email barbara.lovatt@slingshot.co.nz

Evening meetings held on the second Thursday of the month (exc Jan) 7.30 pm, venue alternating between Masterton and Greytown. Field trips are the following weekend. Contact Barbara Lovatt for further details.

### Wellington

Ian Armitage, 50 Ranui Terrace, Tawa, Wellington. Ph (04) 232 7470. Email ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz

Evening meetings - first Monday of the month, Head Office of DoC, 18-32 Manners Street, Wellington, meet 7.30 pm for a 7:45 pm start, ph. Ian Armitage (04) 232 7470.

East Harbour Regional Park bird survey, Reg Cotter (04) 568 6960. Fluttering Shearwater chick transfers, Colin Miskelly (04) 479 1662. Beach patrols, Sharon Alderson (04) 298 3707. Mana Island robins & sooty shearwaters, Geoff de Lisle (04) 527 0929. Mist-netting and passerine banding, Peter Reese (04) 387 7387. Rock pigeon nesting project, Ralph Powlesland (04) 386 3323.

### Nelson

Stuart Wood, 24 Olympus Way, Richmond. Ph (03) 544 3932. Email stuartwood38@yahoo.co.nz

Evening meetings – usually first Monday of the month, 7.15 pm Solander/Aurora Fisheries Board Room. The Solander/Aurora building is on the right hand side of Cross Street, just beyond Dickson's Boat Repair and more or less opposite the 'red shed' - the Tasman Bay Cruising Club, Nelson. Phone Stuart Wood (03) 544 3932 or Don Cooper (03) 544 8109.

### Marlborough

Mike Bell, 42 Vickerman Street, Grovetown 7321. Phone (03) 577 9818 or 021 734 602. Email mikeandnoz@slingshot.co.nz

Lake Grassmere count – third Sunday of month. Ph Brian Bell (03) 570 2230. Passerine banding, each weekend during February and March, at Jack Taylor's farm, Ward, contact Mike Bell Ph (03) 577 9818.

### Canterbury/West Coast

Jan Walker, 305 Kennedys Bush Road, Halswell, Christchurch. Ph (03) 322 7187. Email shesagreen@gmail.com

Evening meetings last Monday of the month, Spreydon Bowling Club, Domain Terrace, Christchurch. Monthly field trips – dates vary, contact Jan Walker.

### Otago

Mary Thompson, 197 Balmacewen Road, Balmacewen, Dunedin. Ph (03) 464 0787. Email mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Evening meetings monthly on the fourth Wednesday at 8.00pm in Benham Seminar Room, Zoology Department, 340 Great King Street. Contact Mary Thompson.

### Southland

Lloyd Esler, 15 Mahuri Road, Otatara, RD9 Invercargill 9879. Ph (03) 213 0404.

Email esler@southnet.co.nz

Evening meetings (in conjunction with Field Club) held second Thursday of the month at 7.30 pm. Please phone Lloyd Esler for venue and further information, field trip usually on Saturday following. Beach Patrols on a casual basis, phone Phil Rhodes (03) 213 1228 or Lloyd Esler.