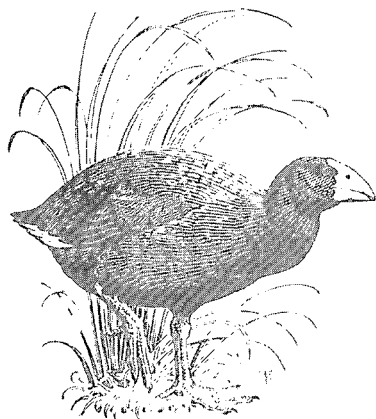


Southern Bird

No. 1 March 2000. • ISSN 1175-1916





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Quotation

'There are three classes which need sanctuary more than others — birds, wild flowers, and Prime Ministers. [Stanley Baldwin in Observer 24 May 1925]

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Cover Photos

Front Cover

Fine jewellery for a technological albatross at Taiaoroa Head. Northern Royal Albatross (Diomedea sanfordi), March 1999. Photo C.J.R. Robertson.
See page 7

Back Cover

Black Shags (Phalacrocorax carbo novaehollandiae) at a colony near Lake Kohangatera, Wellington, April 1982. Photo Peter Reese.

Publisher

Published on behalf of the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc), P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, New Zealand. Email osnz1@ibm.net.

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We welcome advertising enquiries.

EDITORIAL

Following the recent thorough review of the publications of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, your Council decided that *OSNZ News* should become a stand-alone magazine of the Society. This is it, and I hope it meets with your approval.

OSNZ News was conceived as a "newsletter", with the first issue appearing in January 1977 as a supplement to *Notornis* 23:4 (December 1976). The early issues consisted of eight pages of closely typed text. Barrie Heather, his hands more than full as editor of *Notornis*, was undoubtedly thankful to hand over responsibility for *OSNZ News* to Paul Sagar in 1978, who edited it for an astonishing 16 years.

OSNZ News has continued to grow, develop and be enjoyed over its 94 issues. Photographs, tables and other items are now common features. Doubling to 16 pages, it has regularly reached 20.

The publications review endorsed the pivotal role of publications in the life of the Society. We all ended 1999 with a hope for a better future. For many this was a temporary respite perhaps, as we face a period of unprecedented difficulty for many of our beleaguered birds. The Society enjoys the support of many passionately committed members, and it is my hope that this new magazine will play its part in an enhanced vigour within *OSNZ* in the 21st century.

Requests for suggested names for the new Society magazine drew a gratifyingly huge response, a sure reflection of much interest in the successor to *OSNZ News*. Many were impressively imaginative, some mind-bogglingly awful. My thanks to each person who took the time and effort to send in suggestions.

The first thing you will have noticed is the inclusion, for the first time, of colour. This is a not inconsiderable expense, and cannot be sustained on the current finances of the Society. Our thanks must go, therefore, to our President Chris Robertson for the generous sponsorship of this issue of *Southern Bird*. If you would like to sponsor colour plates for a future issue I look forward to hearing from you.

So why *Southern Bird*? Firstly because it contains the word "bird". But there is also a firm link with the journal, as "southern bird" is a direct translation of the Greek "notornis".

Barrie Heather commented in his first issue "Perhaps *OSNZ News* will get too big, perhaps it will fade out". Then, as now, this depends on you. There is effectively no limit to the size of *Southern Bird*. It is your magazine, and will only grow and prosper if you support it.

I hope you enjoy this first issue of *Southern Bird*.

Tony Crocker

OBITUARY

Died 14 December 1999.

Friedrich-Carl Graf Kinsky von Wchinitz und Tettau at Sassenberg, Germany aged 88. Fred Kinsky was the ornithologist at the Dominion Museum for many years,

Convener of the Checklist Committee (2nd Edition) and President of the Society from 1971-75. A full obituary will appear in *Notornis* in due course. Any correspondence should be addressed to Lady Alexandra Mackechnie, 15 Waldegrave Gardens, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham TW1 4PQ, England.



From the President's Desk

As you will see from the ballot papers enclosed with these publications, I have decided to retire from the Presidency at this year's AGM in Napier. After 5 years I decided that it was time for some fresh blood at the top. I am delighted that two members of the Society have been nominated for the position and that an election has been required.

The Society has only had 14 individuals as President during its first 60 years. I count myself very privileged to have been able to serve the Society in this way. I thank you for your generous support and participation as we have together reorganised and examined our activities to cater for the demands of the next century of bird study. There is no shortage of work to be done and we will always need members who are willing to serve in the interests of the membership. Please don't just wait to be entertained, for birding is much more fun if there is a result at the end which will be useful for others, and especially if you have participated in the making of that result.

It is with considerable regret that I must record the death of an old friend, past-President Fred Kinsky (see notice elsewhere). Following WW2, Fred came to New Zealand from Czechoslovakia as a refugee. His first job was as a sweeper at the Wellington Railway station. By the 1960s he was established as the ornithologist at the Dominion Museum (now Te Papa, MONZ) where he spent many years curating what became one of the significant ornithological collections of the world. His contacts throughout the Society enabled many a beach wreck specimen or road kill to be added to the collection or exchanged with overseas institutions.

As a child Fred had been a great collector of birds eggs, like so many of his era in Europe. This collecting habit was continued both at the Museum and in his hobby of stamps. He was reputed to have had one of the best collections of bird stamps anywhere in the world. Following his return to the U.K. after retirement, he was for many years an international authority and consultant for the identification of the birds illustrated on stamps. It would seem that taxonomy and its techniques can be of assistance in the most unusual places.

Many of you will have some delightful memories of Fred, and I must acknowledge that I first went to the Antarctic as a result of Fred being committed to the ill-fated OSNZ Expedition to Raoul Island, which had to be evacuated because of a volcanic eruption. I recall I was at White Island at the time, and hoping that my volcano would not blow up as well. I suspect however that I got some of the blame, with dark suggestions about people rolling boulders into volcanic vents and blockages causing eruptions elsewhere.

Needless to say he was back in the office waiting for me on my return from White Island, but still generously allowed me to go down to the Ice and collect seriously for the museum, while starting a competition between us to see all the species of penguins in the world. I have to accept a draw. As a gentleman and an ornithologist Fred brought a valuable overseas perspective to the formative years of our Society. A formal obituary will appear in *Notornis* in due course.

The 61st year of the Society is, I hope, proving to be an interesting start to the new century. I see a steady flood of mail for the Atlas Convenor which means that some of you at least have been wrestling with the intricacies of map references and your identification skills. Keep up the good work.

Probably the biggest change or surprise should be contained within the envelope you have opened to get at this reading. A new magazine and a revised modern format for the journal. These will continue to evolve over the coming issues so that you will have something both to look forward to and make contributions to in the future.

During this year at least there may need to be a little more sponsorship to maintain a permanent colour presence in *Southern Bird* (presently costing about \$500 per issue). However, there is now very much more flexibility for the editor and the designers as to what may be provided. The intent is to continue to have the covers provide good bird portraits to assist identification and provide information. In future the presentation of periodic maps from the Atlas Scheme will benefit from the ability to publish in colour.

The journal format reflects the international standards required

for ease of presenting scientific material, and states clearly the scope and position that *Notornis* aims to fill within the scientific literature. Again, the use of colour will be possible in future issues, but a charge will be made to the contributor where it is required.

You will shortly be able to go to the web for the OSNZ. From 1 June it is intended to go live with two sites www.bird.org.nz and www.osnz.org.nz. These are being designed to provide you with the a full range of information about birds and the Society in New Zealand as well as a comprehensive set of linkages to other bird organisations worldwide. The bird site will be aimed at pictorial and birding material or contacts, while the osnz site will provide more formal material about the society, its schemes, publications and activities. Brent Stephenson has been doing sterling work in the preparation of the material and we are indebted to Andrew Robertson and Chelmer Ltd for sponsoring the sites for an initial period of operation.

Finally, it is my hope that the Society continues to provide a comfortable home for both the amateur birder and professional ornithologist on the New Zealand scene. Neither are exclusive and most are interdependent. The promotion of reliable factual material and studies remains our most worthy aim. Only when there is reliable information available on our birds, can conservation organisations participate in reasoned factual debate and make reliable decisions for future management.

It is very easy to overlook, in a rush to proclaim the preservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of ecosystems, that we know perilously little about the individual components (past or present) of the ecosystems or collections of biodiversity, which as New Zealanders we propose to maintain. While sustainability is a word which has featured negatively in the early activities of the new government when dealing with forest preservation, the same word is likely to re-appear in the realm of birds over the coming years. As Maori continue to assert traditional rights over many parts of our New Zealand biodiversity and occasionally to proclaim a traditional conservation ethic, we need to recall that the principle of conservation, or wise use, is a relatively recent phenomenon. BirdLife International (Previously ICBP) as the world's oldest conservation body was only formed in 1922.

Recent material, published on the international stage by one of our own members, not only confirms the relatively short human history of New Zealand, but that some of our most distinctive bird species became extinct on the mainland in a remarkably short space of time, and long before European settlers arrived. However, the predatory camp followers - rats and later mustelids - are the legacy which must be of most concern today as the remaining avifauna of New Zealand continues to disappear before our eyes. Taiko, Kakapo, kiwi, Black Stilt, Black Robin, Fairy Tern and the Notornis are all species facing extinction, with the need for continuing research, recovery, management and sponsorship programmes to halt or slow the decline.

Even the largest birds such as the Northern Royal Albatross at Taiaroa Head are not immune to stoat predation on young chicks during the guard stage. When four chicks were killed a few years ago, nobody could work out how a stoat could get at a chick when it was covered by the parent. The cautionary tale is that we did not know enough about bird behaviour. The archival tag prototype (see Technological Albatross) showed during this summer that parents stand up and expose their chicks for 10-15 minutes on a regular 1-2 hour pattern day and night - all the stoat has to do is sit and wait!

I hope the Society does not just become a home of the watchers for entertainment, but continues to build on its traditions of watching for useful knowledge.

Thank you for having me at your place.

Your retiring President
CJ.R. ROBERTSON



Falla Memorial Award & A.T. Edgar Junior Award - 2001

Nominations are called for the above awards and should be with the Secretary, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, by 30 June 2000. Nominations should be on the standard forms, which are available from RRs and the Secretary.

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

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

CHRISTINE REED
(Hon. Secretary)

Mainland Muttonbirds

Conservation for one of New Zealand's most abundant birds

By Kerry-Jayne Wilson, Lincoln University

S seabirds once nested on headlands and cliff tops in many parts of New Zealand. A few even nested on hilltops and mountains far inland in such unlikely locations as the Canterbury foothills and the Urewera mountains. Remains of



Kerry-Jayne Wilson engaging in "hands-on" field work.

seabirds have been found in so many Maori middens, cave and sand dune deposits that breeding petrels must have been an important feature of many mainland ecosystems.

Now, thanks to introduced predators and hunting, at least 14 species of petrels that once bred on the North and South Islands are now confined to offshore islands. Today only four species of burrow-breeding petrel survive on the New Zealand mainland. Hutton's Shearwaters breed only near the snowline in the Kaikoura Mountains, where predators presumably pose less of a threat than they do at lower altitudes. The large (1.2 kg) and pugnacious Westland Petrel breeds successfully in the presence of

introduced predators, but even these aggressive birds lose a few chicks to stoats or cats. A few colonies of Grey-faced Petrels and Sooty Shearwaters persist in very low numbers at a few mainland locations but the extinction of these colonies seems inevitable unless measures are taken to protect them.

The only mainland Sooty Shearwater colony whose numbers are apparently increasing is at Taiaroa Head on Otago



Mark & Sonia Armstrong at the gate closing ceremony, December, 1998.

Peninsula where a fence and ongoing predator control aimed at protecting the Royal Albatross colony provides incidental protection for shearwaters.

Why should we spend scarce conservation dollars protecting Sooty Shearwaters when it is possibly the most abundant seabird in New Zealand? Mainland breeding seabirds were an important feature of coastal ecosystems and the nutrients the birds deposited ashore in the form of guano and dead eggs, chicks and adults would have been key factors in the functioning of those ecosystems, just as they remain important on many offshore islands.

To maintain these ecological processes we should include seabirds in the ecological restoration of certain coastal ecosystems. The translocation of petrels to new colony sites is far more difficult and to date the success rate is far lower than that for the transfer of terrestrial birds. If we want to restore mainland coastal ecosystems that have seabirds as important components it is perhaps simpler to build restoration projects around existing seabird colonies. To this

end the preservation of the few existing mainland colonies would be invaluable.

Another reason for the conservation of these common birds is to allow people to see and experience a feature of New Zealand's natural heritage. While seabird colonies occur on numerous offshore islands, the ground on many of these islands is densely burrowed and the colonies are too fragile to allow access to the public. Few people are lucky enough to visit these fascinating islands. Mainland colonies could offer bird watchers and the lay public an opportunity to enjoy this aspect of their heritage.

Over the last five years I have monitored the numbers breeding at two mainland Sooty Shearwater colonies. One of these colonies is on private land at Stony Bay, Banks Peninsula where a few birds persist on a clifftop long ago cleared of native vegetation. In stark contrast, the other colony is in dense South Westland rainforest atop a small nugget only just attached to the mainland by a sand bar.

Each year eggs have been laid, but of the few chicks hatched, none survived to fledge. Every time I have visited the colonies the remains of predator-killed adults, eggs or chicks have been found. Both colonies are accessible to the public



Stony Bay, Banks Peninsula.

and both could present opportunities for ecological restoration. The Banks Peninsula colony is close to the Banks Peninsula Track, a privately operated four-day walk that wends its way through native forest, farmland and along coastal cliffs. The Westland colony is on Department of Conservation land, there is a walkway leading to a viewing platform

Nominations for Regional Representatives 2001

Each region of the Society shall have a Regional Representative who will be an Officer of the Society and as such is responsible to the Council for the management of the region. Each RR shall serve for one year (from 1 January 2001) and is eligible for re-election.

Nominations for the Regional Representative of each region of the Society will close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 12397, Wellington) on 31 July 2000. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must be a financial member of the Society.

If more than one valid nomination is received by the Secretary a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2001 year.

CHRISTINE REED
Hon. Secretary



that, by chance, sits over the shearwater colony. Regrettably the number of birds using the colonies has been declining and unless the colonies are protected from predators the opportunities they offer for public viewing and ecological restoration will be lost.

During the winter of 1998 a predator-proof fence was erected around the Banks Peninsula colony. The fence was the initiative of, and built by, the landowner Mark Armstrong and partly funded from the profits of the Banks Peninsula Track. The year before the fence was built, only two pairs had attempted to nest and only three other burrows showed signs of use. One recently dead bird plus numerous bones had been found.

In December 1998 with the fence in place, no dead birds were found, at least three eggs had been laid and six further burrows showed signs of frequent use. Last December, while only one egg had been laid shearwaters had visited 31 of the 43 burrows and the level of activity at the colony was far higher than during previous years.

The fence is in place but the job of restoration has just begun. Mark will maintain bait stations and traps in the enclosure in case ferrets or cats manage to breach his fence. We plan to replace the exotic grasses with native vegetation more conducive to burrow-breeding petrels. Offshore are two small, densely burrowed islets that we believe support colonies of Sooty Shearwaters and Fairy Prions, which may be the source of the shearwaters that use the mainland colony. If we can obtain funds for the necessary equipment we will also attempt to lure Fairy Prions onto the colony by providing them with prion-sized burrows (too small for the shearwaters) and playing taped calls of courting prions.

This project relies on the dedication of the Armstrong family (this is but one of several conservation initiatives of theirs) and the support of the Banks Peninsula Track Committee. It has not received a cent of public money.

A few years ago the prospects for restoration were better at the Westland colony than on Banks Peninsula but that has now changed. This colony is in native coastal scrub so predator control was all that was required to allow the colony to increase.

In December 1995 there were 11 breeding pairs and an average of 15 shearwaters returning to the colony each night. Without predator control the numbers have declined steadily and last December only one pair bred at the colony and each night we observed only one bird returning. Only about 5 of the 30 burrows showed signs of recent use.

This colony offered a wonderful opportunity for New Zealanders to experience a petrel colony or even for a small-scale nature tourism venture. The Wanganui River walkway leads to a viewing platform that sits immediately above the colony, offering a unique opportunity for people to watch the shearwaters circle overhead before

crashing through the forest canopy to the ground below. I always enjoyed my visits to this colony. Late afternoon we would set out, an easy walk through the riverside rainforest, perhaps with a detour to the nearby Fernbird-inhabited pakahi or a walk on the wild West Coast beach. I would check out the waders, herons and terns in the river mouth before the steep climb up the steps that led to the viewing platform. The views from the platform are superb. You look up the Wanganui River and across forest and pakahi to the Southern Alps. Our colony check done, the platform was a good place to watch birds in the rivermouth or at sea. After dark we counted the shearwaters as they returned to the colony. On our walk back to the car we would always hear and often see Moreporks and walk right by a lovely display of glowworms. It is ironic that the walkway and viewing platform are maintained but not the shearwater colony that made this outing unique.

On a global scale the loss of these small colonies of an abundant species, (there are over 2.5 million pairs of Sooty Shearwaters on the Snares Islands alone), is of little

concern, and because the species is common the Department of Conservation was unable to justify the cost of predator control to protect the colony. The Sooty Shearwaters, Grey-faced Petrels, Westland Petrels and the alpine-breeding Hutton's Shearwaters are the last of the many petrels that once bred on the mainland. The conservation of the remaining mainland colonies has significance greater than the species themselves. The readily accessible Wanganui River colony offered bird watchers and naturalists an opportunity to experience the sights, sounds and smells of a petrel colony. Alas that opportunity has probably been forgone. However, one day the cliffs above Stony Bay may again resonate to the caterwauling of shearwaters and Banks Peninsula track walkers catch a whiff of the musky smell of seabird guano?

Kerry-Jayne Wilson is South Island vice-president of the New Zealand Ornithological Society. She teaches ecology and conservation biology at Lincoln University, Canterbury, and has a special interest in seabirds.

Royal Spoonbill Census



A reminder that at the Christchurch AGM, 1999, it was agreed to conduct another National Royal Spoonbill census during the winter of 2000. As you may recall the last one we did was in June 1996.

All indications are (and I can only speak for Otago, since I have lost contact to some extent with the other colonies) that the Royal Spoonbill is doing very well. At least one other colony has been established since 1996, at Taieri Island in 1997, more or less on the doorsteps of Dunedin. The latest count mid January this year on Taieri Island totalled 91 adults and juveniles. A random check of the various colonies and feeding grounds in coastal Otago early February gave a conservative figure of 175 birds. Not bad for a day's travel. And in June these will all have dispersed to the north!

I have set the date for the weekend of 17th and 18th June 2000. Let's see what figure we come up with. Please email results to Peter.Schweigman@xtra.co.nz, or post to 121 Maryhill Terrace, Dunedin. I am looking forward to the enthusiastic involvement of many members and friends.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN



Green Is, Steve Broni, DoC.



*Kaikorai Est, Dunedin.
Photo: Otago Daily Times.*



Photo: Peter Reece



Purple Patch for Manawatu Estuary

The summer of 1999-2000, and particularly the months of December and January, has been an extraordinary one for birds at the Manawatu Estuary. All the normal species have been present in expected numbers - including three each of Sharp-tailed and Pectoral Sandpipers, up to six Red-necked Stints, 25 or so Pacific Golden Plovers, a Grey-tailed Tattler, a Little Tern and, rather more unusually, up to five Curlew Sandpipers - but a string of outstanding rarities has made this summer special.

On 4 December, Tony Wilson flushed what he thought was a snipe from grass at the tide-line - the bird behaved as a proper snipe, promptly flew miles away and was lost to view. It was not seen again until the 12th when a very high tide pushed it out of whatever hiding place it had, and right onto the sand-spit, where it behaved most unlike a snipe and stood about in full view.

I believe that the views obtained revealed enough behavioural, structural and plumage detail to enable this bird to be accepted as a Japanese Snipe, as opposed to just snipe sp. There are less than 20 accepted records of snipe sp. for New Zealand, and very few indeed that have been specifically identified. Over the next few weeks the bird performed admirably to (almost) all-comers - I know that it was seen by birders from Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Wellington, at least.

Oystercatcher Feeding

On Sunday 13 February, while observing golden plovers on the Waimea Estuary I was distracted by a vigorous tapping sound. A quick scan with my telescope revealed a Variable Oystercatcher feeding on a Pacific oyster some 50 metres away.

It was tapping like a woodpecker and seemed able to chip away enough shell to get its bill inside. It would then open its bill, forcing open the shell. Presumably this was after cutting the muscle of the shell. I observed it taking six oysters in five minutes before being hassled by a Black-backed Gull and flying away. The following day, armed with Pesola scales, plastic bag and hammer, I went back to the same area and shucked six oysters to gain 10g of flesh.

I'm wondering if anyone else has noticed this behaviour elsewhere—it is certainly the first time I have seen it in more than twelve years of observation on the estuary. Is it possible that the recent increase in distribution and numbers of this oyster is therefore related to the increase in numbers of Variable Oystercatchers in the Waimea Estuary and indeed throughout the country? I would like to hear of any such observations.

The next rarity was the least expected of all. On the morning high tide of 19 December, Pam and Roger Slack found a Fairy Tern, and it was seen again that evening - though unfortunately not after that. There are no recent records of Fairy Terns south of Auckland, and the last claim for Manawatu was 60 years ago. The bird had been banded as a chick, last summer, at Mangawhai, but what had caused it to wander south, and where is it now?

The Slacks also saw what was almost certainly a Large Sand Dotterel on the 24th, but this appears to have been another "one-day only" bird.

So we moved into the new century/millennium etc. and what a start we had! On the morning of 3 January I received a call from a reasonably excited Jim Moore to say that he had just been watching an adult male Shore Plover. I tried really hard not to break the speed-limit on my way, but nonetheless was there fairly quickly to see this extraordinary bird. It had been on a bit of a North Island tour, having originally been released on Portland Island off the east coast, it was in New Plymouth for New Year before stopping off at the Manawatu. Again, this was to be just a brief appearance, and the bird was not seen after that morning. Apart from the previously mentioned old Fairy Tern record, these four species were all new for the Manawatu.

In line with last summer's tern records, January brought us two more rarities, with an immature White-winged Black Tern on the 9th and a Common Tern from the 21 January to at least 5 February. Thus, there were five notifiable rare birds and four new species for the estuary in a seven week period, all within about a 100m radius. Even for the best birding spot in New Zealand, this is pretty remarkable!

As an aside, I would also like to put in a good word for the oft-maligned "twitcher". The fact that various folk travelled to see the Japanese Snipe has increased their knowledge of the species, and made them better equipped if they were lucky enough to find another in the future. If I had not twitched last years Manawatu Common Tern, then I would have been much less confident about identifying the one in January. If the Fairy Tern had not been successfully twitched, then the record would have stood on the one, original, sighting - and so this amazing record would have always been open to some doubt. Anyway, twitching is only a matter of degree - I have never met a birder, anywhere, who would not walk 100m to see a rare bird; so would you drive 10 kms to see one or 100 kms? I think it is just a question of where you draw your own line.

IAN SAVILLE

NZ Fairy Terns and Shorebirds

Members of the Northland OSNZ (Claire Burtt, Den Carter, Dianna Dombroski, Jean Hawken, Gerard Pilon, Janet Snell, Lorna Simpkin, Marie Smith and Audrey Williams) have spent many hours this season again helping DoC staff monitor the NZ Fairy Terns at Waipu and Mangawhai. The help is most appreciated as it means the Fairy Terns are still checked during our days off.

It has been a busy and windy season, but a good one with five chicks fledged and a couple of interesting events to note. The season got off to a good start with the earliest recorded nest found at Mangawhai by Northland members (Audrey, Dianna, Jean and Marie) on 3 November. Another record was set when these chicks fledged in mid-December, several weeks earlier than previously recorded.

Four new birds entered the breeding population this season, with four of the seven chicks from the 1997-98 season returning to the breeding sites at Waipu and Mangawhai. Two of the birds bred successfully with older partners, while the other two birds were paired together and 'made the right moves' they didn't manage to breed.

So this season there were five pairs breeding in Northland (two pairs at Waipu and three pairs at Mangawhai) and they produced a total of eight nests and seven chicks. However two of these chicks disappeared without trace, leaving the five remaining chicks. Of the eight nests, three were infertile and these pairs re-nested.

At Mangawhai eggs from a fertile nest were transferred to an infertile pair, the fertile pair re-nested and raised one chick to fledging. So overall, five chicks surviving in a La Nina summer of stormy, windy weather is a very pleasing result. (NB: Two chicks fledged from Papakanui in Auckland's area, making a total of seven chicks, which is as good as our best year two years ago.)

The NZ Dotterels at Waipu and Mangawhai, and Caspian and White-fronted Terns at Mangawhai, have also had a good breeding season. A greater number of NZ Dotterel chicks were metal-leg banded this season than last season - 18 chicks at Waipu and 24 at Mangawhai. A good number of these should fledge. Up to 80 Caspian Tern chicks and nearly 200 White-fronted Tern chicks fledged this season: these numbers are up on last season.

KATRINA HANSEN

WILLIE COOK



XXIII IOC - call for contributions

The Scientific Programme Committee of the 23rd International Ornithological Congress will meet in early June 2000 to plan the scientific programme for 2002. The SPC relies heavily on the proposals submitted by interested ornithologists to decide on the contents of the scientific programme.

Information about the SPC and requests for proposals have been posted on the Congress home page at <http://www.ioc.org.cn> and on the International Ornithological Committee home page at <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/IOC>. Please refer to this material for information for what information is requested in proposals for symposia and plenary speakers, contact addresses, and other information.

The Scientific Programme of the Congress consists of plenary lectures,

symposia, individual contributions and round table discussions. Contributed papers are for presentation of recent findings and ideas. Round table discussions are designed for exchange of ideas among specialists in a field, and should not be used to present a longer lecture by the organizer of the discussion group or a series of symposium type papers.

The SPC will consider only plenary lectures and symposia. Interested ornithologists are welcome to submit individual contributions and proposals for round table discussions later with their registration to the congress - information will be made available in congress brochures and on the congress home page.

Proposals of plenary speakers should include the name and address (including postal and email address) of the proposed speaker, and a statement of the possible topic and why the person is proposed. Plenary speakers should be ornithologists known to present outstanding lectures and

the topics should be ones of overall interest to the general ornithologist.

Symposia proposals should include a title, a statement on the expected content (not exceeding 1,800 characters), suggested speakers (maximum five, including addresses/email), the suggested conveners (a primary convener and a co-convenor). It is urged that speakers be as international as possible.

Proposals for symposia and for plenary lectures should be submitted to Dr. Fernando Spina by 30 April 2000 at the latest and hopefully as soon as possible.

We strongly encourage use of the internet to submit proposals. They should preferably be sent as .rtf format files as attachments. If not, send the proposals as a simple email message. Dr. Spina would greatly prefer to have this material submitted electronically to him at <infioc@iperbole.bologna.it>. He can also be reached at: Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica, Via Ca' Fornacetta 9, I-40064 Ozzano Emilia (BO), ITALY Phone: +39 051 6512111; Fax: +39 051 796628.

WALTER BOCK
President, 23rd International
Ornithological Congress, 2002

Technological Albatrosses (See Front Cover)

Tracking birds has just got even more technological. Since the start of recognised bird banding just over 100 years ago, there have been a number of advances in the study of bird migration. The simple recovery of banded (known) birds dead or alive has formed the foundation of many bird studies throughout the world, especially where it has been imperative to recognise individuals.

The banded Northern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea sanfordi*) colony at Taiaroa Head is the longest continually banded population of seabirds anywhere in the world. 'Grandma' was known to have reached an age of at least 62 years. Having been banded as a breeding adult in 1937 she was last seen in 1989. Each of the birds at Taiaroa Head has a colour combination of up to 3 colours to enable the rangers to identify the birds from a distance (see left leg of cover picture).

During the past ten years there have been major advances in finding out what happens to many albatross taxa while they are away from the breeding colony (83% of life for the Northern Royal). These advances have been achieved by using small satellite transmitters which are recognised by the ARGOS weather satellite. This system has some channels which are set aside for animal tracking experiments. New Zealand and Australian scientists have been innovative in extending the life of the transmitters to enable attachment and tracking of some birds for up to two years.

Probably the most remarkable results have been the speeds obtained between fixes and the time taken to get to South America for example - six days from Taiaroa Head to Chile with distances of up to 1650 kilometres travelled in one day. You may well, like us, ask when the birds had time to sleep or eat, if they did so at all. Unfortunately the transmitters can only tell us where the bird was, but not what it is doing.

Enter technology once again! On the cover you will see that there is a small package attached by tape to a large leg band. This is a prototype archival tag. Throughout the time of deployment, this tag is designed to record and store light and temperature data against a clock timer. This means that it can be used as simple geolocation device to give a daily longitude (but not yet a satisfactory latitude), and the temperature when the bird is at the nest or at sea. Combined with a saltwater switch it has been possible to record what amount of time the bird spends on the water (sleeping feeding or resting) during a nine month period.

Now, about that fast flying to South America! Some 60 percent of the time was spent flying. In four days the bird flew 4,200 kilometres at an average flying time speed of 95kph !! When we checked with some satellite tracks over the same area and applied the same amount of flying time a similar figure was achieved. These are still only point to point speeds for birds flying over a 24 hour period. Their actual speeds will be much higher, for an albatross rarely flies in a straight line.

Courtesy of the NZ Police we tested flying speeds at Taiaroa Head in March 2000, with birds that were cruising round the colony in a gentle 18 kph breeze. Downwind the birds were easily able to achieve 70-75 kph in level and not soaring flight. It is thus possible to speculate that these birds may be capable of achieving actual speeds as high as 150 kph for short distances while soaring in the 'Roaring Forties'. Human beings on yachts have a little way to go yet before they can outrun the albatross in a good breeze. However, the advances of miniaturisation and technology may enable us to be more precise about our Flying Royals in the future.

CJR ROBERSTON & DG NICHOLLS

World Bird Count 1999

We have finally completed adding up all the birding reports you kindly sent us for the 5th NTT-ME World Bird Count between 1-31 October 1999 and are pleased to announce the remarkable results:

Number of participants:	192,482 <small>(record number)</small>
Number of countries regions from which birdwatching lists were reported:	99 <small>(record number)</small>
Number of reported bird species:	5,660

Thanks to the participation and cooperation of so many people around the world, our birding event in 1999, which was held in conjunction with World BirdWatch coordinated by BirdLife International, has turned out to be the greatest success, as you see from the results shown above. We extend our deep gratitude to all of the participants, both individuals and organizations, who contributed to the outstanding outcome.

According to the number of species recorded, NTT-ME made a contribution of 5,000,000 yen to BirdLife International to help their project of "The World's Largest Natural Environment Database".

For more details of the results, please find them in the WBC page (www.wnn.or.jp/wbc/index_e.html), in which more analytic results are to be provided one after another.

NTT-ME WORLD BIRD COUNT
OFFICE



Farewell Spit Field Study Course

22-30 January 2000



Participants in the course (left to right) - Rear: Frances Schemechel, Scott Butcher, David Melville, Mark Barter, Stuart Tovey-Nicholson, Rob Stone, Pasi Hyvonen, Celia Thompson. Front: James McGrail, Bruce Kirkman, Sunkita Howard, Lynne Sheldon-Sayer, Kirsty Chalmers, Hayley Meehan, Brian Bell, Cheryl Doyle. Photo: Frances Schemechel.

On 22 January, fifteen lucky OSNZ members descended on Collingwood to begin our journey to Farewell Spit. We were transported by Farewell Spit Safaris, who took our luggage and most of the party in a huge Bedford vehicle. A few of us were fortunate enough to ride out in the tourist bus, which included an interesting commentary and stops to explore. I learned that the spit is only about 3000 years old and that it used to be largely forested, until settlers ran stock on it and burned the bush for grass. Nowadays, airline pilots who fly over the spit report that it often looks as if it's on fire, this time because of the shifting sands.

We arrived at our destination, the Lighthouse Keeper No.1 House, at about 5.30 pm. A roomy place with hot water, stove, shower, and even beds (even if the mattresses had seen better days!) - our home for the next 8 days. We didn't linger though, just moving in our gear then setting off for an 'orientation tour'.

Actually, this turned out to be more of an 'immersion class' - wading through mud and swampy slush full of crabs as we looked for a mistnetting site and then headed towards the inner beach to watch waders. This was good practice for the coming days - Farewell Spit is not a place where you can expect to have dry feet for long! That evening, we sorted out rosters. The next morning, we had a round of brief introductions before getting stuck into all the activities which the course had to offer.

First up was mistnetting, led by David Melville. He taught us how to set up the nets, remove birds, band, weigh and measure them and to record moult scores. Opportunities to mistnet and band were on offer almost every day, so everyone had a chance to practise their new skills. Birds caught included Chaffinches, Redpolls, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, but the majority by far were Silvereyes.

We started with a site in the bush near the airstrip but later moved to a site nearer the house. This new site yielded far more birds, which enabled us to spend our last morning banding and moult recording back at the house, while the rain pelted down and the wind howled outside.

Wader watching was one of our main activities and several expeditions were mounted. We set out on Monday morning for our first long trip to Mullet Creek (about 10 kms up the spit). Along the way, we marvelled at the dune landscapes, beautiful shells and driftwood sculpted by wind and waves. We stopped several times to view huge flocks of waders - Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Knots, Banded Dotterels, Red-necked Stints and also a few Sanderlings. Alas, we did not make it to Mullet Creek - the weather turned foul on us and we had to turn back. We arrived home bedraggled, with soaked backpacks and quite a few wet pairs of binoculars (thank heavens for drying cupboards!).

We survived the wet weather and the armies of mosquitoes which attacked overnight, and got up early to visit the gannet colony at the end of the spit. The skies cleared to give us a lovely day, so off we went to Mullet Creek again. Exciting sightings included Whimbrel and a Pacific Golden Plover.

A few stalwarts elected to mount another, longer expedition the following day to Banana Pan, about 20 kms down the spit. We caught a tourist bus down to the pan, where we spent a couple of hours up on a tall sand dune with a wonderful view over Golden Bay and down the spit to the lighthouse. Of course waders were our main concern and we spent some time observing a Mongolian Dotterel (cunningly concealed amongst several hundred Banded Dotterels). Sightings on the walk back homewards included Greenshank, Wrybill (colour-banded), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper.

While we were away, the rest of the group went mistnetting and banding and also

explored the recreational beach activities. Not content just to swim, James got himself buried in the sand and underwent an amazing transformation into a very sexy lady in a bikini, and Hayley evened out her sunburn. The main activity that evening was comparing blisters - all agreed that Cheryl was the champion with her amazing patchwork of plasters!

On Thursday, our leaders, Brian Bell and David Melville, went down the spit to attend a ceremony dedicating Farewell Spit as a site of significance within the East Asian Australasian Flyway. The ceremony was also attended by Mark Barter, an Australian wader expert, who spent a night with us on the spit and talked to us about wader research in Australia. In their absence some of us spent time observing a flock of nine Eastern Curlews near the gannet colony, as well as a Royal Spoonbill in amongst the Black-backed Gulls. When it got too hot out under the blazing sun, we headed home, spotting three seals and a one-legged SIPO en route.

On Friday, we did more banding, this time walking out to the Black-backed Gull colony near the gannets to band chicks and juveniles. We got an excellent workout, catching and banding fifteen birds - irate adults took to the skies while the youngsters all hit the mudflats in a desperate but futile attempt to evade capture.

Sadly, our plans to return to Mullet Creek on Saturday were dashed by bad weather once again. Heavy rain and strong winds (30 knots, gusting to 40 at times) forced us to stay inside. Luckily, we had all been practising unusual bird reports over the preceding days and the bad weather was an ideal opportunity to present our 'mystery birds' to the group. Each person had chosen a species to describe and the group had to identify it from the description - not only good fun but a really valuable training exercise. Later on, we had a power failure, but this



The face is James McGrail's!



Lighthouse keepers house, from the Lighthouse.
Photo: Frances Schmechel.

lasted only a couple of hours, after which we were able to cook our pizzas and watch David Melville's excellent slide show on conservation in Hong Kong.

As well as the daytime expeditions, we enjoyed a number of evening activities. Chris Petyt, author of *Farewell Spit: a changing landscape*, spent a night on the spit with us and gave us a talk about the history of the spit. Frances Schmechel presented a very interesting and entertaining slide show about her work with Chatham Island Oystercatchers and Brian Bell gave a slide show on his international island pest eradication/restoration work. Brian and David gave an evening workshop on the OSNZ moult recording, nest recording and beach patrol schemes. An expedition was mounted one night to look for crakes and rails, unfortunately with no success. And of course, clear nights provided wonderful opportunities for stargazing, with the added 'special effects' of the lighthouse beams playing across the landscape. Last, but certainly not least, we filled in our mapping records for Farewell Spit - three squares in all.

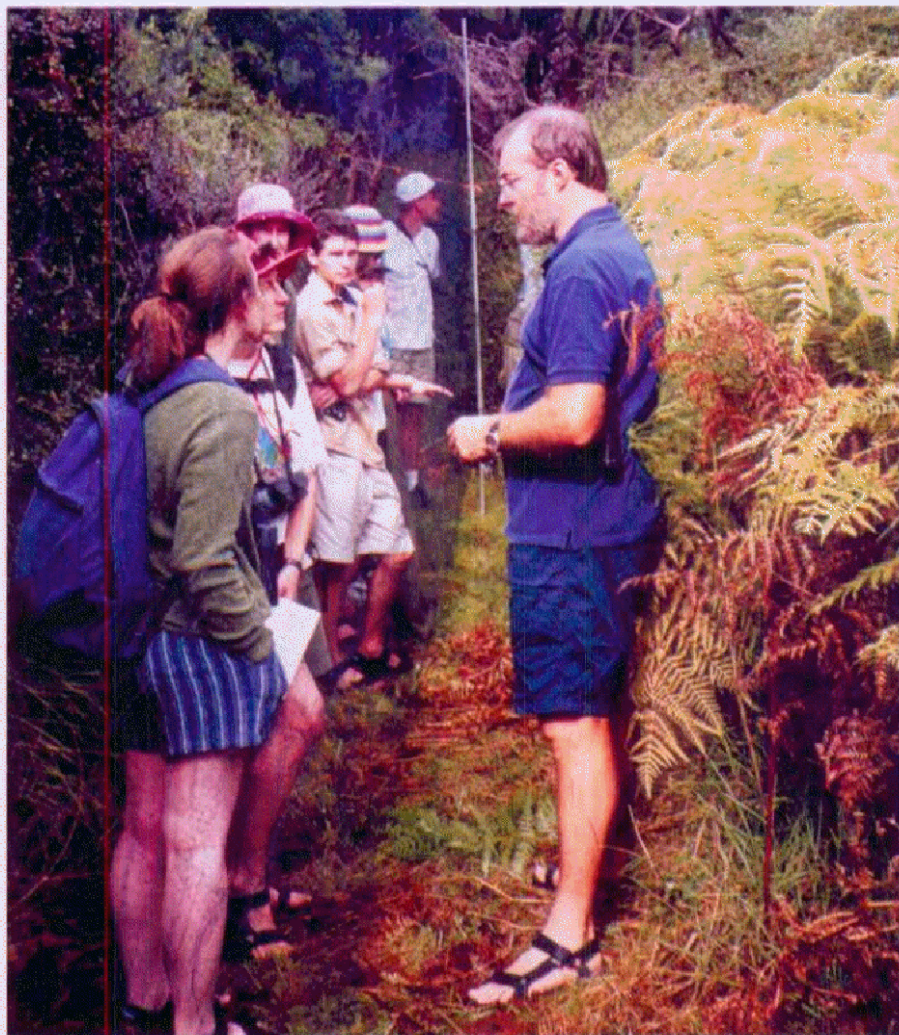
As well as the species already mentioned, some of the more exciting sightings included: Pomarine Skua, and two Lesser Knots and two Bar-tailed Godwits with orange flags (south-east Australia). During the week there were several sightings of Fernbirds in the wetlands near the airstrip - including a group of three birds on one occasion.

All good things must come to an end, and on Sunday 30 January we had to pack up and leave the spit. Those people who were flying out of Takaka later on rode in the back of the Bedford truck, along with the luggage. For the rest of us though, the adventure was not to end so quickly. We waited for the tourist bus, which was going quite well until, about 6 kms from the base of the spit, it got caught in quicksand right up to the back axle. Two trucks came out from Collingwood to rescue it and we got back to 'civilisation' only a couple of hours later than planned.

A very big thank you from us all to: OSNZ, for making the course possible - Peter Gaze, for excellent organisation, great food and safe transport, Brian Bell and David Melville for a wonderful week full of fun learning experiences.

The call of the chaffinch, "chip-chip-chip-tell-tell-chirry-irry-irry-tizzi-chewio" became the official call of the Farewell Spit birders.

KIRSTY CHALMERS



David Melville shows mistnetters how it's done. Photo: Frances Schmechel.

Library News

As many members know, OSNZ has a large library of ornithological books and periodicals from around the world, which has been housed for over 50 years as part of the Auckland Museum Library. Together with the museum's own large collection of bird books, they form the country's largest ornithological library collection.

In 1990 the museum library began the process of electronically cataloguing all new acquisitions; however, little progress could be made in computerising materials acquired before that date. Recently, thanks to the generosity of members of the former Auckland Institute and Museum, funds have been released to employ two staff for a 12 month retrospective cataloguing project. The good news for OSNZ members is that the bird books are to be one of the first sections to be completed.

Auckland Museum is currently setting up a web-site (www.akmuseum.org.nz), through which, by the end of this year, it is hoped the museum library database will be available. This will enable OSNZ members throughout the country to access the extensive list of bird holdings, including the OSNZ books.

The museum library is about to undergo major refurbishment which involves temporarily moving the entire collection off the library floor and into storage. Consequently, from 1 April 2000 until about February 2001, the library will be closed to the public, including OSNZ members. During this time interloan requests will not be serviced. However, Kathy Barrow will continue to circulate incoming journals to members on the circulation lists.

When the library re-opens, public access will be available for the first time from the museum galleries at the front of the building. The refurbishment will make the library more accessible, provide improved storage for collections, and offer to the public a more comfortable reading room and secure research area. In time it is hoped that the library's opening hours will be increased to match those of the public galleries.

BRIAN GILL & KATHY BARROW

Rare Birds Committee

In the Rare Birds Committee item in the last OSNZ News Mike Imber was omitted from the list of members of the committee. The members are Brian Bell, Brian Gill, Mike Imber, Paul Sagar, Peter Schweigman and Graeme Taylor. Sincere apologies to Mike for the oversight.

Confiding Bittern

From April 1999 we were lucky enough to have an Australasian Bittern living on the ponds close to our house and garden for three and a half months. We saw it every day and observed its behaviour closely. We watched it watching us and marvelled at its camouflage.

Some days it would roost in the sun on banks of reeds, staying there for three or four hours without moving. It normally



fed in the morning and evening around the edges of the ponds.

The ponds are man-made. They cover about half an acre and are surrounded by native and other vegetation. It is an ideal habitat for Australian bell frogs, which appeared soon after the ponds were constructed.

At first the bittern was a bit shy, but it gradually got used to us driving and walking around the ponds. We noticed that when we walked out to the ponds it stretched up into its "I'm a raupo stem and you can't see me" position. When we got closer and it felt threatened it shrank down and appeared to be only around one third of its normal size. If you got closer still it would fly away across the pond.

When ordinary birds like White-faced Herons or Australian Magpies flew around, the bittern would stretch up really tall. When harriers flew around it changed its pose quite dramatically - at first the

neck feathers would fluff up and it looked a little like a crested grebe. When the harrier flew closer its neck feathers fluffed right out like a bottle brush and the bill was pointed skywards like a rapier to defend itself.

We have observed this behaviour before, and seen a bittern leap up and defend itself against an attacking harrier.

CHERRY & COLIN HILL



Black-fronted Tern Alert

I am currently engaged in work towards a PhD, looking at the survival of Black-fronted Terns and gathering more information on their basic ecology. I have monitored colonies on the Ohau River intensively for the past two seasons, measuring survival of eggs, chicks and post-fledging survival. Survival is low, and I plan to model the population to assess whether the low survival rates are adequate to sustain the population or indicate a decline.

I will also review the population status (currently listed as threatened) of BFTs in NZ in conjunction with my modelling exercise, by examining historical data on population size and distribution. I'm really keen to hear from people who have any anecdotal information on changes in BFT population sizes through time that they want to share.

For example, I have met several fishers who have fished at certain river mouths for the past 20-odd years and have noted large declines in the numbers of BFTs nesting and feeding in these areas. This sort of information is hugely valuable in assessing the current status of the BFT population. If you or anyone you know has similar observations on population changes, I'd love to hear from you. Any information on BFTs is welcome, and will help in accurately assessing the health of the BFT population.

I would also like to ask people to look for bands on Black-fronted Terns, either overwintering or breeding. I have been banding terns in the last two years and have banded 42 adults and 185 chicks. Adults have a metal band on one tarsus and a double coloured band on the other tarsus (colours: white, red, green, black, blue, purple, yellow, pink and orange). Juveniles and immatures have either metal on one tarsus and a single colour band on the other tarsus, or have metal on the right tibia and a single colour on each tarsus (colours: red, white, blue, green or yellow).

All these birds were banded in tern colonies on the Ohau River and I would like to get as much information as possible about where they overwinter, or alternatively, if they are seen in colonies on rivers other than the Ohau. Very little information exists on Black-fronted Tern movements and population dynamics, so any reports of band sightings will be extremely valuable. Reports can be sent to me at 49 Rata Road, Twizel or rachel.keedwell@xtra.co.nz.

RACHEL KEEDWELL

Gould's Petrel translocation

One kilometre to the north of Cabbage Tree Island, NSW, lies the smaller Boondelbah Island. Recently the NSW NPWS found that a small population of Gould's Petrel breeds on this windswept rock. This discovery has meant that the island is an ideal site to translocate birds using artificial nest boxes, to augment the available habitat on Cabbage Tree. The island is also close by and free of rabbits and introduced predators.

A trial translocation between two locations on Cabbage Tree Island was carried out in 1995, providing the researchers with valuable skills and data for the "real thing". Further refinement of techniques was carried out in early 1999, after a subsequent visit to New Zealand to talk to the teams involved in translocation there.

In 1998 nest boxes were installed on Boondelbah in readiness for chicks from Cabbage Tree. The usefulness of the nest boxes was recognised when first presented to the international bird community during the 1994 IOC, where they were awarded first prize in applied conservation.

By May 100 chicks had been moved to Boondelbah. This was the critical time for translocation, as the chicks were three weeks prior to fledging and beginning to spend time at the entrance to their burrows picking up cues as to their location that will enable them to return to the same site in 12-18 months time.

NICHOLAS CARLILE

courtesy of *Volunteer*, newsletter of Birds Australia's Threatened Bird Network.

Oiled Wildlife Network

Massey University is co-ordinating the development of a national oiled wildlife responder network of people who might be able to offer their knowledge and skills to respond to wildlife casualties in the event of an oil spill disaster striking New Zealand's coast.

National and regional oil spill contingency plans developed by the Maritime Safety Authority of New Zealand (MSA) have already placed people and equipment ready to respond rapidly to the technical aspects of oil spill containment and environmental clean up. Under a contract with the MSA, Massey University has been developing the wildlife aspects of these plans.

The impacts of spilled oil on birds and their habitats can have terrible consequences for the welfare of individuals. There is also the potential for severe impacts on conservation values for instance when oil spills threaten rare species, or populations at vulnerable stages of their life histories. The dual aims of wildlife response operations are to minimise the compromise of the welfare of oiled wildlife and to protect the conservation value of wildlife affected by the spill.

Although New Zealand has been fortunate in not having had a catastrophic oil spill, the very special qualities of its marine wildlife mean that it is all the more important for there to be a cadre of potential responders available and committed to achieving these welfare and conservation aims, should the unthinkable happen.

OSNZ members are invited to register their interest in the network by sending their name and contact details to:

Deb Anthony, IVABS, Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North or by Email to: D.J.Anthony@massey.ac.nz

Another Spine-tailed Swift

We were very interested to read of David Medway's sighting of a Spine-tailed Swift at Farewell Spit in November. On 23 December 1999, while we were walking in Hamilton Gardens, our attention was drawn to a rather large swallow-like bird circling and swooping above a group of tall pines on a hill side in front of us.

Even without the aid of binoculars or telescope, as we watched the bird loop out over us, we could clearly see by its size, swept back wings, short tail, and white undertail and throat that it was a Spine-tailed Swift. I had seen one of this species previously over Cuvier Island, and have also picked up a dead bird on a beach patrol. We watched the bird for several minutes before it moved off, seeming to follow the path of the Waikato River in a north-westerly direction.

BEV & BRYAN WOOLLEY

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Northland

In December we joined the local DoC staff to see some interesting slides and to hear Richard Parrish and his daughter Vicki talk about the life and the wildlife in Saudi Arabia, where Vicki has been working as a nurse. Customs and lifestyles, especially for women, are very different to New Zealand which generated much discussion.

Beach patrols have continued monthly on both west and east coast beaches with an average number of species for the time of year, except for the 11 Cook's Petrels on the east coast in January, which is higher than usual.

Our annual Black-backed Gull chick banding was completed on 22 January which is later than usual, and we were only able to extract 25 from the gorse and pampas instead of about 100. All were healthy, energetic chicks with strong beaks!

Several members of the Northland region participated in the latest very successful joint DoC/Chatham Island Taiko expedition radio telemetric effort. Fourteen Taiko were captured and seven individuals had transmitters attached. The telemetry located a further 12 active burrows. David Crockett, John Ballantyne and Garry Morris opened the camp and developed the infrastructure on 24 September. During November Tony Beauchamp participated in the telemetric tracking. After the telemetry was completed on 8 December, Taiko expedition members continued monitoring until mid January. Those involved were David and Ruth Crockett, Mike and Jane Camm, Den Carter, as well as Mark Holland (Auckland) and Rod Orange (Wellington). Over Anniversary Weekend Janet Snell organised a trip to survey the lakes in the Far North, along with Far North members. Her summary follows.

The Aupori Peninsula is a narrow piece of land subject to a lot of wind and weather changes. Depending on the wind direction and temperatures on the day the birds are counted, we can get a rather varied tally from year to year. Low numbers may not mean that the

population is down, only that the birds are hiding in out of the way corners.

Some lakes come and go depending on the rainfall during the year, which also affects the movements of the birds. Being so close to both coasts some birds tend to move from coast to lake.

Birds on the increase over the past five years are Canada Geese, Paradise Shelducks, Grey Ducks, Mallards, White-faced Herons and Australasian Harriers. The increase in Canada Geese is a cause for concern for some Far North farmers. There is a special open season for the shooting of Paradise Shelducks but their numbers are still increasing.

Birds on the decrease are Australasian Shovelers, NZ Scaup, Australian Little Grebe, Australasian Bitterns and NZ Dabchicks. An unusual bird seen in the area this year was a Chestnut-breasted Shelduck. The increase in harrier numbers as noted by members and locals may be a factor in the decrease of some of these birds, along with changing weather patterns and habitats. It was noted that there was at least one harrier on each lake.

This annual survey will now go on hold and be picked up again at a later date.

(Lorna Simpkin/Janet Snell)

Hot Stuff in Auckland

The locals here have a bit of a fetish for hot living, and it is something of a gamble as to who gets there first. The locals in this case being Blackbirds, House Sparrows and Silvereyes making a beeline for MY chilli bush.

Growing up to 2.4 metres each year after hard pruning, the bush was planted for a splash of colour in late autumn and winter when the garden looks drab and lifeless. Our locals thought they were onto a good thing - hot meals a la carte in the middle of winter was just the thing to warm up ones insides, so to speak. Alighting on the twig or branch, sometimes at odd angles, the birds choose the darkest reddish chilli, pecking their way through the flesh, which they swallow, and onto the main delicacies, the seeds.

Seeds are the hottest part of a chilli, so several attempts are made here, with lots of coming and going (to who knows where?) until most of the seeds are either eaten or strewn all over the deck. I've yet to see one plunge into the bird bath to cool off!

The chilli bush is a number of years old, but it is only in the past three years that the birds have taken an interest in it. Sparrows were the first to take the initiative, then the Silvereyes and Blackbirds. Maybe the old adage that your tastebuds change as you get older applies - are these the same birds from previous years?

HAZEL HARTY

Auckland

The New Kohia Teachers' Centre, Epsom Avenue, is proving a good venue for evening meetings, held monthly on first Tuesdays. In November Adrian Riegen gave an enthralling account of the Gulf of Carpentaria and the prime wader sites of that vast coastline. We concluded the year with an informative talk by Graeme Taylor, always a welcome visitor, who combined an account of his studies of seabirds with a briefing on the Society's new mapping scheme. David Pye will be coordinating bird mapping activity in and around the Auckland region. In January Sandra Morris shared the enthusiasm of her voyage to the subantarctic, with splendid slides of the plant and bird life of Enderby Island, and showing examples of her work as an artist.

Regular wader censuses and other field work continues, with monthly patrols of Muriwai Beach organised by John Simmons and study visits to parks, reserves and gulf islands, notably Motuora (which now serves as a nursery for young Brown Kiwi) and Tiritiri Matangi (from which Bellbirds have spread to the mainland, where population monitoring is in progress with OSNZ members' participation).

A bird survey of Tawharanui Peninsula Regional Park, organised by Tim Lovegrove at Labour Weekend, provided the opportunity to practice and compare the techniques of fine minute counts and transect tallies. An area of wetland is being restored and the park is planned to be managed as a "mainland island". Nearby, adjacent to the Whangateau Harbour, a valuable 63 hectare remnant of kahikatea forest which protects a zone noted for Banded Rail and Fernbird populations, has been gifted as a DoC reserve, ahead of further housing development at the south end of Omaha Beach. OSNZ was represented at this ceremony on 2 February, International Wetland Day.

Within Auckland city, Western Springs is a magnet for waterbirds, with NZ Scaup and Australian Coot among the host of Black Swans. Willows beside this lake are home to the region's main shag colony, shared by Pied and Little Shags, where a Royal Spoonbill has been seen recently.

The city reserve and shorebird roost, Tahuna Torea on the Tamaki Estuary, was the venue for a summer picnic to open the outdoor programme for the new year. Members had also gathered socially at the zoo - that occasion being the book launch of *Unique Birds of New Zealand* by Brian Gill and Geoff Moon.

(Michael Taylor)

Gisborne/Wairoa

The atlas scheme will be a huge commitment for our small group - we have over 200 squares. However I have already been able to record the birds in three usually difficult to get at squares by visiting Portland Island for a week over Christmas. Raewyn and I were dropped off by DoC in order to monitor the island's birds. We lived in a small woolshed and spent each day walking the island.

Many species nest in the spit area. Three pairs of New Zealand Dotterels attempted to breed this year, but all the nests were predated, probably by Black-backed Gulls, though harriers are also suspected. The mixed colony of White-fronted Terns, Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls was doing well, with chicks at various stages of growth, while some were still on eggs. Caspian Terns also breed here, with five pairs now forming a small colony.

White-faced Storm Petrels have burrows among the sand tussock at the northern end of the island, and were just completing breeding, while Black-winged Petrels had not begun. They nest in burrows on the slightly higher grassy slopes of the spit. A few prospecting birds were seen, including a couple in daylight as they flew back and forth over the colony. At least two, possibly three, Reef Herons live on the island, the last stronghold in our region.

At low tide extensive papa platform reefs are exposed, and these are usually well used by a feeding flock of Turnstones. I had always seen about 40 on previous visits, but numbers were in the 150-180 range this time. Variable Oystercatchers are a prominent breeding wader, with over 70 birds present. Banded Dotterels also breed.

(Geoff Foreman)

Hawke's Bay

The most notable recent sighting was of two Shore Plovers at Ahuriri. One was first seen toward the end of last year at Waitangi by a visiting English ornithologist, but local members never caught up with it. Then in January Brent had a good but distant view of one at Ahuriri. The following day Wayne and Margaret Twyde got close views of two birds. Their band combinations were noted and the Banding Office replied that they were a male and a female from Portland Island, off Mahia Peninsula. Another colour banded bird has been reported from Foxton.

Murray Jeffries has also seen some interesting birds. In early December he had close views of two Blue Penguins near

the port of Napier. Also in early December five Royal Spoonbills at Waitangi, and, on the south side of the common rivermouth, eight Turnstones, 85 Little Black Shags and a Pied Shag. The latter is most unusual for Hawke's Bay.

In December Brent saw the Reef Heron in the port area, four Pectoral Sandpipers and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in the Landcorp Marsh area of the Ahuriri, and a Grey-tailed Tattler at Ahuriri. John Cheyne of DoC reported two White-winged Black Terns at Ahuriri and ten Royal Spoonbills in Pandora Pond. Barbara Taylor reported two Pied Shags at the Waitangi rivermouth, and a well coloured Cattle Egret near Clive in January.

Ten members enjoyed the first outing for the year at Mohi Bush. On the way a stop at Lake Okahu produced two Mute Swans among lots of other waterfowl. The lake has recently had trees planted around the edge and has been protected from shooters - at least two pairs of NZ Dabchicks, one with two well grown youngsters, plus quite a few Grey Teal, means it looks like the protection of the lake is doing a grand job. The bush produced a good collection of birds, including quite a few Riflemen, heard more often than seen.

On 22 January five members went to the Porangahau Estuary. The normally wet, muddy areas were fairly dry, but there were Bar-tailed Godwits, Pied Stilts and Banded Dotterels. One flock of godwits flew past with a large, plover-like bird. It was not a golden plover, and it flew off, out of sight, and was not seen again, much to our disappointment.

We have made a good start on the new atlas scheme - many of our field trips over the next five years will be geared to this. After Porangahau we covered another seven grid squares. Though not covered extensively we were able to put together a good list for each square - which just shows how easy it is, and we got to see some great countryside.

(Brent Stephenson)

Taranaki

In November members travelled to the Waitaanga State Forest. Eighteen bird species were seen, the most common being New Zealand Robins. In December our host Myk Davis took us to a pond in the Hawera Showgrounds to see a pair of coots with six chicks. Pukeko were in the pool too, and the parent coots became very agitated and noisy if they moved too close. We drove on to Nowells Lakes where twelve native species and twelve introduced species were seen. On every visit to these lakes we have seen bitterns - this time two. At the Hawera sewage plant waterfowl were present in great numbers - Grey Ducks, Mallards, Australasian Shovelers, NZ Dabchicks, NZ Scaup, Black Swans and Canada Geese.



There were fifteen people at our December meeting. DoC officers have been making efforts to rid the city area of Rooks, with some success. Reports were given on Lake Rotokare and Collier covenant surveys previously mentioned. Six cats have been destroyed in the covenant, and in spite of evidence of stoats, Spotless Crakes, Fernbirds and robins still call around the lake. The meeting closed with feasting on flash food and beverages.

At the first meeting of the new century there were many interesting reports. A banded Shore Plover was seen feeding with Banded Dotterels in the vicinity of the Waiongana River mouth and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was seen on two occasions. Large numbers of Wrybills have been moving along our coastline in different locations.

A most interesting report was that the New Zealand Dotterels at the Pungaree Stream have nested. On 2 December six eggs had been laid. By the end of January however they had nested four times, without success. Other waders seen along the Taranaki coast include Variable Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Knots, Pacific Golden Plovers, Turnstones, Banded and New Zealand Dotterels.

The resident Royal Spoonbills at Mokau were not seen after 13 December. Two interesting "beach" wrecks were a Shy Mollymawk at Pihama, south Taranaki, and a banded mollymawk in north Taranaki, actually found on an inland road. The band has been forwarded to Te Papa, so we await more information.

A pair of Variable Oystercatchers raised three chicks which have fledged and flown off from the Waiongana area. In mid January another pair had a chick alive as well as a pair of Pied Stilts. Early in January a Pomarine Skua was sighted off the coast. On 28 January a Little Shag nesting site was observed in a large old pine tree in Pukekura Park. Five nests were seen and up to fourteen birds were in the vicinity.

(Rosemary Messenger)

Manawatu

Ian Saville has detailed elsewhere the remarkable set of rarities at the Manawatu Estuary which has kept many of us busy over recent times.

A walk over the Ohau sandspit in mid November revealed well over 466 Black-backed Gull nests with several Pied Stilts and Variable Oystercatchers nesting among them.

Following strong winds this summer the local beaches have seen an assortment of birds washed up. The Fairy Prion population has suffered with 25, mostly juvenile, found along 5-6 kms of Hokio and Waikawa Beaches. Other finds include Common Diving Petrel, Short-tailed Shearwater, Fluttering Shearwater, Hutton's Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater,

Cape Pigeon, Blue Penguin, and a very young White-fronted Tern. An Australasian Gannet, a Feral Goose and a Magpie round out the list.

(Brian Tyler)

Wellington

A busy year concluded with Christmas cheer and a flavour of holidays. Three members shared their overseas experiences. Janice Woon took us to the Galapagos Islands, Ros Batcheler showed us the penguins of Macquarie Island and Rod Orange led us to the edge of the sea-ice in the Arctic, looking for narwhals and polar bears.

"Birds on the Net" (February meeting) introduced a new focus to members more accustomed to handling birds in the net! Geoff de Lisle's computer demonstration captured the interest especially of people planning overseas trips. A powerful means of access to birding information, within reach even of struggling computer neophytes. Thanks Geoff for your preparation, sympathetic presentation... and suggested websites.

January's tour of the Tall Trees, led by Ralph Powlesland, was aptly named by all accounts. In a week of fine weather, fifteen members enjoyed excellent encounters with Kokako (at Pureora) and Blue Ducks (on the Whirinaki River). Most impressive however was the size of the podocarps themselves and the luxuriance of the Urewera forest habitat, which was a surprise and a delight to many.

In December Mike Imber reported on aspects of the telemetry work at Taiko Camp on the Chathams. A new group of burrows had been discovered. There were eight good burrows and seven other incomplete diggings. Altogether 12 sites were being monitored, including nine good burrows. Credit should be given to DoC for its predator control. There may be four chicks this year, with an outside chance of two others. The colony is estimated to have 100 birds.

In February Colin Miskelly gave an update on Kapiti after one year of quarterly surveys. Significant increases are recorded for Bellbird, Blackbird, kakariki, Kereru, NZ Robin and Saddleback. - most dramatic for kakariki (160%). Tomtits are consistently fewer (perhaps being out-competed by robins?). The survey results so far give a reassuring picture of the effectiveness of the rat eradication.

More diving petrel chicks were translocated to Mana Island in November. In February Geoff will lead a team there to count robins, and band juveniles, plus shearwater chicks.

Graeme Taylor, who has explained the organisation of the mapping scheme, will be running a training exercise, in conjunction with a visit to Foxton on 20 February.

The large team responsible for covering the 16 sectors of the Wellington

Harbour each month will have earned their break when this survey concludes in July, though the mapping scheme will have taken up any spare time by then!

(Rod Orange)

Canterbury

Things have been relatively quiet since the last regional round-up in December, due to the Christmas break and year 2000 celebrations. A mini-twitchathon in late February was won by the RR, who saw 60 species in five hours. A 5 am start at a marsh playing a Marsh Crake tape, followed by a manic dash round Christchurch helped. Light-hearted accusations of cheating were bandied about, but were dismissed due to the rules of the competition being that there were no rules.

A more sedate visit to the Ashley Estuary followed the morning's madness, with good views of a couple of Eastern Curlews, as well as the commoner waders, gulls, terns, and wildfowl. Poorer views were had of a Whimbrel of indeterminate race on the opposite side of Saltwater Creek, though having both it and a curlew in the same scope field of view aided identification.

It was commented that there was a definite lack of Black-fronted Terns - a few years ago there would have been hundreds at the Ashley roost, but on that day there was not even one. A Black-billed Gull was seen to employ the unusual behaviour of imitating a skimmer as it flew down the final stretch of the Ashley River.

The February indoor meeting was the annual members' evening. Submissions of slides came from six people and covered such diverse subjects as the Farewell Spit training course, Kaikoura pelagic seabirds, rare waders on Lake Ellesmere, and birds in Patagonia and subantarctic islands. Quizzes tested members knowledge on bird sounds and bird topography. All 30 of those present had a most enjoyable night.

Rare and unusual birds over the summer included a Ruff and Little Whimbrel found on Greenpark Sands by Colin Hill, just rewards for regular sorties onto the mud adjoining his farm. A Mongolian Dotterel was found by Daniel Ruth on Lake Forsyth, and confirmed by Scott Butcher. This latter lake was opened to the sea, resulting in a dramatic lowering of its level and the disappearance temporarily of the Great Crested Grebes. An unusual grebe was also reported on Lake Forsyth by a British visitor, but its identity could not be confirmed.

Australian Little Grebes have bred once again on the gravel pits just north of Timaru, with at least one nest being found by Peter Schweigman. Two orange flagged Bar-tailed Godwits have been seen on the Avon-Heathcote wader roost, and a black banded Variable Oystercatcher (from Otago).

Mid-February saw a gathering of about 1200 Hutton's Shearwaters close inshore near the Waipara rivermouth, unusual this far south. They were feeding with flocks of White-fronted Terns and Spotted Shags. It has been a bumper year for NZ Scaup – they have been seen in unprecedented numbers and in new places, and seem to have bred well. The reappearance of White Herons in late February at Lake Ellesmere denotes the turning of the year back into autumn.

(Nick Allen)

Southland

A few volunteers had a pleasant weekend in December at Curio Bay observing the comings and goings of Yellow-eyed Penguins. There seem to be only about six, with possibly three nests. Penguins coming out of the water are so

indecisive - there are two possible explanations for this: 1) they like to take life quietly and they are quite entitled to relax after a tough day's swimming, or 2) they are so dim they can't quite remember what species they are, where the nest is or what they are supposed to be doing.

Bruce Newland reported a flock of eleven Bar-tailed Godwits in the Te Anau basin on November. Essentially a coastal bird, it is unusual to see them so far inland. They were there for at least a fortnight. A ploughman who works in the Tuatapere area reports that sometime Black-billed Gulls follow the plough so closely that they are buried by the turning soil and he has to dig them out!

On 31 October we did our fifth annual flight up Southland rivers observing and photographing the Black-billed Gull colonies. This was a month earlier than 1998, as it was evident from colonies at Otautau and Wrey's Bush that breeding was well advanced. Heavy rainfall in mid November raised all of the Southland rivers to record level and wiped out all of the colonies. On the 21st Wrey's Bush was

inspected again and several hundred surviving chicks were seen. "Bereaved" gulls seemed to be nesting on the same site but it was not possible to cross the river. A successful banding trip took place on 11 January, though blue bands were a disappointment as they proved impossible to open and close manually. This had to be done with a knife and pliers, which slowed the process down and we only banded 138 chicks.

Our estimate of totals for breeding gulls before the washout is 39,200. This compares with 48,958 in 1998/99 and 44,060 in 1997/98, though there are many variables in the results. This is the third year of banding. We also had a French student, Aurelien Besnard, studying aggression, distance between nests and creching behaviour before the Wyndham colony was washed out. He moved to Mararoa Weir, Lake Manapouri, where a colony had a good survival rate plus renesting.

(Lloyd Esler)

WHAT'S ON

Far North

25 March, 29 April, 27 May, 24 June, 29 July, 26 August - 90 Mile Beach patrols. Ph. John Dawn (09) 407 8658.

11 April - evening meeting, DoC offices Kerikeri. Ph Leigh Honnor 025 2000 300.

16 April, 21 May, 18 June, 16 July, 20 August - Karikari beach patrols. Ph. Isobella Godbert (09) 407 8058.

24/25 June - Far North wader census. Ph. Leigh Honnor.



Northland

13 April - evening meeting. Ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954.



Auckland

4 April - evening meeting, Kohia Teachers' Centre, College of Education. Galapagos Is. Ph. Gwenda Pulham 09 480 5535.

7/8 April - NZ Dotterel and NZ Fairy Tern census. Ph. Gwenda Pulham.

9 April - Muriwai beach patrol. Ph. John Simmons (09) 828 8642.

2 May - evening meeting. Subantarctic penguins.

7 May - Muriwai beach patrol.

6 June - evening meeting. Tiritiri Matangi Is.

10 June - Muriwai beach patrol.

24 June - Mangawhai Harbour census. Ph Gwenda Pulham.

1 July - Kaipara Harbour census. Ph. Adrian Riegen (09) 814 9741.

2 July - Manukau Harbour census. Ph. Connie Schischka (09) 827 3728.

4 July - evening meeting. Black-billed Gulls.

9 July - Muriwai beach patrol.



South Auckland

11 April - evening meeting, Papakura Croquet Rooms, Chapel Street. Rats and Islands. Ph. David Lawrie (09) 238 8407.

9 May - evening meeting, Gippsland birds.

13 June - evening meeting, South America and Antarctica.

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

11 July - evening meeting.

Monthly beach patrols, Kariotahi and Sunset Beaches. Ph. Rob Wheeler (09) 299 7069.



Waikato

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

25 March - workshop - beach patrol scheme and identification, Miranda Shorebird Centre. Ph. Hugh Clifford (07) 855 3751.

15 April - Lake Waahi census. Ph. Pam Bovill (07) 824 7567.

19 April - evening meeting, Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica.

30 April - five minute counts Mt Kakepuku. Ph. Paul Cuming (07) 829 8215.

17 June - west coast harbours winter census. Ph. Hugh Clifford.

9 April, 16 April, 14 May, 21 May, 11 June - Hamilton/Cambridge lakes census.



Bay of Plenty

- 9 April - waders on Tauranga Harbour.
Ph. Paddy Latham (07) 542 0406.
- 11 June - winter wader census
Kaituna-Maketu. Ph. Paddy
Latham.
- 24 June - Tauranga and Ohiwa
Harbours wader census. Ph.
Paddy Latham.



Volcanic Plateau

Hawke's Bay

- 3 April - evening meeting, Education
Discovery Centre (opp. the
Masonic Hotel, Napier). Ph. Brent
Stephenson (06) 873 4111 for all
activities.
- 16 April - Blowhard Bush field trip.
- 8 May - evening meeting, 1110
Allenby Street, Hastings.
- 20 May - Horseshoe Lake.
- 2-5 June - AGM and annual
conference, Napier.
- 17 June - winter wader count,
Ahuriri, Waitangi and Tukituki
Estuaries.
- 18 June - winter wader count,
Porangahau.

Websites

Given the meteoric rise in the use of the Internet, I'm keen to set up a section of *Southern Bird* with interesting websites. While OSNZ is all about birds of the New Zealand region, there are many sites which have excellent information on various topics to do with groups of birds or aspects of their biology, or are useful to travellers. Some are very well linked to other sites around the world. Brent Stephenson is currently working on an OSNZ site, which we will link with some of these overseas sites.

Email me details of any interesting sites (or discussion groups) you have discovered, with a short note as to why they are interesting (since many sites on the web aren't!). Try these to start with:

www.rem.sfu.ca/gis/Projects/Eh/Nzbirds/index.htm - an analysis of data from the last atlassing project, with lots of maps.

www.nzbirds.com - a large and growing site about aspects of New Zealand birds by member Narena Olliver.

TONY CROCKER

t.crocker@cont.canterbury.ac.nz

Taranaki

Evening meetings, Taranaki Museum,
New Plymouth. Dates for 2000 4
April, 2 May, 6 June, 4 July, 1
August, 5 September, 3 October,
7 November, 5 December. Ph.
David Medway (06) 758 0370.

Wanganui



Manawatu

- Evening meetings - held every three
months at the Lido Centre, Park
Street, Palmerston North, 8 pm.
- 10 May evening meeting, then on
second Wednesday of August and
November.
- Beach Patrols - 1st Wednesday of
each month and on other
beaches at irregular times. Ph
Brian Tyler (06) 368 1489 for
meeting times and places.

Wairarapa

Wellington

- Harbour survey, 2nd Sunday of the
month 1-3 pm. Ph. Ros Batcheler
(04) 479 4095.
- Beach patrols. Ph. Jean Luke (04)
293 5601.

Canterbury

- 27 March - evening meeting, Science
Alive Building, Moorhouse Ave.
South Island Robins. Ph. Nick
Allen (03) 312 7183.
- 15 April - farewell to the waders,
Lake Ellesmere. Ph. Colin Hill (03)
325 5891.
- 1 May - evening meeting, bird
techniques workshop.
- 21 May - Hallswell area and
Whitewash Head. Ph. Nick Allen.

Otago

- 26 April - evening meeting, Otago
Art Society Building. Ph. Louise
Foord (03) 467 5041.
- 4 July - evening meeting - special
Science Festival meeting. Cliff
Skeggs Gallery, Dunedin Town
Hall. NZ Birds through the ages.
- 23 August - evening meeting,
Kakapo.

Southland

- 12-14 May - Mason Bay trip, Stewart
Island. Ph. Lloyd Esler (03) 213
0404.

We want to hear from you!

I'm often asked if something is suitable for the Society's magazine. The answer is almost always yes. *Southern Bird* does not replace the proper publication of scientific results and observations, or local newsletters. However I very much doubt if any member does not have, tucked away in a notebook or the back of the mind, something worth sharing.

Format is not important. Submissions on disk, typed, or written on the back of an envelope are fine, though I admit to email being easiest. We do not aspire to literary excellence, but if you really are reluctant to put pen to paper, seek a friend's assistance, or ask your RR about the Society's mentoring scheme.

How about a letter if you have something on your mind, or a note about a great website you've found? One of the great features of a national publication is that something which may be quite ordinary on your patch may be interesting and exotic to someone else.

And more photographs please! Lots of them!! With or without text. Few of us are expert photographers, but many have an excellent shot of a bird or activity taken on our travels. Slides or prints are fine. I don't promise to use all photographs, or maybe not straightaway, but I welcome many, many more.

Please don't wait to be asked - it may never happen. I look forward to being overwhelmed....

TONY CROCKER

PLEASE NOTE

Deadline for
the
JUNE Issue
will be
10 MAY



Black shags (*Phalacrocorax carbo novaehollandiae*) at a colony near Lake Kohangatera, Wellington. Showing nuptial plumes and facial skin colouration when at its most intense (during pair formation and nest building).

