

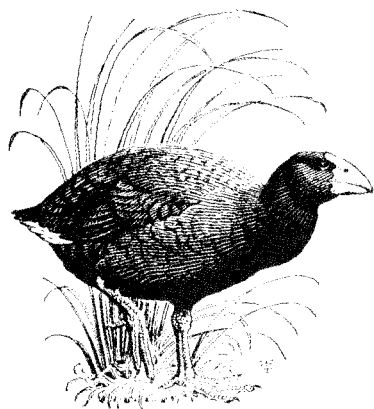


# Southern Bird

No. 12 December 2002. • ISSN 1175-1916







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## Quotation

*It is on the wing that she takes her repose  
Suspended and poised in the regions of air;  
'Tis not in our fields that her  
sustenance grows,  
It is winged like herself – 'tis ethereal fare.*

WILLIAM COWPER, *on swallows.*

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## Cover Photos

*The front cover photograph of a Silvereye was taken in December 2000 in the garden of the photographer's house in Wellington - showing that you don't need to travel miles to see and photograph beautiful birds".*

*The back cover by the same photographer is a beautifully adult-plumaged Caspian Tern.*

Photos: Jason Elsworth  
[www.jasonelsworth.co.nz](http://www.jasonelsworth.co.nz)

## Publisher

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Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc),  
P.O. Box 12397 Wellington, New Zealand.  
Email: [osnz@extra.co.nz](mailto:osnz@extra.co.nz)  
Edited by Tony Crocker, 118 Cones Road, Ashley,  
RD2 Rangiora. Tel (03) 313 4995,  
Fax (03) 364 2057,  
email: [t.crocker@cont.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:t.crocker@cont.canterbury.ac.nz)  
We welcome advertising enquiries.  
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## New property for Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Over recent years the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Council has been aware of significant changes that are taking place within the Firth of Thames. There has been an unnatural growth of mangroves, presumably caused by the runoff of fertilisers and animal waste matter from the large number of farms in the catchment and the stopbanks around the shoreline. This mangrove growth has possibly been accelerated by the early manifestations of global warming and is unprecedented in recorded history within the Firth.

Most of the birds which roost at Miranda need a clear field of vision if they are to get undisturbed rest at high tide. If the mangroves continue to spread as predicted, it is almost certain that roosting habitat will be lost at a faster rate than the birds can adapt.

It is well documented in the old Society records that substantial roosts were previously available at Piako, Waitakaruru and at Karito. All of those roosts have now been lost through the spread of mangroves. The only viable remaining roosts in the whole of the Firth are the small shell island at the mouth of the Waihou River, the spit and pools at Miranda and the roosting area at Rangipo. The island at the mouth of the Waihou River and indeed the spit near the Centre are now also being threatened by mangrove growth.

The Trust Council therefore believed that it could no longer take a passive stance on this issue and believed that a pro-active approach was needed. Just over 2 years ago an 11 hectare property in the close vicinity of the existing Centre was placed on the market. Since that time the Trust negotiated a purchase option on the land and has been seeking funding for the purchase. Grants were received from the Nature Heritage Fund, the ASB Charitable Trust, Environment Waikato Environment Initiatives Fund, the Chisholm Whitney Family Charitable Trust and the J M Butland Charitable Trust to cover the bulk of the purchase price.

The purchase of the property has now been settled and the next step in the project will be to prepare detailed plans of the property, then to commence planning of how the land can be developed to maximise its potential for bird roosting and habitat enhancement.

This is an exciting project that will result in the establishment of secure roosting areas where access can be controlled, as can the state of the land itself. If any society members have ideas on the development of the property they should contact the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Centre and advise of their interest.

DAVID LAWRIE



# Nest Records Database

Work is proceeding well on the computerisation of the Society's nest record scheme cards. The following is an update from my report in *Southern Bird* no. 9.

Data for all the introduced European passerines (the 11 species listed below) have been entered from cards with two or more visits, some 7000 in total. All the multi-visit cards have also been entered for three natives: welcome swallow, grey warbler and Chatham warbler. Single visit cards have been excluded as very little useful data can be calculated from them.

Data have been entered into Access 2000, with a separate database for each species. A generic template has been developed so that data can be entered for additional species in the future. Data are entered into a form that roughly resembles the format of the nest record card, with up to 14 visits per nest.

The database has been designed to constrain the permitted values for some variables. For example, the month of each visit can only be between 1 and 12, latitude and longitude are constrained to take values within the range of New Zealand. These constraints reduce the potential for typos during data entry.

SAS programmes have been written to read the data into SAS. SAS code has also been written for a series of data-checking procedures. These usually require either (i) the printing of graphs and then checking for possible errors in the values taken (ii) checking that the number of observations for which certain variables are recorded are identical, eg. day of the 3rd visit and month of the 3rd visit.

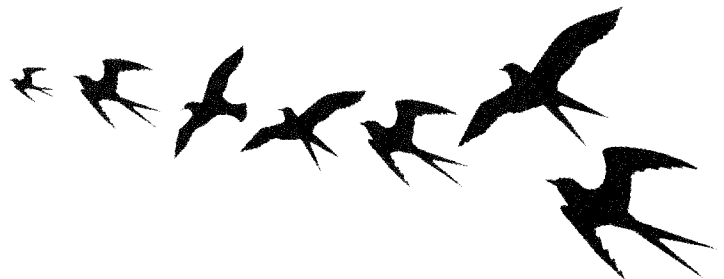
SAS code has been written to convert dates to a single number where day 0 equals the middle of winter ie. the winter solstice. This is corrected for annual variation in the date of the solstice. It does not correct for leap years, but this is not a major problem as leap years only add an extra day at the end of the (passerine) breeding season when there are very few cards. Code has then been written to check that the dates run in sequence as most typos were of this type.

We have just identified the following variables as being desirable to be able to calculate automatically. Shortly, we will be attempting to write SAS code to do this, but this may not be possible for all the variables. The code will often be species-specific, as the assumptions to be made will vary, eg. if eggs are laid at one or two day intervals this will influence the code written to calculate clutch size.

European species with data entered, in rough order of sample size with estimates from memory given for most species:-

<b>Blackbird</b>	<b>1,500</b>
<b>Song thrush</b>	<b>1,500</b>
<b>Goldfinch</b>	<b>700</b>
<b>Starling</b>	<b>600</b>
<b>House Sparrow</b>	<b>500</b>
<b>Greenfinch</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>Chaffinch</b>	
<b>Dunnock</b>	
<b>Redpoll</b>	
<b>Skylark</b>	
<b>Yellowhammer</b>	<b>150</b>

KARL EVANS



## Daisy Dies

The Department of Conservation (DoC) says Daisy the duck, who saved her species from extinction, has died. Daisy was a Campbell Island teal, the world's rarest duck species.

DoC official Karen Barlow said that in 12 years in captivity Daisy reared 24 ducklings and in turn they produced 39 more birds. There are only about 30 of the ducks left in the wild and about 80 in captivity.

"This remarkable event marked a significant occasion in the captive-breeding programme and essentially secured the future of the species," Ms Barlow said.

The teal hail from sub-Antarctic Campbell Island, 600 kilometres south of New Zealand, which is among the bleakest places on earth and no longer permanently occupied.

The 11,300 hectare island had become overrun with rats introduced by whalers in the 1830s which decimated the duck population. In 1975 Daisy was among a tiny population of teal rediscovered on tiny Dent Island, just off Campbell.

Daisy was taken to a captive-breeding programme at Mount Bruce, north of there, and was introduced to Donald and became one of only four wild-origin females to breed in captivity.

The long-term aim is to reintroduce the ducks on Campbell Island once the rats are eradicated. A major rat-poisoning program was run last year.

courtesy of ABC NEWS (AUSTRALIA)

## Kaka destroying a Blackbird nest

On 11 Oct 2002, we were in Karori Wildlife Sanctuary in Wellington, checking out the lines to be used in an upcoming bird census. The sanctuary comprises 252 ha of pines and regenerating native bush surrounded by a predator-proof fence, which, in addition to common native and introduced birds, has been stocked with several rare and uncommon species, including Kaka.

We were near the upper dam when we saw two Kaka, perched 3 to 4 metres above the ground. They were a couple of metres apart but on the same level. The first thing we noticed when we got binoculars on them was that one Kaka was standing by a Blackbird nest and had a bluish eggshell fragment in its beak. After it had dropped this to the ground, it stretched its head into the nest and removed a second intact egg. After a moment's pause it dropped the egg, then reached into the nest and removed another whole egg, which it also dropped. With the second and third eggs, dropping the intact eggs seemed a deliberate act.

The Blackbird nest was in a fork where several branches joined the main trunk and was very conspicuous. It would have been easily seen by the Kaka as they hopped from branch to branch. Having apparently disposed of all the eggs in the nest, the Kaka proceeded to rip large quantities of the nest material from the edge of the nest nearest it. It then climbed into the nest and did the same on the opposite side. Finally, it ripped up the nest floor before clambering along nearby branches and disappearing from view. The second Kaka had not come near the nest and left before the other.

We do not know whether destruction of the nest was mischievous or malicious, or whether the bird was looking for grubs or insects. However, the removal and disposal of the eggs seemed quite deliberate and was carried out very efficiently.

The Kaka was a young male bird, hatched at Auckland Zoo in December 2001 and released in the sanctuary in September 2002.

Our thanks to Raewyn Empson and Colin Miskelly for their help in preparing this report.

DEREK & ROS BATCHELER

## Checklist SALE

In anticipation of a new Checklist, an offer to New Zealand members of 50% off the new price of the 1990 *Checklist of New Zealand Birds* - \$5.00 + .90c postage. Orders of more than two copies will have postage charged accordingly. Send orders to:

PAUL CUMING  
Sales - Ornithological Society of NZ  
Private Bag MBE 381, Hamilton

## The Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc)

### NOMINATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Under the provisions of the Constitution, the following Council members retire at the 2003 Annual General Meeting, and nominations for a three-year term are hereby called for to fill the vacancies created:

David Medway (President)  
David Crockett (North Island Vice-President)  
Kerry-Jayne Wilson (South Island Vice-President)  
Hazel Harty  
Graeme Taylor

and three co-opted Councillors -

Elizabeth Bell (Secretary)  
Ros Batcheler  
David Lawrie

Retiring Councillors are eligible for re-election and co-opted Councillors are eligible for nomination. However, Hazel Harty and Graeme Taylor do not wish to stand for re-election to Council, and Kerry-Jayne Wilson does not wish to stand for re-election as South Island Vice-President but she is available for re-election as an ordinary Councillor.

Nominations close with the Secretary on 28 February 2003, and must be signed by two financial members and be consented to in writing by the person nominated.

### NOTICES OF MOTION

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 2003 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before 28 February 2003 and be in writing and signed by a mover and seconder who shall be financial members of the Society.

### NOTICE OF AGM

The 2003 Annual General Meeting will be held in Wanganui on Saturday 31 May 2003.

ELIZABETH BELL  
Hon. Secretary  
P.O. Box 12397  
Wellington



## Twitchathon 2002

This year's event was a complete letdown after the preceding competitions, with the paltry total of only five real entrants (plus my solo effort). None of the previous winners were involved – my team scratched due to my partner-in-crime Brent Stephenson deserting for a trip to Indonesia.

With so few teams the total number of species recorded was way down, but there are two items of good news. Firstly there were two teams including children (Brown's Bay Birders and Twellington Tweepers), and secondly the winning total is a new record with 89 species recorded by Tinny Tickers (an account of their effort by Ralph Powlesland is on page 11).

A common theme in the reports sent to me is that all the entrants thoroughly enjoyed their day out, and I can only hope that more of you will take the opportunity to participate next year, otherwise this annual fun event will just fade away.

Brent and I shall surely attempt to wrest the record back next time, and that 100-birds-in-a-day tag has our names on it !!

Congratulations to Ralph and his team – the Magnificent Mantelpiece Monstrosity is deservedly theirs. The best non-boat score was Who ate all the Pies?, the best with kids was Twellington Tweepers, and the best 20 km radius score was mine. Full (!) results below:

TEAM	RECORDER	TOTAL
WHO ATE ALL THE PIES?	TIM BARNARD	71
WAIKATO OSNZ	PAUL CUMING	53
TINNY TICKERS	RALPH POWLESLAND	89
BROWN'S BAY BIRDERS	SHAWN LOEWEN	43
TWELLINGTON TWEETERS	PETER REESE	52
(LONE RANGER)	(SAV SAVILLE)	(61)

SAV SAVILLE

## Noteworthy Bird Behaviour

The following are some brief notes of unusual bird behaviour reported at a recent South Auckland meeting.

### AUSTRALASIAN HARRIER:

Wim Houtman recently noted a harrier struggling with a large load, which presumably it was determined to get to the nest to feed juveniles. The hawk appeared to have a juvenile White-faced Heron that was too heavy for it to carry in flight. It would therefore struggle for 10 or 15 metres, then land gasping for breath before struggling a further distance.

### NZ KINGFISHER:

Wendy Goad had reported to her a kingfisher which was pirating worms from a Song Thrush. The kingfisher perched on a bush and waited until the Song Thrush had located and extracted an earthworm from the ground, then flew down snatching the worm. The kingfisher would then return to its perch and wait for the thrush to find the next worm. The kingfisher also tried the same tactic on a Blackbird, but the Blackbird fought back and refused to give up its worm, so the kingfisher tried for goldfish in the pond.

### STARLING:

Wendy also reported on a pair of Starlings acting territorially towards a canary in a cage. In fine weather the canary was placed in its cage hanging on a large veranda during daylight hours. However in recent times a pair of Starlings have taken exception to this bird appearing within their territory and attacked the canary in the cage. The attacks have been so persistent that the canary is now confined indoors until the Starlings' current nesting efforts have been completed.

DAVID LAWRIE

## NEW MEMBERS & DONATIONS

*A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:*

*David Hayman, E. Hayward, LWR & VER Langdon, Janey Thomas, Richard Romijn, Lorna Russell, David Watts, Sam Leary, Alan Wiltshire, Tony Woodroffe, Pauline Samways, Peter & Iris Tait, Martin Toland, Maria Stables-Page, Cameron De Wys, Euan Kennedy, Alan Emmerson, Suzi Phillips.*

*We also thank the following for their generous donations to the society:*

*PM & JL Sagar, Audrey Eagle, Dr PL Munns, Ian Sutherland, Mrs KF Rodbard, CJ Foreman, Mrs JM Soper, A & W Winger, Marion Macbeth, L.S. Rickard, Hugh & Zoe Clifford, John Gibb, Martin Snowball, Barry Friend, Stuart Nicholson, Charles Huffleft, David Pye & Stella Morton, Jack Davidson, Mr & Mrs D Stracy, Mona Taylor, Pauline Creighton, M H Powlesland.*

ROGER SHARP

Membership Secretary



# Rare Birds Committee - 6 Monthly report

The following sightings have been *accepted* by the Committee since preparation of the report in *Southern Bird* 10: 5-6.

UBR 27/02 - Report and photograph from Brent Stephenson of a *Fiordland Crested Penguin* (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) seen by himself and Bridey White at Whirinaki Beach, north of Napier on 11 February 2002, and at Marineland, Napier on 18 February 2002.

UBR 28/02 - Report and photographs from Brent Stephenson of a *Snares Crested Penguin* (*Eudyptes robustus*) seen by himself and Ed Minot near Clifton, Hawke Bay on 7 February 2002, and at Marineland, Napier on 17 February 2002.

UBR 29/02 - Report and photograph from Brent Stephenson of a *Ruff* (*Philomachus pugnax*) seen at Ahuriri Estuary on 26 December 2001.

UBR 30/02 - Report from Matthias Retter of a banded *Black Stilt* (*Himantopus novaezelandiae*) seen at Lake Ellesmere on 9 February 2002.

UBR 31/02 - Report from Matthias Retter of 2 *Cape Barren Geese* (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) seen at Lake Ellesmere on 30 November 2001.

UBR 32/02 - Report and photographs from Matthias Retter of a *Red-necked Phalarope* (*Phalaropus lobatus*) seen by himself, Daniel Kissling & Colin Hill at Lake Ellesmere on 18 & 21 January 2002. A photograph of this bird by Colin Hill appeared in *Southern Bird* 10 (June 2002): 8.

UBR 38/02 - Report and video from Ian Saville of 2 *Gull-billed Terns* (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) seen by himself, Jim Moore, and Roger & Pam Slack at Manawatu Estuary on 15, 16, 18 & 19 January 2002.

UBR 39/02 - Report and video from Ian Saville of a *Great Knot* (*Calidris tenuirostris*) seen at Manawatu Estuary on 25 November 2001.

UBR 40/02 - Report and video from Ian Saville of a *Large Sand Dotterel* (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) seen by himself, Brent Stephenson, and Roger & Pam Slack at Manawatu Estuary on 8, 9 & 10 October 2001.

UBR 41/02 - Report from Johan Kok (via Paul Cuming) of a *Common Tern* (*Sterna hirundo*) seen by himself and Charlotte Wiemand at Raglan on 3 December 2001.

UBR 42/02 - Report from Liz Wang (via Paul Cuming) of a *Nankeen Kestrel* (*Falco cenchroides*) seen at Te Kuiti on 8 November 2001.

UBR 46/02 - Report from Nigel Milius & Wendy Hare of

a *Brown Skua* (*Catharacta skua lonnbergi*) seen near Port Jackson, Coromandel Peninsula on 14 May 2002.

UBR 48/02 - Report from Ian King (via Phil Rhodes) of a pure adult *Black Stilt* (*Himantopus novaezelandiae*) seen at Wendon, near Gore from 4-15 June 2002.

UBR 49/02 - Report from Bill Plunket (via Rosemary Tully) of a *Wilson's Storm Petrel* (*Oceanites oceanicus*) seen in Ohiwa Harbour on 4 April 2002.

UBR 50/02 - Report and photographs from David Lawrie of a *Black Kite* (*Milvus migrans*) seen by himself near Mercer on 9 & 12 May 2002, and by several other observers at various South Auckland locations between April 2000 & May 2002. All these sightings probably relate to the same bird as the one reported by Ted Wnorowski under UBR 76/01. Together, they constitute the 4th accepted record of the species in New Zealand, and the 1st for the North Island.

UBR 51/02 - Report from Richard Parrish of a *Little Egret* (*Egretta garzetta*) seen by himself & Audrey Williams at Stables Landing, Kaipara Harbour on 16 May 2002.

UBR 52/02, 52A/02, 52B/02, 52C/02 - Reports and photographs from Nick Allen, Jack Davidson, Alexander Phillips & John Lyall (via Graeme Taylor) of a *White-necked Heron* (*Ardea pacifica*) seen just south of Hokitika from 23 June 2002. This appears to be the 4th accepted record of the species in New Zealand. An account and photograph of the bird by Nick Allen & Jack Davidson appeared in *Southern Bird* 11 (September 2002): 8.

UBR 53/02, 53A/02, 53B/02, 53C/02 - Reports, photographs & painting from Nick Allen, Alan Wright, Dave York, Peter Schweigman & Derek Onley of a *Franklin's Gull* (*Larus pipixcan*) seen at Tomahawk Lagoon, Ocean Grove, Dunedin on 2 & 3 July 2002. This is the 1st accepted record of the species in New Zealand. A full account will appear in *Notornis* in due course.

UBR 54/02 - Report from Ben Bell of a shag seen in Wellington Harbour on 14 July 2002, accepted as being a *Leucocarbo* shag, probably a *New Zealand King Shag* (*Leucocarbo carunculatus*).

UBR 55/02 - Report from Colin Miskelly of a *White-headed Petrel* (*Pterodroma lessonii*) seen between Kapiti Island and Paraparaumu Beach on 26 June 2002.

UBR 56/02 - report (via Colin Miskelly) of a *Cape Barren Goose* (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) seen by Blake Abernethy at Waikanae sewage ponds on 5 August 2002.

UBR 57/02 - Report from Gwenda Pulham of a



# Rare Birds Committee - 6 Monthly report

*Pomarine Skua* (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) seen by herself and John Simmons at Papakanui Spit on 15 June 2002.

**UBR 58/02** - Report from Gwenda Pulham of 2 *Australasian Little Grebes* (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) seen by herself and Ted Wnorowski at Mangere sewage ponds on 16 June 2002.

**UBR 59/02, 59A/02** - reports from Nick Allen & Peter Howden of a *Black-tailed Native-hen* (*Gallinula ventalis*) seen by themselves, Jan Walker & others at Lake Hood, first sighted there by Peter Howden on 9 August 2002. This appears to be the 5th accepted record of the species in New Zealand.

**UBR 60/02** - Report from Lloyd Esler of an *Australian Wood Duck* (*Chenonetta jubata*) shot on a farm pond at Otapiri, near Winton, on 4 May 2002 and identified by Maurice Rodway, Manager, Southland Fish & Game, by comparison with a stuffed specimen.

**UBR 61/02** - Report and photographs from Paddy Latham of a pair of *Australasian Little Grebes* (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) with 1 young at Lake Rotoehu on 3 August 2002. The adult birds were apparently first seen there by David Lawrie in April 2002, and subsequently by others including Malcolm Hutton & John Brierley. Stella & John Rowe reported seeing a single Australasian Little Grebe there on 8 October 2002 (UBR 61A/02).

**UBR 62/02** - Report from Peter & Iris Tait (via Phil Rhodes) of a *Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike* (*Coracina novaehollandiae*) seen at Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island on 1 & 2 July 2001.

**UBR 63/02** - Report and photograph from Lindsay Rowe of a *Fiordland Crested Penguin* (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) seen at Kaikoura Peninsula on 10 February 2002.

**UBR 65/02** - Report and photograph from Vic Hensley (via Alison Howell) of a *Brown Booby* (*Sula leucogaster*) seen by David Kay at Houhora Harbour on 7 August 2002.

**UBR 66/02** - Report from Tony Crocker of *Common Terns* (*Sterna hirundo*) seen at Ashley Estuary on 30 & 31 July 1995 (1), 18 August 1995 (2), 27 August 1995 (1), & 16 September 1995 (1).

**UBR 67/02** - Report from Trevor Worthy of a *Black Kite* (*Milvus migrans*) seen by himself and Aaron Worthy near Pirinoa, Wairarapa, on 26 September 2002. This is the 5th accepted record of the species in New Zealand, and the 2nd for the North Island.

**UBR 68/02** - Report from Alan Collins (via Nick Allen) of a *Cape Barren Goose* (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*)

seen at Seadown, near Timaru on 9 September 2002.

**UBR 69/02** - Report from Alan Collins (via Nick Allen) of a *Wilson's Storm Petrel* (*Oceanites oceanicus*) seen off Kaikoura on 5 April 2002.

**UBR 70/02** - Report from Alan Collins (via Nick Allen) of a *Yellow-nosed Mollymawk* (*Diomedea chlororhynchos*) seen off Kaikoura on 2 July 2002.

**UBR 71/02** - Report and photographs from Peter Fryer of a *Ruff* (*Philomachus pugnax*) seen by himself and Julie Fryer at Waiongana, near New Plymouth, on 6 October 2002.

**UBR 72/02** - Report from Chris Petyt of a *Grey Plover* (*Pluvialis squatarola*) seen at Farewell Spit on 31 January 2002.

**UBR 73/02** - Report from Chris Petyt of an *Australasian Little Grebe* (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) seen at Puponga Farm Park, Golden Bay on various dates between 29 July 1994 and November 2001, and of 2 on 3 January 2002 (1 sitting on nest), with sightings since. These are no doubt the same 2 birds which were reported in UBR 4/02.

**The following sightings have also been determined by the Committee since the last report was prepared.**

**UBR 20/02** - Report from Margaret Conal of a "*Bush Wren*" seen by herself and Mike Arnold in Northern Tararua on 23 January 2002. The Committee considered that this bird was undoubtedly either a female or a juvenile North Island Rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris granti*).

**UBR 43/02** - Report from Brent Stephenson of a suspected *Phoenix Petrel* (*Pterodroma alba*) seen by himself and Ian Saville off Foxton Beach on 30 March 2002. The Committee considered that this sighting could not be accepted as being of the species claimed by the observers.

**UBR 47/02** - Report from Colin Scadden of a suspected *Lesser Yellowlegs* seen by himself and Brian Boesen at Lake Wairarapa on 25 January 2002. The Committee considered that the bird reported was possibly a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) as claimed.

**DAVID MEDWAY**  
Convenor  
17 November 2002





# Painted Hutton's Sh



**In late September, around 15 OSNZ member volunteers spent a week working with DoC staff from Kaikoura and further afield. The task was to obtain a firm estimate of numbers of Hutton's Shearwaters.**

**This was a rare privilege to get to know a lot more about the lives of these engaging little petrels.**

Early September sees Hutton's Shearwaters return from across the Tasman to their only breeding sites among the most rugged parts of the seaward Kaikoura Ranges. There they begin their season's breeding effort, provided winter has relaxed its grip and snow conditions permit. This year around 2000 birds were briefly interrupted by the application of a coat of enamel paint across the breast. The team, led by Graeme Taylor, worked in bitterly cold conditions over five nights.

The following week, two DoC boats, supplemented on occasion by a chartered Oceanwings vessel, carried groups of 4-5 observers to wherever the birds could be found. Land-based teams located flocks and directed the seafarers. Plans for counting painted birds from shore, as well as using video, proved less than satisfactory, but the counts from on board boats resulted in an excellent data set.

Once a feeding or roosting flock was located, counters motored slowly through the birds. Only those whose breast could clearly be seen were counted. The idea was not a total count – that would have been impossible. Over time however,

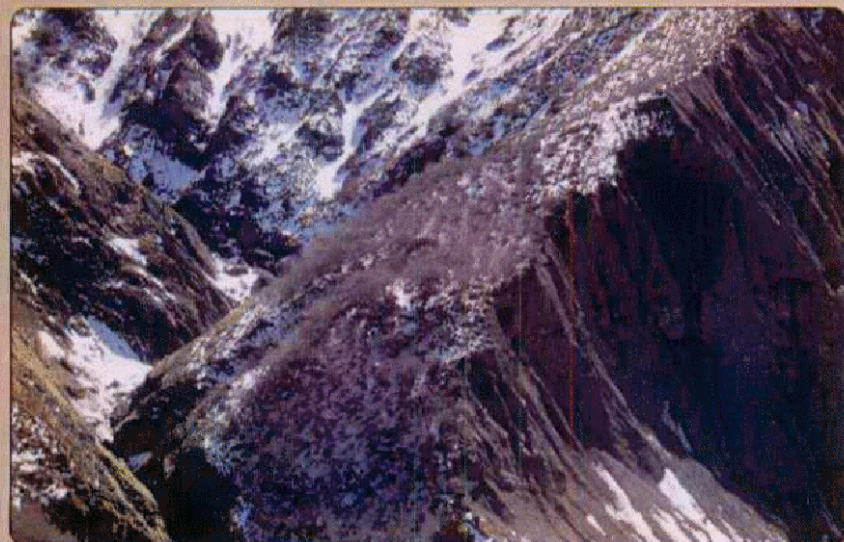
through counting individual birds within flocks, a more and more accurate total number could be computed. In dense flocks with birds constantly on the move, large numbers could be checked and counted in short order. Only a



small proportion – one in several hundred – sported red breasts, and there was a far lower number of yellow-painted birds.

The counts will, with the application of a mathematical formula, reveal an accurate proportion of marked to unmarked birds, and thus what percentage of the total population the 2000 marked birds represents. Previous population figures have been based on estimated numbers of occupied burrows, and ignore the presumably large numbers of pre- and non-breeders. This accurate population estimate will be used as a baseline to monitor future population trends, to see if Hutton's Shearwaters are holding their own.

Quite apart from their value as an endemic taxon, Hutton's Shearwaters



*The birds' rugged breeding area.*

*Photo: Graeme Taylor*



# earwaters

(along with Westland Petrels) are the only viable breeding petrels remaining on mainland New Zealand. Work by Richard Holdaway, Trevor Worthy and others, has revealed that at one time much of the mainland must have been covered in breeding seabirds – not just the coastline, but large areas of, for example, inland Canterbury. Coastal seas would have been densely covered in birds. Predators have seen the extirpation of nearly all.

Hutton's Shearwaters have lived here for very many millions of years. The Kaikoura Ranges have risen only in the last four million. It is likely that the shearwaters' breeding grounds rose under them. While formerly breeding at lower altitude, it seems that these otherwise vulnerable birds' choice of rugged mountain terrain has spared them until now from extinction by predators introduced only in the last two thousand years. Their colonies thus represent a fragmentary remnant of a seabird-dominated ecological system which covered large parts of primeval New Zealand.

We mostly spent 6-7 hours a day at sea, from soon after dawn to early afternoon. The weather largely cooperated and seas were generally calm. Graeme Taylor pronounced himself very satisfied with the quality and quantity of data collected, and Dave Walford, DoC Kaikoura ranger who coordinated logistics, was more than pleased with the calibre of OSNZ volunteers.



But what will remain a highlight for all, I am sure, was the opportunity to be a part of the shearwaters' daily lives for a time. Most flocks were directly off the Kaikoura Peninsula, often feeding close to surging kelp-covered rocks, or north and south as far as the Hapuku River and Haumuri Bluffs. Large flocks numbered tens of thousands.

These flocks featured bewildering numbers of birds streaming past the boats, sometimes only a couple of metres distant, before slightly folding their wings, then plunging into the sea. Diving birds (to a depth of some 40+ metres apparently) churned the surface and left trails of bubbles. A minute or two later, great numbers popped to the surface again, rested, then flew back to the front of the feeding hordes.

Deep within a flock, the boat might travel through a seemingly empty expanse of water, before birds suddenly appeared beneath us, darting and twisting at incredible speed, then surfacing alongside. Flying shearwaters show masterly control of the air. Beneath the surface, wings turn into amazingly dexterous propulsion devices.

In the flocks there was the constant patter of little feet as the birds took off. Excited mobs of birds would chuckle before commencing to dive en masse. Occasional "colony calls" could be heard among resting birds.

Sometimes a flock would thin out as the birds travelled to another location. A particularly impressive sight one sunny day was little waves of birds, a hundred or so at a time, hitching a ride on the air pressure of the upwind slope of two metre swells, flying gently and effortlessly as a result.

Many visitors, perhaps most, come to see the charismatic whales and dolphins of Kaikoura. Few leave even dimly aware of the existence of the one species which above all others makes the area unique.

TONY CROCKER



# Memorandum of Understanding

In my last Annual Report I mentioned that an approved Memorandum of Understanding had been drawn up between this Society and the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society. It covers the provision and use of information between the two societies. The only remaining requirement in order to formalise this significant new working relationship was for the Memorandum to be signed by the Presidents of the two societies. The Memorandum was duly signed by Gerry

McSweeney, President of Forest & Bird, and myself at the Annual General Meeting of Forest & Bird held in Wellington on 22 June 2002. The full text of the Memorandum of Understanding is reproduced here.

DAVID MEDWAY  
President

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

between

**THE ROYAL FOREST AND BIRD SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND INC.**

and

**THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND INC.**

**BACKGROUND.** The Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc. and the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. (hereafter referred to as the Societies) wish to develop a closer working relationship. The Societies have constitutional interests with New Zealand's birds. RFBPS has a public advocacy and awareness capacity, whereas OSNZ has considerable information capacity. The objectives of the Societies could be enhanced through a closer working relationship, particularly in the exchange of information.

During informal discussions between Keith Chapple (then President of RFBPS) and David Medway (President of OSNZ) it was agreed there could be substantial benefit for New Zealand birds if the Societies co-operated on issues such as the identification of possible marine reserve sites, important bird areas, potential Ramsar sites and important "braided river" bird habitat.

**CONSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVES.** The Societies have many constitutional commonalities including:

- To foster and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds generally (OSNZ)
- To spread knowledge and encourage appreciation of our native flora and fauna (RFBPS)
- to assist the conservation and management of birds by providing information from which sound management decisions can be derived (OSNZ)
- To advocate the protection of indigenous species, their habitats and ecosystems (RFBPS)

**PROVISION AND USE OF INFORMATION.** The objectives of the Societies could be better achieved through a closer working relationship generally and the provision and use of information specifically. The Memorandum of Understanding covers

the provision and use of information between the Societies.

OSNZ undertakes to provide information to RFBPS where this information will help develop sound management decisions.

RFBPS undertakes to:

1. Use information provided by OSNZ only for projects agreed by the Societies.
2. Publish OSNZ information only when the owners of that information agree with its publication.
3. Appropriately acknowledge OSNZ information in any report or publication in which it is included.
4. Recognise that the intellectual property in information provided remains with OSNZ and the members who collected it.

Both Societies undertake to:

1. Collaborate on surveys to collect additional information for bird-life conservation purposes.
2. Meet at regular intervals to share information.

Review of this Memorandum of Understanding

The Societies agree this Memorandum of Understanding should be reviewed annually.

Signed at Wellington on the 22nd day of June 2002.

G.D. McSweeney  
President,  
Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of New Zealand

D.G. Medway  
President,  
Ornithological Society of New Zealand



## 3rd Time Lucky

We, the Tinny Tickers, Stephen Sharp, and Mary and I, started our Twitchathon effort at the junction of the Trig and Wilkinson tracks on Kapiti Island at 12:45 pm, where a little earlier a Kaka, a NZ Robin and a pair of Weka had been keen to share our lunches.

As we made our way down to Rangatira we ticked off Stitchbird, Saddleback, Morepork (whose roost site was indicated by the alarm calls of Bellbirds, North Island Robins and Whiteheads), and the more common forest birds, such as North Island Tomtit, Red-crowned Parakeet and Kereru.

Once down on the flat we saw several more species, including Takahe, NZ Pipit, and Variable Oystercatcher. Although we missed out on cuckoos, by the time we left Kapiti at 3 pm we had made a good start, having ticked off 30 species.

Driving north from Paraparaumu, our tally increased gradually as we spotted common species from the car – House Sparrow, Welcome Swallow, Mallard, Pukeko, etc. First stop was the Otaki Sewage Ponds for Grey Teal and other waterfowl, and we were delighted to also see Black-fronted Dotterel.

Our next destination was the Manawatu Estuary near Foxton for waders. Having arrived about three hours after the high tide, we were left to sight the common and distinctive species from afar, such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Knot, Wrybill and SIPO. In addition, we had excellent views of flocks of feeding Little Black Shag and Royal Spoonbill, and a Little Tern.

Heading back south, we visited Lake Horowhenua for Australian Coot but ended up with no new species at all. A diversion inland near Otaki into farming country with scattered totaras soon rewarded us with our target, the Eastern Rosella, plus finches. With dusk fast approaching, we searched the ponds and estuary at Waikanae for Banded Dotterel, NZ Scaup and NZ Dabchick; two out of three was OK. Fish and chips at Plimmerton quelled our hunger pangs, then our final search of the day was for a Blue Penguin among the rocks at the water's edge of Frank Kitts Park, Wellington – luck was with us.

A couple hours sleep, then off to board the Picton ferry for the 1.30 am sailing! Dawn found us at Lake Elterwater hoping to find a coot, but missed again. At Kowhai Bush, near Kaikoura, we soon saw our targets, California Quail, South Island Robin, Brown Creeper and Rifleman.

At Kaikoura there was a strong north-east wind raging, so much so that fur seals were hauled out beside the Peninsula carpark, and hundreds of Hutton's Shearwaters were flying close to shore. Even though the weather seemed far from ideal for a boat trip, our results on the Oceanwings trip were great, 16 species in total. Three majestic Wandering Albatrosses and a couple of Salvin's Mollymawks took centre stage, among about 30 squabbling Cape Petrels just off the back of the boat. However, the highlight for me was having a Southern Giant Petrel and a Northern Giant Petrel sitting on the water next to each other close to the boat.

Even though we had nearly an hour to spare on getting off the boat, and searched the lower Kahutara and Kowhai Rivers for Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns, we failed to increase our tally of 90 species. We then retired to a local café for lunch, very happy with what we had seen, and the fun we had had in the process.

The effort was third time lucky because during two previous attempts the weather thwarted us getting to Kapiti. One hundred species in 24 hours – yes, it's possible with some preparatory trips and a good dose of luck

**RALPH POWLESLAND**



## Reviews

**Heather, Barrie D; Robertson Hugh A.**  
*The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand.*  
Illustrated by Derek J Onley. Revised edition.  
Viking, Auckland, 2000. ISBN 0 670 89370 6. 440 pp.  
Hard cover \$49.95.

**Heather, Barrie D; Robertson Hugh A.**  
*The Hand Guide to the Birds of New Zealand.* Illustrated  
by Derek J Onley. Penguin Books, Auckland, 2000.  
ISBN 0 14 028835 X. 168 pp. Soft cover \$29.95.

This 2000 edition of "our" Field Guide is a reprint of the 1996 (first) edition with two additions. Firstly, six species since accepted by the Rare Birds Committee of OSNZ feature in an Addendum. Secondly, an addition "Where to see birds in New Zealand" suggests places to go to see "our" birds. Also, the Introduction is amended somewhat. The references have not been updated. The cover is different but the Identification Guide and the Handbook (not to be confused with the Hand Guide – see below) seems to remain the same.

For newcomers to this definitive work, it builds on the Falla, Sibson & Turbott editions and is also sponsored by OSNZ. It has adopted the successful layout of the Field Information section of Simpson & Day's *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, producing a concise, and economic reference on New Zealand birds.

In the time between these two Heather & Robertson editions, several mark-ups have accumulated in this pedant's copy. Alas, the errors and comments stand for the revised edition. Four typographical errors in the Introduction do not detract from the meaning of the text. I have marked my copy to readily indicate if a species is reportable to the Rare Birds Committee. These do change but if we have an edition every 5 years or so, why not add this feature?

On the inside cover maps, Aupouri Peninsula could do with identification. Whangaruru Peninsula is shown as an island. How about adding leg flag colours next time? Some definitions that could do with adding to the Glossary: common, abundant, uncommon, visitor, protected, rare, indigenous, lamellae. Parts of a bird: nail, front, cheek. Some of the headings in the Identification Guide could be improved. For instance, it is confusing to have an "Arctic migrant" that breeds in Asia. Surely this should be an Asian migrant?

The Hand Guide is a new idea and handy to throw in the pack (at 407 grams it is more portable than the 1027 gram Field Guide) to help resolve arguments and queries in the field. It consists of the Identification Guide (not the Handbook) and the "Where to see birds in New Zealand" sections of the Field Guide. It comes in a sturdy plastic cover and has maps, inside the covers, that

are different from those in the Field Guide. Each main island has a cover to itself, is coloured, with shading to show mountain ranges, and gives major lakes, lagoons, estuaries, islands, and harbours.

STUART NICHOLSON

Carey, G.J.; Chalmers, M.L.; Diskin, D.A.; Kennerly, P.R.; Leader, P.J.; Leven, M.R.; Lewthwaite, R.W.; Melville, D.S.; Turnbull, M.; Young, L. 2001. *The Avifauna of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society. Hard cover; Charts, Photographs, Maps and Illustrations. 564 pages.

The first recorded observations of birds in Hong Kong were made in 1860 by the great Robert Swinhoe. Since the 1930s there has been an almost unbroken tradition of bird recording in Hong Kong.

This work analyses in detail the 41 years of records subsequently collected by the Society, compares them with earlier observations and thus provides a thorough review of the Hong Kong list. Each species' pattern of occurrence is detailed, as well as habitat preferences and trends in numbers or distribution. The results of the first comprehensive breeding bird survey in Hong Kong are presented, together with summaries of ringing activities and water bird surveys. The result is the most thorough explication of an avifauna available in the region.

ROS BATCHELER



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

### Auckland

The intriguing title 'Shorebird Foraging at Miranda' brought an attendance of near 50 to our September meeting for Michael Anderson's presentation of his MSc study of the feeding behaviour of wintering waders. Focusing his telescope on godwits, knots, SIPO and Wrybills, Michael quantifies the extent and success of foraging by individuals during five minute periods at various sites accessible to him for sampling the marine invertebrate levels. His results will set a baseline against which to compare future changes, especially those which may follow the expansion of mussel farming in the Firth of Thames (mussels remove as much as 60% of the phytoplankton material needed by invertebrates and hence deplete the food chain at its base).

In October, David Lawrie, a welcome visitor from South Auckland, described his trip to the Galapagos Islands a year earlier, in the company of Pam & Des Agnew and Richard & Bridget Lowe. During a two week stay they were able to visit all the islands, going ashore by rubber boat and managing to see and photograph a great deal. Helped by – or perhaps in spite of – the stringent attention of the obligatory guide they saw many of the 50-60 resident species, from Lava Gulls to flamingoes and Flightless Cormorants to mockingbirds; even locating the Mangrove Finch at a site where it had been deemed locally extinct. The pictures were first rate, added to which David's full account of the archipelago, enhanced by his characteristically droll commentary on the party's adventures, gave us a great evening.

Our roundup of sightings and local events brought welcome news of the further 10 ha expansion of the Forest & Bird Matuku reserve in the Waitakere Valley – now grown in five stages from its original 30 ha to a total of 102 ha (300 acres). It is worth recalling that the initiative to

acquire, develop and protect this area stems from an OSNZ survey of the wetland and adjacent bush led by Jean Skinner and Sylvia Reed, Auckland's RR during the 1970s.

We were delighted to have Ruby Jones at our November meeting. She recalled how, as a junior member, she first went to Tiritiri Matangi and instantly fell in love with the island. She later chose the study of Kokako on Tiri as the subject of her Masters degree. In 1997-8 the first Kokako were transferred to the island – 6 males and one female.

It is logical to assume that a bird's current habitat is their optimal environment. However this theory was to be quickly disproved. Usually to be found in high treetops, the birds set up home in Wattle Valley with its low bush and bracken and raised 2 chicks. They were observed eating fruit, leaves, flowers, moss, invertebrates and exotics.

The success of the transfer was not only the increase in the Kokako population, but the revelation that birds can and will adapt to available food and habitat. Management of Kokako in mainland areas continues, but the work is exhausting and expensive. Islands such as Tiri, Little Barrier and Kapiti provide a good safety option – Tiri in particular being a good advocacy for the species with many visitors to the island getting close-up views of the birds.

(MICHAEL TAYLOR & CHRIS THOMPSON)

### South Auckland

At the time of preparing this report we had just held the summer census in the Firth of Thames, and, as warned in the last report in *Southern Bird*, the weather was windy but only with passing showers. In terms of Tony Habraken's past efforts this was a relatively fine day, even if it was a little too windy to be comfortable. It is hoped that the weather on the 24th November in the Manukau will be better.

At the October meeting David Pye, the RR for Auckland on a reciprocal speaking arrangement between the two regions, gave us an





interesting insight into the workings of the Wildlife Act. This particularly related to birds and the various lists and the schedules in the Act. This provoked a lively discussion during which we all learned something.

The speaker at the November meeting was Rachel Fewster, who gave us an interesting insight into how statistics can be used to assist in the interpretation of data from bird studies. Rachel lectures in statistics at the University of Auckland, but also has an interest in birds from her formative years in Scotland. Rachel demonstrated to us the value of regular data recordings from sites and the value of gathering information in a manner that gives data in a consistent manner.

The northern migrants would appear to be back in reasonable numbers, although there have been no rarities that have remained in the South Auckland area. There have been tantalising reports of a Ringed Plover, a Mongolian Dotterel, a Great Knot and two Common Terns from Miranda in recent times. However those birds have not been seen on subsequent days, so presumably they have moved through and headed to Lake Ellesmere with virtually everything else.

Another interesting sighting at Miranda on 27 October was a godwit with a green flag over an orange flag on the right leg, which was one of 73 banded by David Melville in the Yellow Sea in China in April 2002. Subsequently a further bird has turned up at Nelson Haven, and it will be worthwhile watching for others over the coming months. It should be noted that the Miranda bird is still present, so it appears that it will be staying for the summer.

There are also good numbers of waders in the Manukau Harbour, with Ray Clough reporting some interesting birds from around the area where the oxidation ponds previously existed at Mangere. A recent trip to the southern Manukau Harbour by Tony Habraken and Adrian Riegen located 60 juvenile godwits amongst the 1500 birds present. These juveniles are now beginning to lose their distinctive plumage, but it would appear from the sightings so far that they are comprising approximately 1-2% of the population, which confirms the records from Alaska that it was yet another poor breeding season.

Other interesting sightings from the region are a number of Kaka seen at various areas, including the RR's home garden. We are hopeful that these birds which are being seen on a more regular basis will commence breeding in the area in the near future. There have also been more sightings of Banded Rails in recent times than previously and hopefully that signals an increase in their population.

The Mangatawhiri Galahs have been seen on a regular basis through the winter, although their numbers have dwindled in recent times, and presumably they have gone back to their summer quarters which we believe is Ponui Island.

Beach patrols have continued in this region with John Brown and his team completing their task on a monthly basis and still finding good numbers of birds. The weekend trip to Tiritiri Matangi Island in September was well supported, and while the weather was a little windy and damp, (no, Tony Habraken was not present!), it was still an enjoyable weekend amongst a different range of birds.

(DAVID LAWRIE)

## Waikato

A bright spring day greeted eight members and extras as we set off upstream to the Kaniwhaniwha kahikatea, tallest in New Zealand, and therefore the world. Excellent views of Tomtits and Kereru were had, while Tui and the more common birds were mostly heard. Parataniwha were also amongst the largest ever seen. The age range of teens to 80s was nice to see as well.

Members of OSNZ participated in a combined field trip and twitchathon to everyone's enjoyment. 'Paul's Jewels' were hauled around the countryside at a pace. Starting with the King Country, we toured the Grand Canyon Bat Cave with much success - <40 long-tailed bats. Leitch's Track produced Kereru and Whitehead, while a quick tiki tour through remotest Taumarunui produced a quantity of rain. Miranda followed the next day, yet not one unusual wader showed itself, and we missed Red-billed Gulls - oops. Fun was had, which was the main factor for us.

We combined our September meeting with the local Forest & Bird Society, who had scheduled their talk the same night. The talk was on high country conservation in the South Island. October's meeting was a unique overview of a scientist's visit to Cape Bird in Antarctica. Shinichi Nakagawa's experiences as a Cold Asian Guy on the ice were told with a humour that you probably had to have when experiencing a cold front at the bottom of the world. His topic, involving working with Adelie Penguins, was peppered with some of the supposedly several hundred digital images he took while executing the experiments.

Hugh Clifford has found two unusual birds on our west coast

lately, both Pacific Golden Plovers, on the same day and on different parts of the beach. Hugh said, "One was feeding along the tideline. It had a substantial patch of black breeding plumage on its belly. The other bird I saw roosting, and then feeding along the tideline. It had no trace of black breeding plumage on its belly. I saw each of them separately, saw each of them flying a number of times and heard the flight call."

Other unusual coastal birds recently have been: Brown Skua at Kawhia, and Red-necked Avocet and seven Royal Spoonbills at Port Waikato. Long-tailed Cuckoos have been doing the old 'flying into inanimate objects' trick again, with two so far this spring. A pristine example was graciously stretched out at our latest evening meeting.

The meeting speaker was Jillana Robertson, who, as a full-time volunteer, has been working with the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust, near Cambridge. This 3360 ha block of bush is the latest mainland island project in the Waikato, with over 50 km to be fenced in, similar to the Karori Sanctuary.

Raglan Harbour summer census was notable for the 490 godwits sitting on a shellbank not previously used in past counts. It may have been the 4 m tide which prompted this behaviour.

(PAUL CUMING)

Since the big prion wreck in July, beach patrols have been rather quiet. This seems strange because over the last couple of months we have been plagued by strong cold W and SW winds. These might have been expected to be tough on birds, and to push the dead ones ashore.

Have there been few birds offshore during this time? Or have there been plenty of birds but ample food supplies have kept them from succumbing to the weather? Whether either or both these reasons are correct, there is another factor that has probably led to fewer dead birds being found. The strong winds have pushed up big seas which have been eating into the dunes. When the seas sweep into a solid bank, and bounce back, they leave no debris on the beach. Long stretches of our beaches are like this at present.

(HUGH CLIFFORD)

## Taranaki

We had a report on a trip to Norfolk Island in August, then in September Dave Bell gave an update on the Taranaki Kiwi Trust and Barry Hartley about the prion wreck of late winter.

Two Kaka have been present in Pukekura Park in New Plymouth for some months now, with a lone one at Pukeiti on two occasions in August. We have also had a report of Indian Ringnecks on a farm quite close to the Egmont National Park boundary. Little Shags are also nesting again in Pukekura Park, and were seen carrying nesting material in September. Nine nests were present by the end of the month.

Waders were conspicuous by their absence at Waiongana in September, though Black Swans and Grey Ducks were nesting. The NZ Dotterels are back at the Pungaereere Stream area.

Beach patrols picked up mainly prions in September, while two gannets and a White-headed Petrel were among the finds in October. The Rapanui coastal colony of Grey-faced Petrels was visited in late August. Burrows on this mainland site were occupied, with 50+ birds arriving in the early evening to this and an offshore stack. The numbers may well be as a result of the DoC programme to control predators. Plans for a predator-proof fence are under way, sponsored by a large oil company.

Our condolences to the family of the late Ross Bishop.

(ROSEMARY MESSENGER)

## Wanganui

The problems caused by the Wanganui City Council allowing fishing at Virginia Lake were the subject of an article in the local newspaper in October. Darryl Greeks, who has "looked after" the birds on the lake for the past seven years, has found a number of birds entangled by stray lines and hooks. Swans seem particularly prone to this and certainly their numbers have been falling.

Vandalism is another problem, with improved walkways making access easier, so that nests are disturbed by humans, and eggs and birds are killed by dogs and cats. Mr Greeks created a controversy however by claiming the main problem was coots. He claimed they competed for food with the swans and ducks and killed the eggs and chicks of geese, ducks and swans by standing on them, harassing them or drowning them. He claimed that few chicks survived for more than

a few days. He was therefore consulting with the Department of Conservation about how to limit coot numbers.

Colin Ogle, OSNZ member and retired DoC officer, responded a few days later. He emphasised the incompatibility of fishing and waterbirds in the small area of Virginia Lake. He also pointed out that coots were self-introduced from Australia and thus fully protected under the Wildlife Act. Coots were first seen on the lake in 1962, with nine breeding pairs in 1966-67 and 12 in 1967-68. There were a total of 60 coots in 1968 and since then numbers have fluctuated, with a maximum of 117 in 1986. Over the past 26 years numbers have been around 100 and in this period Black Swans and ducks have bred successfully, and he speculated as to other causes for recent failures.

On a happier note, the recently arrived pair of immature Mute Swans are still around and developing adult plumage. Little Shags are breeding in greater numbers, with 17 nests this year.

Kenneth Thomson was at the Manawatu estuary on 23 September and reported two Wandering Tattlers, a Red-necked Stint and a Variable (all black) Oystercatcher. Nic Peet of DoC reports that in October a survey of the Manganui-a-te-ao river between Hoihenga Bridge and Ruatiti Domain (approx 9 km) revealed 35 Blue Ducks: 13 pairs, seven singles and two ducklings.

A rare visitor to the region was a Turnstone seen at Turakina Beach in September by Bill Greenwood, who also reports only two godwits there, although Black-fronted Dotterel numbers seem to be recovering, with seven being seen in October. Also in October, 18 godwits were on the Wanganui River estuary.

(BILL GREENWOOD)

## Wellington

January saw the conclusion of our three-year quarterly bird count on Kapiti Island. As this was the first survey since rats were eradicated in September-October 1996, there was great interest when Colin Miskelly summarised for us the response of the forest birds to their altered environment.

Against a baseline of our earlier survey (1991-1994), it is evident that most benefit has accrued to species that nest in sites that have been accessible to rats, most notably the hole-nesting Red-crowned Parakeet (now four times as conspicuous, and observed feeding on the ground), but also NZ Kingfisher and Saddleback, and the fork-nesting N.I. Robin and Bellbird.

No species showed evidence of consistent decline, said Colin, though Tui and Kereru appear to have changed their seasonal use of habitat. Weka numbers have rapidly recovered, more than compensating for the attrition that was temporarily caused by a diet of poisoned rats and baits.

Rats have been a problem also in the Falkland Islands, our October meeting was told. Kerry Brown has been involved in eradication efforts there, and treated us to some excellent slides of the wildlife. When it comes to disturbance by humans, however, Falklands birds enjoy a most effective protection. Minefields, left along the beaches from the war of 1982, defend from invasion the various species of penguin, shag, heron, goose, duck, oystercatcher and other shorebirds that make their homes in these remote islands.

A third island, Chatham, was our reference at the November meeting, when Hilary Aikman reported on the Taiko Recovery Project. By catching adults in the glare of bright lights, fitting them with radio transmitters, and then tracking them, 25 to 35 active burrows were found during the 1999-2001 period.

Breeding success has been assisted through intensive control of cats, possums, Weka and rats, and the use of artificial feeding and burrows. Burrow scopes, time-lapse video and a black and white banding system that can be read off the video, have facilitated close monitoring. As a result, no known chicks have been lost to predators since 1996, though five eggs were lost in 2001, through unknown causes.

Funding is now being sought for a predator-proof fence, based on Karori's but designed to be cheaper to install. DNA analysis indicates a very diverse gene pool. The team is hoping for 10-12 breeding pairs this year, said Hilary, and has a target of 25 pairs in 10 years' time. It was only 2 pairs per year a short time ago.

At Karori itself, the first of our "post-fence" quarterly counts has (provisionally) confirmed a dramatic increase of Tui and revealed that most other resident species have either increased slightly or held their own. Of the six re-introduced forest birds, Whitehead, Robin, Saddleback and Bellbird were recorded sufficiently often to provide a baseline for assessing future changes in conspicuousness.

Introductions and transfers: in October a new member was

introduced and welcomed to the Society. At this year's School Science and Technology Fair, Cameron de Wys, a student of Aotea College, was awarded the branch's prize for his project entitled "Can birds condition themselves to ignore their fear?". We wish Cameron many years of enjoyment of bird study with us. At the same meeting members farewelled Brian Bell, elder and activist, who has translocated himself to his native habitat in Marlborough, after 35 years in our branch as leader, supporter and mentor. Thanks, Brian, you'll be missed here by us all.

(ROD ORANGE)

## Nelson

A Bar-tailed Godwit flagged by our group last year was seen nesting in central Alaska in 2002, which made exciting news as only 35 were flagged and the nesting areas are vast.

Two godwits and a knot flagged last year on Motueka sandspit and in the Waimea Inlet have returned to this area and a godwit banded in Victoria was seen here. The programme is continuing and another 32 godwits have been flagged on the Motueka sandspit, including one juvenile and a Banded Dotterel.

We are monitoring the margins of the Waimea and Moutere Inlets and Nelson Haven for evidence of Banded Rails. Footprints are regularly seen in some areas and two adults and a juvenile were sighted recently.

The New Zealand Native Forest Restoration Trust is buying their first piece of land in the South Island, the Mangarakau Swamp near the Wanganui Inlet on the northern west coast. It will be a great addition to the bird estate and four bitterns were recently seen there.

Golden plovers and one Grey Plover were seen recently in the Waimea Inlet. David Melville is formulating a project to study the numbers and ages of Variable Oystercatchers in the inlet. The Farewell Spit benthic survey is to take place in March.

(GILLIAN POLLOCK)

## Canterbury

To say that spring has started slowly this year in an understatement, and rare wading birds have mainly waited until October to make an appearance. Again, however, the range of rare species has been good, though for a change not just at Lake Ellesmere.

Colin Hill has been busy on his farm bike again this spring on the mudflats at Lake Ellesmere, first finding a Black-tailed Godwit with a gammy leg – possibly the same individual as last year. Latterly he found two Sanderlings sharing Greenpark Sands with a putative Little Stint.

Andrew Crossland, recently returned from Singapore, whilst checking the Humphrey Drive reserve, a part of the Avon-Heathcote known for its nesting stilts, was surprised to find a Lesser Yellowlegs. Alan Collins has been spending a decent amount of time at the until recently greatly under-watched Ki-Wainono Lagoon, finding amongst the commoner waders a Ruff and a probable dowitcher. At the Ashley River Mouth Sheila Petch found a 'commic' tern in a flock of over 1000 White-fronted Terns.

High rivers have been a feature of this spring. This has not helped with the field meeting programme. A surprisingly high Ashley River made the twice-yearly census rather difficult in places, with the counters on one of the three counted stretches feeling that it was not safely fordable. Despite a flood after the end of the previous breeding season clearing the bed of most of the lupin that must affect breeding waders, low numbers of river-bed birds were found – most worryingly Wrybill. The Ashley is this species' northernmost breeding outpost.

The Hurunui River was scheduled to be counted on the first weekend of November. However, with the El Niño weather currently being experienced (as with all the rivers with a source in the



Hybrid Stilt: this bird was at Motueka sandspit in May. Photo: Steve Wood



main-divide) the river has been frequently elevated. The first weekend of November it was especially so, with the river running high and brown on the Sunday. Hopefully the weather may calm down and part of the river might be counted before the end of the month.

The September indoor meeting heard theories as to why Yellowhammers are doing so much better in Canterbury compared to Scotland. Catriona McLeod had been studying the species on a farm managed for game birds in eastern Scotland – that is managed not solely for profit or increasing the grain mountain in Europe. She has been working in Canterbury for the last year or so to compare the breeding success here with that in their natural range, and finding that success is mixed, though the wide grass road verges in the Canterbury study area seem to have a positive effect.

In early November, Ron Nilsson told the story of how Codfish Island came to be the haven for birdlife it is today. Photos showed just how rugged most of the island is, and demonstrated how difficult a job it was to rid the island of introduced mammalian and avian (Weka) pests. The amenities on the island have steadily improved from a fairly basic and makeshift start to the sizeable accommodation today.

(NICK ALLEN)



*A white redpoll at Pukerau, Southland,  
photographed mid-July 2002 by Fraser McRae.*

## Southland

The fickle spring weather has thwarted recent plans to visit Awarua Bay, although Ian Southey managed to find a fine break and was rewarded with the sight of two Wrybills on 6 November, rare visitors to Southland.

At our September meeting we were fortunate to have Dave Merton talking about the recent successful Kakapo breeding season on Codfish Island. From disastrous seasons in the early nineties, numbers have increased, with last season producing a bumper 24 chicks which have all survived.

There were some excellent Kakapo shots, and one of the most poignant was a recent image of Dave holding Richard Henry, the last surviving Fiordland Kakapo, and then in the next shot was another of him twenty years later holding the same bird. Dave commented on the tremendous effort put in by his father Don and DoC staff and, of course, the many volunteers over the years to bring the birds back from the brink of extinction. Another highlight of the evening was a conference phone link to Don Merton, who answered a number of questions about the Kakapo and of course the amazing recovery of the Black Robin in the Chatham Islands.

Young Buller's Mollymawks have been turning up on farmland around Southland. This is usual for this time of year as the youngsters leave the colony on the Solander Islands and get blown inland.

A white House Sparrow was reported from Wallacetown and a photo was taken of a "whitepoll". One of Lloyd Esler's beach patrols turned up an interesting find, an Erect-crested Penguin, a first for Oreti Beach. Lists from other patrols include Antarctic Petrel, several Antarctic Prions and one Blue Petrel. A recently dead giant petrel was found near the Invercargill Estuary, not the usual area for finding these oceanic birds.

(PHIL RHODES)

## What's on



### Northland

Evening meetings, 2nd 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

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month (except January) at 7.45 pm in the Kohia Teachers' Centre in the grounds of Auckland College of Education, 74 Epsom Ave, Mt Eden.

### South Auckland

Evening meetings are held at the Papakura Croquet Clubrooms, 5 Chapel Street, Papakura, on the second Tuesday of each month (February – November) at 7.45 pm  
Beach patrols ph. Rob Wheeler (09) 299 7069  
Manukau and Firth of Thames censuses ph Tony Habraken (09) 238 5284

### Waikato

Beach patrols ph Hugh Clifford (07) 855 3751  
Hamilton Lake Census ph Barry Friend (07) 843 6729  
Forest Lake Census ph Brian Challinor (07) 855 2561  
Cambridge Lake Census ph Hugh or Paul  
Bird sightings ph Paul Cuming (07) 829 8215  
Field trips (monthly) ph Paul Cuming  
Evening meetings, every third Wednesday, 7.30 pm DoC London Street, Hamilton City, ph Paul Cuming  
Atlas Sheets, Stella Rowe ph (07) 843 5199

### Taranaki

Evening meetings - held at 7.30 pm on the first Tuesday of the month except January. Ph. Barry Hartley (06) 757 8644. Field trips on first conducive weekend thereafter.

### Wanganui

Evening meetings, fourth Tuesday of the month, Davis Lecture Theatre, Whanganui Regional Museum (Watt St).

### Manawatu

Evening meetings - held 2nd Wednesday of February, May, August and November, at the Lido Centre, Park Street, Palmerston North, 8 pm.  
Beach patrols - 1st Wednesday of each month and on other beaches at irregular times.

### Wellington

Evening meetings – first Monday of the month, DoC offices, Wellington City Library, ph Stuart Nicholson (04) 934 5940.  
Matiu / Somes Island surveys ph. Rod Orange (04) 473 1912.  
Pauatahanui Inlet surveys ph. Allan Munro (04) 566 4834.  
Beach patrols ph. Jean Luke (04) 904 1704.

### Nelson

Evening meetings - usually 1st Monday of the month, 7.15 pm, upstairs in Cafe Affaire, Trafalgar St, Nelson. Ph. David (03) 543 3628 or Rob (03) 576 5371.

### Canterbury

Evening meetings last Monday of the month, Spreydon Bowling Club, Domain Terrace, Christchurch. Monthly field trips – dates vary. Contact Nick Allen (03) 312 7183, [nick\\_allen@extra.co.nz](mailto:nick_allen@extra.co.nz).

### Otago

Evening meetings Otago Art Society building, cnr Albany & Great King Streets. Ph. Louise Foord (03) 467 5041.

### Southland

Evening meetings (in conjunction with the Field Club) held every second Thursday at 7.30 pm, Otago Community Centre, Dunns Rd, Otago. Field trips usually following Saturday, and beach patrols most weekends. Ph. Phil Rhodes (03) 217 2757 or Lloyd Esler (03) 213 0404.





