



# Southern Bird

No. 15 September 2003. • ISSN 1175-1916

*Photographing New Zealand's  
beautiful birds*

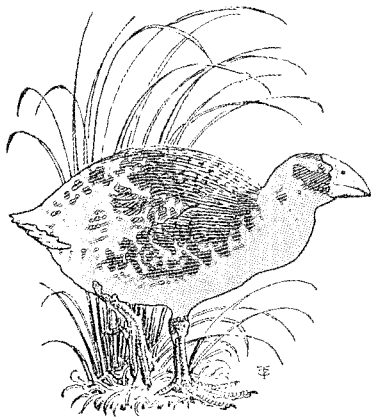
*Atlassing at the  
Wanganui AGM*

*Round the world  
albatross expedition*

*The Trials and tribulations  
of the Fairy Tern Breeding Season*

REGIONAL ROUNDUP • WHAT'S ON • BOOK REVIEW





# Southern Bird

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## Quotation

*The birds sit chattering in the thorn,  
A' day they fare but sparely;  
And lang's the night frae e'en to morn,  
I'm sure it's winter fairly.*

*From Up in the Morning Early  
written by Robbie Burns in 1788.*

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## Cover Photos

**Front cover:** Banded Dotterel, Gladstone Bridge, Wairarapa.

**Back cover:** New Zealand Dotterel, Miranda, Firth of Thames.

Both photos by Jason Elsworth. For more of his work see his article in this edition of Southern Bird.

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

## Unusual Heron near Balclutha

On 13th October 2002, we were visiting a friend at Inchclutha, near Balclutha, when a flock of 12 Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* landed in a paddock about 150 metres away, and began feeding amongst the cattle. On checking through them with a telescope, we came across another bird, superficially like a Reef Heron *Egretta sacra* but with a rufous neck. We watched the bird for about 30 minutes, and took a description.

It was the same size as the Cattle Egrets, but had a very hunched posture and a more horizontal gait. The bill was longer, the forehead was not as steep, and it lacked the distinctive jowl of Cattle Egret. The entire neck was chestnut, the forecrown pale grey, and the rest of the plumage was dark bluish-grey. Plumages were visible on the back, breast, and back of head. The bill was lemon yellow, the iris yellow, and the legs dull yellow.

At this stage we fairly certain it was not a New Zealand species, and assumed that with its distinctive plumage it would be easy to pick out in an Australian field guide. However, Simpson and Day contained no such bird, so we looked further afield, but still could find no match. Reef Heron could be ruled out by the rufous neck and small size, not to mention the habitat. It was much too dark for a White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*, had the wrong bill colour, and again was too small. The size, and the fact that it was associating with Cattle Egrets, suggested the possibility of a melanistic Cattle Egret. Searches of the literature found only two such reports, of birds in India and Spain, both of which had more patchy plumage than this bird (*British Birds* 94:390-391; 95:531). Besides, the head and bill shape, as well as the general structure of the bird, suggested it was not a Cattle Egret.

When a photograph of the bird was posted on the internet (<http://www.wrybill-tours.com/idproblems/balcluthaheron.htm>), there were several suggestions for a hybrid, either between Reef Heron and Cattle Egret, or White-faced Heron and Cattle Egret. Hybridisation between herons is extremely rare (M Maddock *pers comm*), and the only reference we can find is to 3 instances of interbreeding between Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* in Spain (*British Birds* 94:382-386).

The identification problem seemed likely to remain unsolved when the bird was not seen after early December, when the accompanying Cattle Egrets had also departed. However, on 13th July 2003, we were looking through a group of White-faced Herons in the same general area where the mystery bird had been seen, and it was again present, though seen only briefly. One characteristic of the bird is that it has always been very flighty, and we were never able to approach as closely as on the initial occasion, hence only poor quality photographs have been obtained. It has subsequently not been seen accompanying Cattle Egrets, despite the fact that they have been present within 1km. It seems possible that it may have spent the summer and autumn of 2003 in the area, rather than returning to Australia with the Cattle Egrets.

After again publicising the bird on the Birding NZ email newsgroup, our attention was drawn to an almost identical bird which was seen at Darwin Sewage Works in Australia c.1986 (<http://www.users.bigpond.com/birdsnt/herons.htm>). The plumage on the Australian bird matched our bird exactly, the only obvious difference being that the bill was not as yellow. A number of other herons with similar plumage have been seen around Darwin over the last five years or so, and thought to have been possibly aberrant Pied Heron *Ardea picata*, or perhaps Pied/White-faced Heron hybrids. These, however, have a slightly different plumage, and distinctly different 'jizz' to the earlier Darwin bird, and to the Inchclutha bird. Unfortunately, the 1986 bird has still not been identified.

Hopefully, further photographs will be obtained in the near future. In the meantime, any views on the identity of this bird would be welcome.

**RICHARD and SUZANNE SCHOFIELD**

## Publisher

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# THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE FAIRY TERN BREEDING SEASON

The 2002-03 breeding season for the New Zealand population of the Fairy Tern was not as successful as in previous seasons but it wasn't all bad. Two chicks fledged from the six pairs that nested at Mangawhai and Waipu. This number is down from the eight chicks that fledged in 2001-02 – the best season since protection started in 1983-84 – but is better than no chicks fledging, as happened in 1996-97 following a summer of three tropical cyclones.

After a slow start to the breeding season, probably due to the cold spring, the birds then had a series of misfortunes to contend with – high tides, predation, abandonment and a severe storm. The first two nests of the season, both at Mangawhai, were lost to high tides and predation. Then one of the two first-time breeding pairs for this summer just gave up on incubating their egg and abandoned the nest. This was rather disappointing, as the male had been making attempts at breeding for the last three years, and we were pleased to see him finally have a nest.

At Waipu, one of the older breeding females disappeared within a couple of days of her first chick hatching, and although the male continued to feed the chick on his own, it too disappeared at a few days old. The second chick from this nest was cross-fostered to an infertile nest, but didn't survive a storm a week later. And after all that, with three nests due to hatch, a storm in early January wiped out all but the one nest at Mangawhai. Fortunately two chicks hatched from this remaining nest. The chicks fledged in early February, and by the end of February they had left their natal site with their parents.

There were several other good news events this season. There were two new pairs breeding, and, for the first time since 1994, three pairs

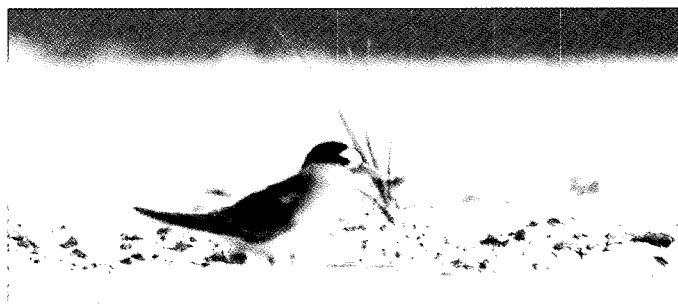


Photo: Katrina Hansen

attempted to breed at Waipu. Although no pairs bred at the South Kaipara this year, several pairs were seen hanging around at Pakiri on the east coast early in the breeding season and maybe will return to breed at this site in the future.

Although only two chicks fledged, the results over the last few years have been good. For three of the last five seasons the highest number of chicks fledged has been recorded since monitoring began: seven chicks for two seasons and eight chicks last season. This has resulted in double the number of chicks fledging over the last six years compared to the previous five.

And again this season a good-sized group of OSNZ volunteers helped the Department of Conservation with monitoring and protecting the Fairy Tern. Their help is invaluable in assisting with nest-minding, especially during periods of bad weather, talking to people on the beach and trying to keep track of the birds once they have left the breeding sites.

*So, overall the outlook for Fairy Terns is still promising, although it will be a long, hard road of on-going and hands-on protection.*

KATRINA HANSEN

## WAIRARAPA HONOURS

The Wairarapa region of the OSNZ was delighted to present certificates to Brian Boeson, Tenick Dennison and Colin Scadden to mark their long, dedicated service to the region. They have been instrumental in keeping the region very active over the past 15 years.

Their combined knowledge, expertise and patience have inspired us all to learn as much as we can about our feathered friends, whilst their sense of humour has made it great fun too.

*Thank you, gentlemen; we hope you will continue to do so for a long time to come.*

BETTY WATT



Photo: Ailsa Harrison

## THANKS FROM HAZEL AND TOM

It was great to see you all at Wanganui. Thanks to all participants for making it once again an excellent AGM and for putting in all those atlassing hours.

Collected from the YHA Wanganui, after all had departed, was a navy OS Guernsey jumper. If this is yours, either phone or email Hazel or Tom Harty so we can return it to you.

Many thanks to Nic Peet (DoC) who lent equipment for the scientific day and to Graeme Taylor who ably came to our rescue to organise a magic day for us with excellent speakers.

Please take this as our thanks to all (too many to name) that helped us in a great many ways.

HAZEL and TOM HARTY

Phone (09) 294 8334, email [hazel.tom.harty@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hazel.tom.harty@xtra.co.nz)

### OSNZ CONTACT DETAILS AND PERSONNEL CHANGES

Stuart Nicholson (Wellington RR) moved house a few months ago now – his new details are 15 Bruce Avenue, Brooklyn, Wellington 6002, phone 04 934 5940 (these were changed for the March edition of Notornis)

Phil Rhodes (Southland RR) now lives at 92 Marama Avenue, R.D. 9, Otatara, Invercargill, phone 03 213 1228

Brent Stephenson (Webmaster) has moved back to Hawke's Bay, and is living at 35 Te Aute Road, Havelock North, phone 06 877 6388.

Gillian Pollock (CSN Convenor South Island) has moved to Dawson Road, R.D. 1, Upper Moutere 7152, phone 03 540 3495, and has changed email details to [gillian.pollock@xtra.co.nz](mailto:gillian.pollock@xtra.co.nz)

The regional recorder for the Nelson region is Don Cooper, 1/26 William Street, Richmond, Nelson, phone 03 544 8109, email [doncooper@actrix.co.nz](mailto:doncooper@actrix.co.nz), and not as per the June edition of Southern Bird.



# AGM minutes 2003

**Minutes of the 64th Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand held at the Wanganui RSA, St Hill Street, Wanganui on Sunday 1st June 2003 at 8 pm.**

The President (David Medway) welcomed the 80 members present.

**Apologies:** Biz Bell, Brian Bell, Sue Bell, Ben Bell, Peter Bull, Connie & Alan Wright, Betty Seddon, Keith Owen, Rod Orange, Russell Thomas, Katrina Hansen, Louise Foord, Zoe Clifford, Lorna Simpkin.

*Moved that apologies be accepted*

Hazel Harty/Stella Rowe Carried

**Deaths of members:** Stewart Lauder, Pauline Mayhill, Norman Mackenzie, Sir E.J. Somers, Kaj Westerskov and Miss D.A. White have passed away since the last AGM. A period of silence was observed in their memory.

**Previous minutes:** *Moved that the minutes of the 63rd AGM held at Hokitika on 1 June 2002 as published in September 2002 Southern Bird be accepted*

Mark Nee/John Rowe Carried

There were no matters arising from those minutes.

**President's report:** *Moved that the President's report as distributed to members present be accepted.*

David Medway/David Crockett Carried

There were no matters arising from that report.

The President made reference to the late arrival of the society's publications. Moves have been made to ensure that the June publications would be available to members by early July at latest. The new editors of both *Notornis* and *Southern Bird* have settled well into their positions. He remarked on his thanks to both Richard Holdaway and Tony Crocker for their editorial roles over the years.

Applauded.

The President also noted that two councillors are to be co-opted to Council, which is looking carefully at options.

**Treasurer's report:** *Moved that the Treasurer's report as distributed to members present be accepted.*

Mark Nee/Kerry-Jayne Wilson Carried

The Treasurer made reference to the fact that the 15% subscription increase as proposed in the notice of motion published in March 2003 *Southern Bird* would now be considered at the 2004 AGM, due to the unconstitutional amount of notice that the late posting of the March publications had occasioned.

The Treasurer also thanked Chris Robertson for his role in securing atlasing funding from the Department of Conservation. He also thanked in particular Hazel and Tom Harty for their assistance in prompt and accurate financial reporting.

Moved that John Mallinson Limited be re-appointed as auditor.

Mark Nee/Tom Harty Carried

## Notices of Motion:

Three notices of motion intended for consideration in relation to subscription increases, a constitutional amendment and the date of AGMs were not considered due to the late posting of the March publications as referred to above. The constitution states that such notices shall be posted to all members at least 40 days prior to the date of the AGM. The Notices of Motion will therefore be considered at the 2004 AGM.

## Presentation of awards:

Meritorious Service Awards were presented to Don Geddes, Colin Hill and the late Dick Jackson. Nick Allen accepted the awards on behalf of the nominees.

Applauded

## General Business:

Chris Robertson asked the President for a run-down on the recent Council meeting, referring in particular to funding secured from DoC for the atlas project as part of biodiversity funding. The President did so, and also moved an expression of gratitude to Chris Robertson for negotiating the funding.

David Medway/Mark Nee Carried and applauded.

David Lawrie advised that a strategic and business plan for the Society is being developed by Council, and that the membership will be consulted on the future direction of the Society in due course.

The President proposed a vote of thanks to Chris Robertson for organising the AGM and Conference atlasing day, and for all his work on the atlas project.

David Medway/Kathy Barrow Applauded.

The President proposed a vote of thanks to Graeme Taylor for organising the AGM and Conference scientific day.

David Medway/Kerry-Jayne Wilson Applauded.

The President proposed a vote of thanks to Tom and Hazel Harty for attending to the AGM and Conference arrangements once again.

Bev Woolley/Rosemary Heather Applauded.

The President advised that the 2004 Annual General Meeting and Conference will be held in Otago, probably based in Oamaru.

Ian Saville expressed his regret that there were only 4 twitchathon entries in 2002 despite the magnificent trophy, which is awarded to the winning team. There were however two teams with school-age children. Ralph Powlesland's team won the award with the best effort to date of 89 species in 24 hours. Stephen Sharp accepted the award on the team's behalf.

There being no further business the President thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 8.48 pm.

## FUNDING TO ASSIST ATLASSING IN REMOTE AREAS.

A study of the atlas coverage maps indicates that there are a number of remote areas, often without direct road access that will require special efforts to obtain adequate coverage. The Society has agreed that some funding will be available to assist special access into remote areas during the remainder of the atlas project.

Applications which involve specific use of limited helicopter time for delivery and recovery of an atlas team, or special vehicle hire, for remote squares not previously accessed will receive priority. The team leader and applicant will need to be an OSNZ member with previous atlasing experience.

Written proposals listing the planned season(s) and squares to be visited (check [www.bird.org.nz](http://www.bird.org.nz) for the gaps) with a summary of the areas within the squares, length of time for trip, and a funding quotation for the helicopter or vehicle assistance requested (copy to be enclosed with application) should be forwarded for consideration to:

**The Atlas Convenor, P O Box 12397, Wellington.**

Please allow four weeks for a decision on your application – don't leave applying till the last minute.

**C J R ROBERTSON**



# BIRD DISTRIBUTION ATLAS 1999–2004

## August 2003 update

The AGM in Wanganui provided a welcome opportunity to present an update of the Atlas progress to members and to spend the field days exploring the environs of the Wanganui and Manawatu regions. The June update report written at that time was not included in the June Southern Bird due to shortage of space. However, a copy may be found on the website at [www.bird.org.nz](http://www.bird.org.nz)

A steady flow of completed sheets continues to arrive at the Atlas office with the tally (at the end of July) now up to 19950 sheets since the commencement of the scheme. The number of observers has levelled off, with the number of registered individuals or teams at about 720. There is an interesting mix of people; some of whom have covered vast areas while others continue to demonstrate that there are interesting patterns to be found by looking at a small area on a regular basis.

At the AGM I reported on 17850 (10489 last year) sheets processed to the end of the stage one data entry. This is principally the data at the top of the sheet giving, observer, location, effort and number of species seen for the sheet. At that time 94% (75%) of the country's squares had had at least one record sheet returned, and the average number of species per sheet continued to be 19. However, the aim of the project is to cover the country seasonally and there is still some way to go to ensure a good coverage for each season: **summer** 5201 (3466) sheets, 2143 (1657) squares, 67% (53%) coverage; **autumn** 3903 (2116), 1750 (1161), 55% (37%); **winter** 4411 (2468), 1767 (1186), 56% (38%); **spring** 4321 (2434), 1932 (1307), 61% (42%). Naturally the coverage in summer is the highest as there has been an extra summer of fieldwork done compared with the other seasons.

We are still receiving earlier material that was recorded from 1999–2002, which is good, but it helps people to plan their coverage if material is sent in as soon as it is completed and gaps are filled in on the updated maps on the website. If you have sent material for the first time to RRs or other recorders, and have not had a registration number from the Atlas office, it means that the material has not been received by the Atlas office as yet. The office is now in a position to be able to send a listing of squares completed and received so far for individual observers. This can enable you to check against your own records. Please use this facility sparingly.

Nicky Sinclair joined the Atlas team from February 2003, and will be responsible for the entry of all the habitat and species data into the database to join the location and observer stage one data being entered as the sheets are received by Derek Batcheler. I am pleased to be able to report that the Society has obtained funding from the Terrestrial and Freshwater Biodiversity Information System Programme of the Department of Conservation which will cover the costs of the data entry of the complete atlas field data between now and mid 2005. This very welcome contribution ensures that now the tests of the database entry system are completed, the entries can continue without interruption. By the end of July 8500 of the field sheets received were already entered, with a possible total of 30000 being projected for the complete 5 years of the atlas programme.

Additionally, the Department of Conservation has agreed that for the final five seasons of the Atlas field work, all Conservancies will be encouraged to have their field staff participate in the challenging role of filling remote gaps and any under-reported areas of their districts. We hope that this will be a very significant addition to the sterling efforts that Society members and friends have provided to date. At least one of the Fish and Game Societies has also undertaken to do the same for their district. Local RRs and members should liaise with their DoC Conservancy co-ordinators (get the names from Graeme Taylor – phone (04) 479 3899 email [gtaylor@actrix.gen.nz](mailto:gtaylor@actrix.gen.nz)) to ensure that the best level of co-operation is achieved.

The Atlas office also wishes to acknowledge the considerable effort being provided by Stuart Nicholson as the chief chaser-up of errors on your sheets – especially those that have managed to locate their observations far from land. He has offered a voluntary service to assist people with their locations especially for remote places where maps may be hard to obtain. He can be contacted at [nicholson@paradise.net.nz](mailto:nicholson@paradise.net.nz) – but remember that this is a voluntary service. A grid map of the country, from which you can check your grid location and reference number can be found online at the website.

Pasi Hyvonen has regrettably returned to Europe where he hopes to find a job in Britain, but managed to produce the March quarterly maps

before he left. Andrew Grant and the DoC office in Christchurch took up the mapping challenge for June at short notice and the next quarterly maps will be on the website by the end of September. All previous maps are also archived on the website so that you can see the progression of coverage.

Some simple questions tell us that 71 species is still the record for those recorded on one sheet, though the same observer has now recorded a 70. Some 144 (87) have more than 50 species. At the other end there are a few sheets where there are zero species recorded, even though a significant search was made of the habitat. This absence of a bird record is equally important. Some 58% of the sheets returned have been part lists while 60% of sheets record the time spent as less than 3 hours for the sheet.

You will be able to see from the March 2003 *Southern Bird* and the website [www.bird.org.nz](http://www.bird.org.nz) that there are still some significant parts of the country which have yet to have any serious atlassing. With only one more 'atlassing' AGM to come it is obvious that this will not be able to fill all significant gaps. Increasingly you should be looking for ways to assist those areas that have few members with the task of covering their patch. **There will be some 'Expedition funds' available from the Society for assisting some trips to really remote spots.** (See separate note for details). Some groups have been organising themselves to visit specific blank spots – like last summer's trips round the East Cape. This sort of planning provides a great opportunity to have some good birding in a new area with an opportunity to enjoy the company of other ornithologists.

Interestingly, the top 15 observers or teams have returned 45% (43%) of the records to date. Barry Hartley leads the sheets score with 1180 sheets while Nick Allen is close behind on 1125, being the first to return over 1000 sheets. Stella and John Rowe in their 'mapping campervan' have increased their squares tally to 582 (290), but have been overtaken by Ted Wnorowski who leads with 710 (258). The coverage maps for some observers demonstrate a remarkable amount of ornithological travelling and observing.

As indicated earlier the average number of birds per sheet remains at 19, but Ted Wnorowski leads the field in the top 15 observers with an average of 33 (36) species per sheet for all his records returned so far. With 31620 individual species records he is clearly a dedicated observer fossicking about in all the different habitats to cover the bird fauna.

During September, Brent Stephenson will load the latest Atlas Scheme material onto the Society's atlas website ([www.bird.org.nz](http://www.bird.org.nz)) where you will continue to be able to see regular updates of the coverage maps as well as instructions for participating in the atlas scheme. The seasonal and total coverage maps presented at the AGM will be found there. The next update of maps will occur about January 2004.

Included on the website since April are a series of maps relating to individual species – initially Silvereyes and White-fronted terns – to show the growth of the atlas as the species information is entered into the database. For interest we will add new species each quarter until the completion of the field data collection. There were no new maps loaded in June due to changes in the mapping process. However, in September there will be various additional species including New Zealand Pigeon, New Zealand Pipit, Robin, Bellbird and Grey Warbler. **Please send your suggestions for future species that you would like to see mapped. They should preferably be widespread, rather than confined to one small area.**

Check the website to see where you need to go when you want to do something different. **Remember, if there are less than five sheets for any square it has not yet received enough coverage. Also, if the maximum number of species per sheet for a square is less than 15, then the area usually needs to have some additional work. THERE ARE ONLY FIVE MORE SEASONS UNTIL THE END OF THE FIELD DATA COLLECTION. THIS IS THE TIME FOR MAXIMUM EFFORT TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OF COMPREHENSIVE AND COMPLETE COVERAGE.**

Any questions, requests for instructions, or extra observation forms, should be addressed to the ATLAS CONVENOR, P O BOX 12397, WELLINGTON, email [100244.1012@compuserve.com](mailto:100244.1012@compuserve.com).

C J R ROBERTSON



# MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARDS

Well-deserved Meritorious Service Awards were presented at the Annual General Meeting in Wanganui on 1 June 2003 to **Don Geddes**, **Colin Hill** and the late **Dick Jackson** in recognition of their meritorious services in furtherance of the objects of the Society. Their individual citations in support of the awards read as follows:

## Don Geddes

Don Geddes is one of those members who work quietly in the background and don't attract attention, yet who make a valuable contribution to OSNZ objectives. Since joining OSNZ about 1969, Don, along with Ray Pierce, completed the initial detailed surveys of Lake Ellesmere in the late 1970s-early 1980s that encouraged the level of surveys that have continued since. In addition, he has organised the annual mid-winter surveys of the Ashburton Lakes since 1980 and has been involved in, usually annual, counts of riverbed birds in mid- and south Canterbury since the late 1970s. All these long-term surveys have proved an invaluable resource in consent hearings. Don's long-term commitment to OSNZ field surveys makes him a worthy nominee for the Society's Meritorious Service Award.

## Colin Hill

Colin's knowledge of Lake Ellesmere has proved of great value to local and overseas birdwatchers and has contributed to the scientific study of migratory wading bird movements. Over many years, he has

organised innumerable counts and surveys of the lakeshore, and has contributed valuable data to OSNZ publications. He has also constructed areas of wetland bird habitat on his adjoining property. The numbers and variety of rare birds seen at the lake has swelled considerably due to Colin's careful observation and identification. He always gives his time freely to those people keen enough to face the rigours of Ellesmere's lakeshore.

## Dick Jackson

As Canterbury RR in the 1960s and 1970s, Dick Jackson encouraged many junior members by passing on his vast knowledge of birds. He was a good, patient teacher – no question was too silly. He helped with all the projects of the day – filling in vast holes in coverage for the first Atlas, studies of Red-billed Gulls and Robins at Kaikoura, braided river surveys, studying petrels in the mountains of the West Coast, and swimming across to Crown Island off Banks Peninsula to check seabirds. His main work, however, was studying Kea in the Arthur's Pass area, where for many years he visited their nests, virtually leaping about the area like a mountain goat. Dick was a very individual kind of guy. He wore the same tattered pair of shorts, and boots without socks. His loss, on the return leg of a trip to Big Bay, was a sad day for all.

DAVID MEDWAY  
President

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Do you know anyone who has selflessly helped the OSNZ or its objectives? These awards are one opportunity to officially recognise this person, and for the Society to thank them.

The person need not be a member, and need not even reside in New Zealand. Posthumous nominations are also welcomed. The person can even receive more than one Meritorious Service Award, though they need to be for different services to the Society.

The award is conferred for service furthering the objects of the OSNZ. These are:

- To encourage, organise and promote the study of birds and their habitat use
- To foster and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds
- To promote the recording and wide circulation of the results of bird studies and observations
- To produce a journal and any other publication containing matters of ornithological interest
- To effect co-operation and exchange of information with other like organisations

- To assist the conservation and management of birds by providing information, from which sound management decisions can be derived
- To maintain a library of ornithological literature for the use of members and to promote a wider knowledge of birds
- To promote the archiving of observations, studies and records of birds
- To carry out any other activity which is capable of being conveniently carried out in connection with the above objects, or which directly or indirectly advances those objects

A maximum of five Meritorious Service Awards can be made every year. Nomination is easy. Simply write a citation of **not more than 100 words** on one side of an A4 sheet setting out the achievements of the person nominated, and include the signatures of two members of the Society.

The closing date for nominations is 31st December 2003.

They should be sent to:

**The Awards Secretary, OSNZ, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington**

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL for 2004

This year I am trying out a new method of sending out renewal forms. Those of you who have agreed to accept the renewal form by email should have already received your personalised form through email. Everyone else should receive their renewal form with this issue of *Notornis* and *Southern Bird*.

If you have not received a form and you joined OSNZ before 1st July 2003, please let me know and I will send you a copy.

If you joined OSNZ after 1st July 2003, you will receive a renewal notice in December or January.

## NEW MEMBERS AND DONATIONS

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

Doug Arthur, Sue Chesterfield, Igor Debski, Tania Dewitt, G L Don, David Farncombe, Ross Galbreath, Alexander Henshaw, David Hindley, Warren Jowett, Chris Lalas, Rob Lawrence, Allan McKenzie, Mary McKenzie, Caroline Parker, Margaret Pasco, Tom Pasco, Hilstrun Ratz, Matt Rayner, Wendy Rayner, Murray Reid, Danielle Shanahan, John Sich, Ilka Soehle, Sue Stubenvoll, Grant Timlin, Victoria University of Wellington, Barbara White.

We also thank the following members for their generous donations to the Society: G L Don (Bioresearches), Caroline Parker

**ROGER SHARP - Membership Secretary**



# EIGHT ESCAPE TO THE CAPE

That Lothario of OSNZ event organising – Tom Harty – along with his partner in punch lines, Hazel, gathered a ragbag bunch of members from Auckland, South Auckland and Waikato to assist atlassing the East Cape region. Nora & Robert Peachman, the Hartys, Stella & John Rowe, Betty Seddon and I assembled at Tirohanga Beach to plan this exciting expedition to the great dustbowl of backcountry Eastland.

So, armed with *Flying Starts* and *Southern Birds* for publicity purposes, day one saw us up the valleys of Waimana, and Waiaua. Reports of Blue Duck in the Waimana recently being banded by DoC were encouraging, and Robins, Tomtits and Kereru were seen.

Day two was time for the hairstyles to be altered – jet-boating on the Motu! The river was very low, so we could only atlas up so far. Even then, we heard and saw many bush birds, with good views of Kereru, Tui and the more common species. The return journey was notable for jet-boating in ankle deep water, and Nora's wasp sting. This is the reward for insisting on sitting in the front, Nora! Tom's toenail endured a near-detachment so he was banished to the back seat, and came in for some serious drenching during the final jet pirouette. That saved on his washing for a few days. My car keys were taken by the tide at dusk and things start looking a little rotten for me – the second set was in Hamilton.

Te Kaha was covered thoroughly on day three, with the Peachmans coastwatching and the rest of us swimming – ah, birdwatching, at Whanarua Bay. Te Araroa beckoned on day four, and despite the indignation of a pig dog hanging off my calf muscle briefly at

Raukokore, things were progressing well. I needed a few tipples of Tom's cherry brandy after that encounter.

Betty picked up a French guy, Pierre, from Reunion Island, who had dinner with us, and intrigued us all with stories of his island home. Our time wasn't spent just socialising – we were doing the yards! Lottin Point, Te Kumi Station, and the bits in between had us all spotting shags, bush birds and hearing crakes and Fernbirds in the vicinity.

Day five saw Betty come to her senses and romp off home with Pierre – nice one Betty. I did a few inland valleys, while the Hartys caught up with more dust on the inland 4WD routes. The Rowes and Peachmans sprang through Te Puia Springs, Tikitiki, Ruatoria and Tokomaru Bay.

Patterns emerging slowly include few bush birds and more water birds, and birds present more in the morning and evenings. The nature of the squares south of East Cape saw us all staying at different locales that night. Like bats huddling for company on a cold slimy cave ceiling, the next day five of us reassembled at Tolaga Bay. Obviously sick of the sight and smell of us, the Hartys had cleared off back inland – I'll remember the Brut next time, Tom!

Day six saw Cook's Cove, Poroporo River and the area through to Gisborne thoroughly gone over. Poroporo River Valley had Spotless Crakes, while Fernbirds kept silent except for a very few spots.

That night we reunited at Waikanae Beach at Gisborne, and local talent Ivan Blair prepared us for the final day's activities: Waipaoa River Mouth. The Hartys, Ivan and I were walking down a disused railway track

towards the river's rail bridge when a loud and painfully unmistakable train whistle sounded.

At this stage I had visions of running across the bridge with my binos knocking my teeth out gunning for the other side. Fortunately, the train was slow, and we had time to depart the bridge before the excursion train swept by – there were quite a few carriages on the historic train trip, so it wouldn't have had time to stop for us.

Safely on our way, our journey was again interrupted by a jigger motoring through our midst, scattering telescopes and cameras. High risk bird watching indeed, yet what results! Pacific Golden Plover, Wrybill, and 30 species of birds were seen that day, a fitting conclusion to our combined journey.

We all went our separate ways after that, promising to keep in touch, but knowing we probably wouldn't. Whoops, sorry, wrong ending. Yes, we all separated and scattered like a dropped fruitcake on a polyurethaned parquet floor: the Peachmans gorging back through the Waioeka; the Rowes repairing to a high country station out the back of Motu; the Hartys completing the Motu Road, I hope – haven't seen them since; and me winding my way back through Wairoa and Waikaremoana.

A major undertaking by the Hartys led to a fantastic trip, full of activities and adventures, and to them I tip my hat. A round of thanks to both of you from all of us. The weather was consistently in the high 20s for the entire time and no rain fell on our parade. I challenge others with gaps in their atlas ranges to do the same before the project ends.

PAUL CUMING

## OTAGO ATLAS CAMP

The Otago region of OSNZ ran a further atlas camp over the Anzac Day weekend. We have found this to be a good way to get a group of people together to cover a large amount of ground quickly in this ongoing task. By checking the season's map to see where there is a large enough gap in coverage, we decide on a location for a weekend's activities. Squares coming and going from home can also be surveyed.

This time two carloads stayed in Gore, and by the end of three days had filled in sheets for 42 squares. Twenty-three of the squares were in eastern Southland, 19 in Otago, and 39 had no previous autumn records.

Blackbird and Starling were seen in 41 squares, Harrier in 40, Magpie and Redpoll in 39, Song Thrush in 33, and Chaffinch in 32. The maximum number of species in any one square was 28, and the minimum eight. A grand total of 43 species were seen. A New Zealand Falcon was seen on each day (in three different squares).

Incidentally, a few days later on 12th May, near the Milburn lime quarry, a falcon was observed being chased for several minutes by a flock of hundreds of small birds, mostly Redpolls. Two Harriers were also in the vicinity.

LOUISE FOORD

## SIT STUDENTS AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

The School for International Training (SIT) is a US-based educational organisation that runs study abroad programmes for third year university students in over 50 countries around the world. SIT's New Zealand programme, based at the University of Waikato, focuses on biodiversity, conservation and management of threatened or endangered species, and human impacts in New Zealand.

If you are conducting field research and would like assistance in your study, or if you would like to design a study in which one of our students could participate, please contact us as we may be able to provide a field worker for your study. Projects can be short-term (i.e. for the length of the fieldwork period), or long-term (in which successive students over multiple semesters help to collect data for a longer study). Generally, the periods of time available to our students are from mid-April to mid-May and from mid-November to mid-December of each year.

If you have any further questions about the ISP or about our programme in New Zealand, would like to receive a list of previous projects, or if you have a particular research project in mind, please contact the School for International Training at:

**Todd Nachowitz, Academic Director, Biodiversity and Conservation Programme, Alumni House, University of Waikato,  
Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.  
office: 07-838-4792, fax: 07-838-4545, e-mail: sitnz@waikato.ac.nz**





# PHOTOGRAPHING NEW ZEALAND'S *beautiful birds*

**B**ird photography certainly presents a challenge and at times it can be very frustrating, but when it all comes right and you capture a beautiful image then all these frustrations are suddenly forgotten. It is also a great excuse, if you need one, to spend more time with New Zealand's wonderful birds. Birds are amazing creatures, they are always doing something interesting and most of all they are often breathtakingly beautiful. It is this beauty, instead of just a "record shot", that I try to capture in my photography.

Apart from capturing this beauty, the other reason I am passionate about bird photography is that I feel it can play a part in conservation. How much of a part is difficult to say, and I think the potential is sometimes exaggerated, but if just one person sees a picture of a bird I have taken and is prompted to take an active part in conservation, then who knows what could happen.

There is much that can be said about bird photography technique and equipment, but as space is limited I will get down to the bottom line – finding some birds and then getting close enough to them.

To be a good bird photographer you first of all need a sound knowledge of birds, their behaviour and where to find them. This, I hope, shouldn't be much of a problem for OSNZ members!

However, not all good 'birding' locations are necessarily good bird photography spots. The beginner bird photographer will quickly discover one thing, birds are small and you need to get closer than you thought – much closer than with a scope or binoculars. Even with a 500mm lens and a teleconverter you will often need to get within six or seven metres of a bird if you aren't going to be saying 'is that dot on my film a bird?'

To get within close range it is important to remember that not all locations are the same. It helps a lot if you can find a place where birds are accustomed to people, for example on beaches where people regularly walk.

When I was first trying to photograph oystercatchers I just couldn't get close enough, but a chance afternoon walk on Petone beach

showed me that here the birds were used to early morning walkers and allowed a much closer approach than the other places I had tried. A few days later I was there early in the morning, sitting at the water's edge and waiting for feeding birds to wander past. The early morning light was perfect and I was able to make some nice images.



*Pied Shag*

It also helps if you can find just the right bird. As all birders know some birds just seem to like people and allow a much closer approach than do others of the same species. During my last visit to Miranda there was a very tame Pied Shag perched opposite the local fish and chip shop. It allowed me to approach as close as I wanted to, change lenses and set up my flash. All the time it never moved an inch.

You don't, however, have to travel away from home to take good bird photographs. Last year I set up a small feeding table in my back

garden, put out some fruit for the Silvereyes and just set up my camera close to the table – no hide needed. After a few evenings I had some nice Silvereye pictures, one of which will shortly be featured on the front cover of an American textbook on evolution.

Silvereyes seem to allow a very close approach, but this isn't the case with many birds. Recently I have started to use a hide more and more. Here location becomes even more important. Once you are in the hide, if you aren't in the right place then you are in for a long and lonely wait. Whilst out and about I am always on the look out for places where birds hang out. If the place is tidal then I visit the day before to see where the high tide point is going to be. Then the next morning I arrive, set up near the high tide point and wait for the water to come in and for the birds to arrive.

I was recently tucked away in my hide when I heard some footsteps outside. I thought it might be an inquisitive member of the public, so I took a peek, only to find myself almost face to face with a heron that had wandered to within a metre of my hide.

Whether using a hide or not I am always on the look out for new locations for bird photography, and I never discount a spot until I have checked it out myself. For example there is a small lake in Paraparaumu where I expected to find only a few Mallards. Instead I found New Zealand Dabchicks and Scaup in good numbers and have returned a number of times trying to get the right shot.

I also always try to check out every possible spot at a location, as you never know where the birds will be. I have visited Waikanae and Paraparaumu many times on photography trips, but, as there are many possible locations, I have only recently been to some of them. My last find was that a large group of White-fronted Terns were spending all day flying back and forth along the edge of the beach, leaving to feed and then returning to the group. This allowed for endless opportunities to practice the tricky art of photographing birds in flight – especially tough with small, fast-flying species like the White-fronted Tern.

Even at a good bird photography location you are going to need to use all your skills to



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get as close as possible, and the two keys to getting close are keep low and go slow. Keeping low can be achieved most easily by sitting down and shuffling along on your bottom. This technique isn't very stylish, but it is much less punishing on your knees than crawling, or moving forward on your haunches. You can also try crawling in on your stomach, 'commando style'. This works great with wading birds and also gives an interesting perspective to your final image. In general keeping low is usually much less intimidating to birds than just walking straight up to them.

The second key to getting closer is to go slowly, never making any rapid movements. The slow approach can mean it takes 30 minutes plus to get close to a bird and then, just when you are finally moving into position, the bird can fly off. Overall the best technique I have found for getting close to birds is to use the low and slow approach to get reasonably close - and then sit tight. If you sit in one place eventually the birds will often get used to you and start to come closer and closer.



*New Zealand Scaup - Male, Waikanae*

Whatever technique you use, the most important factor to remember when approaching birds is that you should never place getting the photograph you want ahead of the welfare of your subject. If in any doubt, stop and slowly and carefully retreat.

Bird photography is a large subject and to learn more I would highly recommend that you read *The Art of Bird Photography* by Arthur Morris. It is by far the best book I have found on the subject. The two websites [www.photo.net](http://www.photo.net) and [www.naturephotographers.net](http://www.naturephotographers.net) are also excellent sources of information. Finally I have recently posted an article on how to photograph New Zealand's beautiful birds on my website.

**JASON ELSWORTH**



*Pied Stilt - Miranda, Firth of Thames, December*



*Fantail - Gladstone Bridge, Wairarapa, September*

*All photos by the author*



# ROUND THE WORLD ALBATROSS EXPEDITION SETS SAIL

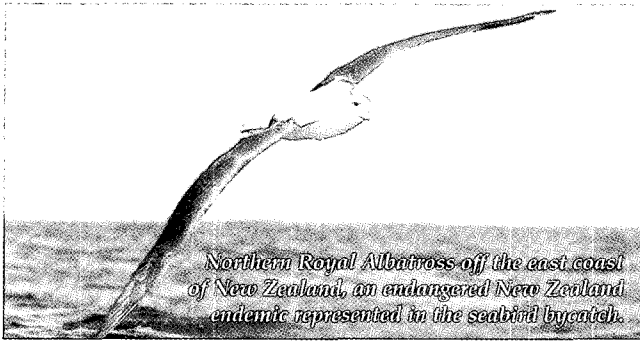


Photo: Brent Stephenson

One of Britain's most experienced sailors is to take on the pirate fishing fleets responsible for the deaths of thousands of seabirds every year. John Ridgway, aged 65, set sail from his home in north-west Scotland on Sunday 27 July 2003 with his crew, which includes his wife Marie-Christine. This saw the start of a yearlong expedition, aboard *English Rose VI*, to report and film illegal fishing operations that are impacting heavily on the marine environment.

The expedition aims to highlight the plight of albatrosses and other seabirds that are killed as the bycatch of fisheries. It also plans to publicise the other threats that these species are facing at their breeding grounds and at sea. Part of the plan, whilst highlighting the huge environmental problems that pirate fisheries are causing, is also to show how effectively well managed and regulated boats can fish without a real bycatch problem.

Much of the voyage, broken into seven legs stopping at several major ports, will be filmed for several BBC documentaries. As well as this the boat is equipped with satellite communications from which a daily log is posted to a website hosted by the BBC's H2G2 interactive site. The web address is <http://www.savethealbatross.org>. As the boat heads through the Southern Ocean, a daily sightings log of birds seen will be maintained, and also posted to this website.

Each leg highlights the predicament of different albatross species. Sailing via the Canary Islands to Cape Town, the boat will then track east in the Southern Ocean, following the westerly-wind driven route of the Wandering albatross. This will take the expedition to Melbourne and then to Wellington, and on to Port Stanley in the Falklands, South Georgia and Gough Island - which lies in mid-Atlantic 1,600 miles off the South African coast - before returning to London from Cape Town, next July. On each leg volunteers have been selected to help with day to day running of the boat, and to provide assistance and expertise.

Another New Zealander, Carol Knutson, from Forest and Bird, and myself have been lucky enough to be selected as part of this volunteer crew. Carol will participate in the Melbourne to Wellington leg, whilst I will start from Wellington and leave the boat at the Falklands. The boat aims to arrive in Wellington in mid-December 2003, and should receive a lot of national media attention. A lot of hard work is being put into creating as much publicity as possible for the whole voyage. It is hoped that through public awareness and pressure the goal of having pirate fisheries closed down may become a realistic one.

Perhaps more extraordinary, is the fact that the Ridgways are conducting this entire expedition unsponsored. The voyage has the support of BirdLife International's 'Save the Albatross' campaign, and BirdLife's global network of bird conservation organisations (Forest and Bird is the New Zealand partner). However, they are receiving no financial sponsorship in an effort to make this voyage independent and free to pursue their own course. A pretty amazing effort by a pretty amazing couple!

For more information, check out the website <http://www.savethealbatross.org> and Forest and Bird's website at <http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/Marine/albatross.asp>. This voyage is relying on public involvement so please take a look at the websites and get involved.

**BRENT STEPHENSON**

# REVIEW OF THE WANGANUI AGM, QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND 2003

Arriving in Wanganui from Hamilton, another riverside city, gives instant shades of déjà vu. However, seeing a Royal Spoonbill lazing away the high tide morning seems startlingly different.

The accommodation proved a combination of comfort, convenience and ten Hail Mary's. Actually, the St. Joseph's convent was most relaxing, and proved that again, Tom and Hazel Harty had outdone themselves. The hostel created a most enduring memory for one member, who was born in the very building.

The Scientific Day provided, in a nutshell, what superb ornithological work has been carried out with 'our' birds. From local DoC representatives, to long serving members of the Society, we were treated to talks that ranged from the diets of native birds at an Auckland bush reserve (fantastic use of PowerPoint), to benthic surveys of Golden Bay. The value of these days is never to be underestimated - my most serious point in this piece. There is nothing like a little hard data to liven up a conversation, and while some were a little at the mercy of the technology - how many gigabytes was that presentation Rob? - And time - you were framed, Phil! - The day was a success on all fronts.

Speaking of fronts, Saturday's weather did not prevent the field trip, which was efficiently assigned by the ever-organised Chris Robertson. Assignments stretched out towards the heart of Wanganui District, and some ended up at Jerusalem. Others were 'randomly' rewarded with easier assignments, and were distinguished at the end of the day by how much of the countryside remained on their vehicles.

The bigger picture on bird distribution in the Wanganui district was now nearly complete. The Monday activities included a repeat of Saturday's atlas squares, as the season had moved to winter from autumn. The morning started with a mass gathering of seabird experts to identify Salvin's or Antarctic Prions. How long people stayed to watch hinged on whether or not they had breakfast prior to the prions getting presented. The jury was still 'out' at the time of press, presumably because of the deadly aroma. How Hugh Clifford drove down with them from Hamilton was a mystery...

Acknowledgements must go to the Hartys, who, if there was a diploma in conference organising, would pass with honours, and to Chris Robertson, who ably delved into the candy to reward our bird watching feats, whilst coming up with multifaceted categories for the successful teams.

**PAUL CUMING**



Alan Tennyson measuring prions to identify them

Photo: Bev Woolley



# BOOK REVIEW

**Watling, Dick. 2001.** *A Guide to the Birds of Fiji and Western Polynesia.* Environmental Consultants (Fiji) Ltd., Suva. ISBN 982-9047-01-06. 272pp. Hardback, A5, 16 colour plates, 9 maps.

This fine book on the birds of the South Pacific nations lying immediately north of New Zealand is a very welcome addition to the literature of the region.

The book is based on Dick Watling's 1978 *Birds of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa*, but has been completely reformatted and updated, and the geographical coverage has expanded to include the widely scattered atoll nations of Tuvalu and Tokelau, the small island nation of Niue, and the French territory of Wallis and Futuna. This almost doubling of the geographical spread does not add many extra species to the 172 species already covered, but now provides a complete overview of the avifauna of Western Polynesia.

The South Pacific region has the dubious distinction of having both the highest ratios of endangered bird species per hectare of land, and per person. It is therefore not surprising that a specific objective of the book, published with assistance from the Avifauna Conservation Project of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, is to encourage the conservation of birds in the region.

A whole chapter is devoted to identifying past and present threats, the prehistoric and historic extinctions, the precarious state of many of the remaining bird populations, and the priority conservation needs. Conservation significance is a heading in each of the species accounts, and a useful tool is the depiction of the major threats to each endangered species as a simple line drawing of a rat, felled tree, hunter, etc.

As part of the publishing arrangements, copies of the book have been distributed free to schools in the eight countries covered by the book. This will hopefully raise the ornithological knowledge and interest of Pacific Islanders, who in turn will put pressure on their communities and governments to face the considerable conservation challenges ahead.

Based on Dr. Watling's immense experience as a Pacific Island naturalist and environmental consultant, other features include an overview chapter on the ornithology of the region, a guide to birding sites, an annotated list of unconfirmed or erroneous records of 22 additional species in the region, checklists, and a profile of each nation (including such things as geography, climate, GDP per capita, population and its growth rate, and environmental issues) along with a country map.

The 16 colour plates and 127 pages of text on the 172 species covered (including 54 endemic or near-endemic species) will allow the easy identification of most birds seen, especially the land birds, and provide interesting reading about their habits and general ecology.

The typescript is quite small, and I found the typeface used in all but the species accounts was difficult to read. I would have also preferred a larger gap between species accounts so that the box summarising the distribution across island groups more clearly lies with the previous species than with the heading immediately below.

I was disappointed that the 1970s plates were not revised along with the text, and so about 40 species miss out being depicted. The drawings are somewhat dated and of variable styles and quality, and some species are drawn at quite different scales on the same plate. The original Silktail drawing has been replaced by a photograph to better capture its stunning glossy plumage. A few species are mis-numbered (e.g. Mangrove Heron and Silvereye) probably as a result of cutting and pasting of the original plates.

My only other criticism is that the endpaper map equals the quality of those in Heather and Robertson's *Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*! However, the final endpapers, showing most species on a double page spread for quick reference, is a clever feature. Some of my criticisms are due no doubt to the worthy aim of keeping the price down, so that it can be distributed and used widely within the nations covered, and at \$NZ 40 for OSNZ members direct from the author at [watling@is.co.fj](mailto:watling@is.co.fj), or websites: [www.pacificbirds.com](http://www.pacificbirds.com) or [www.environmentfiji.com](http://www.environmentfiji.com), it is very good value for money.

I highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the birds of the South Pacific region, and in bird conservation in general. The region is crying out for bird conservation initiatives to help save the many endemic birds that are heading to join the already long list of species that have already been lost. I hope that this book will stimulate both Pacific Islanders and outsiders to face this critical conservation challenge.

**HUGH ROBERTSON**

## WESTLAND PETREL WOES

In 1988 the Westland Petrel south of Punakaiki, became the subject of a small tourism venture when my partner, Denise Howard, and I, operating under the banner of Paparoa Nature Tours, began offering tours to a sub-colony on our property.

Ardent conservationists, we designed a walkway and viewing shelter that fitted nicely into the forest without disturbing the petrels, their burrows or the forest itself, and over the next 10 years gave hundreds of visitors a unique natural history experience. Impacts on the petrels were kept to a minimum by catering only for small groups under strict control, along with a predator control programme targeting Weka (that were relocated elsewhere), stoats, cats, dogs, possums and goats.

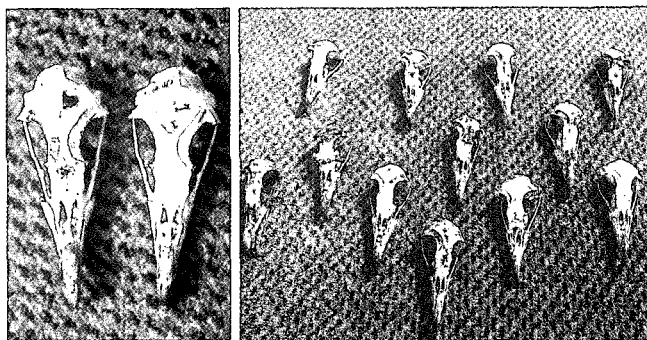
The tours certainly did not seem to have a negative impact, particularly given that burrows within a couple of metres of the viewing shelter regularly produced fledglings, and this was enhanced when I installed nest chamber boxes that were occupied by successful breeders. Indeed, over the next 10 years the annual fledgling numbers in the sub-colony increased from 39 to 57, a healthy sign for such a slow breeding bird.

The project was undertaken with the general idea that if, for some reason, the development or regular human presence caused a significant negative effect on the petrels, then the whole facility could be removed with little sign it had ever been there.

Over the years our efforts were held up as an example of how eco-tourism should work, winning the NZ Eco-Tourism Award, gaining highly commended in the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, and more recently being described by the Lincoln University tourism study 'Indicators of Acceptable Environmental Change' as the way forward.

However, many local people did not appreciate our outspoken environmental advocacy, and as a result in 1999 we moved house to Christchurch. With no suitable person available to run the tours the sub-colony was left as it was found, unattended, except for when I made the occasional visit to monitor the petrels' progress and run the odd tour.

We had always feared an attack by roaming dogs, and in 2000 dogs attacked our sub-colony, probably gaining easy access via the walkway, killing at least a dozen breeding adults (the number of dead birds later found). The dogs then proceeded to do more of the



Westland Petrel skulls

Photos: Bruce Stuart-Menteath

same throughout the Department of Conservation-administered part of the breeding grounds where many of the sub-colonies are not monitored closely.

Regardless of whether I was still there or not, I now believe that it was wishful thinking that such an attack could have been prevented. I could not guard the site constantly, or guarantee that the dog trap I had installed on the walkway would have caught the offenders, even if it had been set at the time. In addition, even if it was practicable, it was certainly not affordable for me to fence off the sub-colony.

**BRUCE STUART-MENTEATH**

# ATLASSING AT THE WANGANUI AGM

Once again the atlassing day on Saturday at the AGM provided an opportunity to cover an area new to many people and in the process provided a useful ornithological snapshot of the Wanganui and northern Manawatu regions. Some 65 people participated on the day, and even Council was persuaded to brush a little fresh air into added heads after their morning meetings. A total of 73 species were seen on the day, which is probably about 95% of the expected list for the area at that time of the year. Eighty squares were covered on the Saturday and a further 21 (some repeats in a new season) on Monday giving a total of 82 for the weekend. In all there were 153 record sheets returned for the weekend from 23 teams of observers who spent some 355 hours of combined observations and drove over 4500 kilometres.

The maximum number of species on a sheet for the day was 47 from the expected leading observer. The team leader had added Ted to the team on the basis that they must win the prize for the most species, unaware of the fact that the Convenor had applied a handicap of ten species. Even with the handicap a win was achieved. The maximum number of habitats accessed in one square was a very commendable 12. The annual atlas prize giving provided an element of humour and point scoring, and a challenge for the Convenor to find a good reason or story for again awarding a prize to every team. The Foreman team won the Memorial Trophy for the judged most unusual bird for the day – a Lesser Knot.

It seems to have become traditional for some team to endeavour to inflate their total with a decoy duck – however none have thus far

endeavoured to indicate which species of decoy is involved. The Hartys deserve special mention for their sterling efforts in arranging the venue and sustenance for the weekend, and managed to win the prize for the greatest number of squares covered in the shortest time and distance – clearly some cobwebs needed clearing! At the other end of the travel stakes were a team of south islanders who managed to cover 24 squares in one day (20 outside the designated area) and 454 kilometres. Clearly the pilot did not realise he was in a car and not a plane so deservedly won the dinosaur trophy for road kill. Some of the more interesting observations for the day were a nearly completely black juvenile Australian Magpie, Tui feeding in strawberry trees, a Peacock in a pine tree, and those who discovered that the Bason Botanical Garden contained the best collection of waterfowl for the day.

One team neglected to nominate their most exceptional species for the day, but probably had a defensible argument of having been somewhat stressed after being invited to absent themselves from the army live firing range at Waiouru. Obviously, courageous atlassing overrode the call of duty. The overheard atlas quote of the weekend was “now we know why he gets so many species – he gets out of the car!!!”

We look forward to seeing an equally challenging team event next year at Oamaru for the final atlassing weekend. As this is close to the Waitaki River and the southern lakes, somebody needs to bring a jetboat.

C J R ROBERTSON



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

### Northland

In March some of our members visited Taporā, and the surrounding area to assist DoC members to check for Fairy Tern. A good variety of bird species were seen – Black-tailed Godwit, Lesser Knot, Pacific Golden Plover, Wrybill and Banded Dotterel, plus the more common waders seen there.

In July Gerry Brackenbury spoke to us about the possibility of introducing petrels to Limestone Island in the Whangarei Harbour. A sample of a wooden petrel burrow made (to specifications) by Den Carter was demonstrated and much discussion followed.

A few recent sightings of note: In April Prue Cozens saw 124 Royal Spoonbills in their ‘special tree’ at Unahi in the Awanui area north of Kaitiā. In late April, Tony Beauchamp saw 207 Australasian Shovelers and over 160 Grey Teal on the ponds at the end of Port Road, Whangarei. Recently an exciting find for Janet Snell was three New Zealand Dabchicks on a farm pond in the Batley/Marahemo area on Hills Road (in the Kaipara district). Cattle Egrets have been seen in the Waipu area, but only two so far. On 26<sup>th</sup> July Janet Snell saw a Reef Heron fishing along the edge of the Ruakaka River, amongst the oystercatchers.

Fernbirds seem to be repopulating our area, with some seen on Limestone Island, at Portland, and in scrub in an area just south of Whangarei on the edge of a shallow estuary of the Harbour. Limestone Island’s bird populations are being carefully monitored, including North Island Brown Kiwi (that have been transferred to the island), New Zealand Dotterel, Banded Rail, Fernbird, and the albino Variable Oystercatcher present there.

JANET SNELL

### Auckland

Several Auckland parties made the trip to Wanganui and were rewarded by an excellent AGM/Conference weekend. Some of us found birds in plenty during the atlassing exercise, while others scoured the farmland around Feilding for naught save magpies (and resisted the temptation to include the city’s aviary in our returns – a pity since Chris Robertson would surely have given us a special prize). Never mind; we’ve been boasting of our Blue Duck side-trip ever since.

Not all were back in time for our June meeting at which Jill Bolland described her work to collect records and build a database of bird sightings along the Auckland West Coast. The purpose is to assist the case for a marine reserve between Manukau and Kaipara. We received the regular beach patrol report (no big wrecks so far this season) and names were gathered for the winter shorebird surveys.

Our July speaker was John Dowding, briefly in the north for meetings of the New Zealand Dotterel Recovery Group. John’s topic was an even

scarcer shorebird – the Shore Plover, on which he gave us a conservation update. Once widespread, by 1900 the species was confined to South East Island in the Chatham Islands. Conservation measures begun in the 1970’s alongside the Black Robin programme were later expanded by DoC, with the aim of establishing several new populations. Eggs taken to the Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre provided 75 birds, which were released over a five-year period on to Motuora Island in the Hauraki Gulf. Breeding took place but birds were lost to predation by Moreporks and Harriers. A second site, Portland Island off the Mahia Peninsula, Hawkes Bay, has received 60 Shore Plovers since 1998 and here they are doing well, with at least 11 breeding pairs in a current tally of over 50 birds. Meanwhile some 43 pairs remain on South East Island, contending with an expanding seal colony which leads to pollution of feeding areas and loss of breeding ground to changes in the pattern of vegetation and the harsh climate. Juvenile birds have been transferred successfully to nearby Mangere Island. These gains must be offset by the rapid decline of another apparently isolated population: that on Western Reef. This group, which numbered 21 when discovered in 1999 has unaccountably declined to the point where a lone surviving male has now been caught and taken to Mount Bruce in the hope that its genes can be preserved in the breeding stock. Once again, heroic steps are necessary to save an endemic species but with close to 200 Shore plovers in various locations the prospects are fairly good. Valuable experience has been gained in establishing new populations and for shorebirds this could be a world first.

The August meeting began with a welcome to our new Regional Representative – Suzi Phillips. The speaker for the evening was Graham Ussher from the Natural Heritage Department of Auckland Regional Council, who gave a fascinating talk on the research and recovery of tuatara. Mostly associated with seabird colonies, tuatara are found on 32 islands, mainly in Cook Strait and the East Coast of the North Island. They are vulnerable to pests such as kiore. Tuataras live for approximately 100 years. As it is 11 to 16 months before the buried eggs hatch, monitoring any population recovery requires time and a great deal of patience.

The beach patrol for July brought in 28 birds with 12 species, including a Blue Petrel – the first one for this millennium!

MICHAEL TAYLOR AND CHRIS THOMPSON

### Waikato/Bay of Plenty /Volcanic Plateau

The Department of Conservation staff here in the Waikato are valued for their assistance to the society. Their expertise is also passed on in the form of talks, and May’s meeting was no exception. Andrew Styche and John Gumbley presented a most balanced view of pest management in the Waikato, with 1080 being the main item on the agenda – a well-received talk that generated much discussion.





Taumarunui experienced an influx of five members for the area's atlas scheme surveys. Nooks and crannies were explored from the Manunui base, with all common bush birds being seen where there were bush patches left. The most notable bird were Eastern Rosellas, which covered the rural areas like hundreds and thousands on a five year-old's birthday cake. We managed to scarper up the southern skirts of Pureora Forest, but could only flush out a few native birds – good views though!

Kawhia and Aotea Harbours were surveyed in July, with DoC's new boat proving somewhat of a beached whale in the shallows of Kawhia Harbour. Black Stilts were seen. They appeared unbanded, but they were at a distance. Over 40 Spoonbills were counted, with large numbers of Banded Dotterels. Aotea provided a nice New Zealand Dotterel count of eight. Raglan Harbour was notable for high oystercatcher numbers, and the fact we rendezvoused our boats at the end of the count for the first time – we NEVER have done this before! Spoonbills appeared here, at over 30 this was a great count for this harbour. Reef Herons were also present, with three on one rock stack.

Our June meeting was ably presented by our President, David Medway, who grabbed some spare moments to talk to us about the Scientific and Rare Birds Committees that the Society runs. It was nice to hear words from one of the most notable people of the Society.

Our July meeting presented us with a trip to Costa Rica. South Auckland member Simon Fordham treated us to this Central American country's amazing birds and scenery, demonstrating that the high temperatures and exploding volcanoes do not have to put you off going to this beautiful country. The slides Simon presented were followed by Ashley and Sue Reid's video, including rental car vs. steep unsealed rutted road antics, and a recording of the threatened Three-wattled Bellbird, with a call that sounds uncannily like an incorrect answer buzzer on a television game show.

July's field trip took six shivering souls into the heart of Pureora Forest, that included two-inch thick ponds and muddy roads frozen to tack-sharp tyre-beaters. Still, birds do exist in these climes, with beautiful Kokako song, Fernbirds bounding through the dense scrub, Rifleman and Bellbird checking out our dreadful whistling.

Takepuku Mountain claimed another few years off our lives, as the 21<sup>st</sup> five-minute bird count was completed in June. The mountain still rewarded us with Robins in full song, and performing *inside* our five-minute periods! In the past, they have seemed skilled in the art of irony, and cruelly been silent whenever the stopwatch started.

August presents us with a Cattle Egret count. The big question is where have they all gone? Hora Hora, the latest area for our big flock near Rangiriri, is conspicuously green, with no white dots. Ngaroto is pitifully running at six birds – they should be in their 20's!

Hugh Clifford reports, "beach patrolling is yielding very low numbers of dead birds, as has been the case for most of this year".

The saga of Waikato Kaka continues, with reports of singles Waikato-wide and up to nine, in this case at the Morrinsville Golf Course. All sightings have occurred in the June-August period.

Falcons have also been on the wing of late, with Malcolm Hutton reporting one at Ohope, Narena Olliver repeatedly seeing one at Ohiwa Harbour, and individuals being spotted at Whatawhata, Ngaroto (near Te Awamutu), Pirongia, Jerusalem, Tokoroa and Ohakune (Kerry Oates observed one hunting Redpolls).

Also in Whatawhata, at the AgResearch Farm, our Regional Recorder Dai Morgan saw 15 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos twice in June.

PAUL CUMING

## Taranaki

At the May meeting Amy Hawcroft from DoC Wanganui gave a summary of her analysis of the bird survey associated with the 1080 drop in Egmont National Park last year. Due to many problems with collecting the data the only variable conclusion reached was there were birds in the park before and after the drop.

The monthly trip took us to South Taranaki's scenic attractions, including the oxidation ponds at Eltham and Hawera yielding the usual species, with Nowelles Lakes (as per most visits) producing an Australasian Bittern.

The June meeting was a quiet affair with a number of members having prior commitments, the major interest being an e-mail from Dean Caskey of DoC alerting us to the presence of a White-necked Heron which has been in the Toko district since late May. The bird appears to be enjoying its visit and has attracted visitors from as far away as Wellington and South Auckland.

After a brief discussion it was agreed by those not gainfully employed that there was enough interest for two monthly trips.

Our monitoring of the Grey-faced Petrel colony at Rapanui is underway with two members having surveyed the fence-line and drawn up a map with vegetation and known burrows plotted on it. An evening visit in late July produced three new burrows with many birds seen in the air and on the ground.

After a week or two of rather inclement weather, our field trip to the Patea hydro dam and lake took place on a fine winters day. Both bush

and lake produced a total of 33 species with the car park area as usual being the most productive. Beach patrols over the last few months have yielded few birds, the major finds being a Black-browed Mollymawk and a Shy Mollymawk from around Cape Egmont in June.

Along with the usual attendees at our July meeting were Nic Peet (DoC Wanganui) and Dean Caskey (DoC Stratford) who gave us a more optimistic update on the Blue Duck re-establishment in Egmont National Park. Extensive predator control is underway, with more scheduled, which will not only benefit the ducks but all other native species in the park.

Most members remained active in the field despite a spell of cold and snowy weather, while others stayed at home and let the birds come to them. David Medway reported early in the month that a pair of Kaka was in the trees within 10 metres of his residence. The rest of us donned woolly hats and jackets to join Dean Caskey in Egmont National Park and were treated to the sight of two of the Blue Ducks under his care, certainly a highlight of our ornithological year.

Cattle Egrets are again absent from North Taranaki this winter.

PETER FRYER

## Wanganui

Virginia Lake now has two pairs of Mute Swans. In July a second pair was bought by the Virginia Lake Support Group at a cost of \$1,400. The Support Group are volunteers who clear the weeds from the area around the lake and also plant native trees. It is hoped the swans survive the perils of fishing lines and hooks, and also nest vandals and manage to breed.

Local farmers are having problems with flocks of Peafowl living in pockets of bush and pine plantations. One farmer estimates he has a flock of 150 on his farm. The birds follow the grazing cycle of the stock and move onto paddocks to catch the new growth. 'It's like having an extra mob of sheep on the property.' Another farmer reports them 'stealing' winter-feed and stripping vegetable gardens. He has 20-odd eating silage right out of the cattle feed pits. It is permissible to hunt Peafowl if they are becoming pests, but local farmers say they are very cunning and difficult to shoot.

In early July Colin and Robyn Ogle had two Redpolls feeding on the catkins of a silver birch on their Durie Vale property in the city. This prompted a query as to whether Redpolls are being overlooked in town gardens. There have been occasional sightings in past years but the only other recent sightings have been at Virginia Lake. Bill Greenwood saw a flock of about 10 feeding on the path around the lake in June 2001, and on 22nd July this year he saw three or four flitting about in the raupo growing round the lake edge. Kenneth Thomson also saw one there on 31st July and on 4th August saw about half a dozen feeding on the ground. Colin and Robyn also reported a couple of New Zealand Pigeons feeding on a daily basis during July on the fruit of a monkey apple tree in their garden, and up to six Goldfinches feeding in rosemary bushes, also in their garden.

On 4th August Ian Sutherland was at the harbour north mole and saw two shearwaters and a prion out at sea. Visits to Turakina Lagoon/Beach always prove interesting. In May 13 New Zealand Dabchicks were feeding on the lagoon and a flock of over 50 Goldfinches were feeding in the vegetation at its edge. In June there was again 13 Dabchicks but no Goldfinches. There was, however, a flock of over 55 Canada Geese on the lagoon. There were no Dabchicks on the July visit and only six Canada Geese, but there were five Royal Spoonbills, a species usually present but not seen for several months previously.

BILL GREENWOOD

## Wairarapa

We are very lucky to have the National Wildlife Centre in our region because the staff seem to be happy to share their experiences with us. In August, Bryan Welch told us about the work he has done with captive species in Mt. Bruce, the Auckland Zoo and Orana Park.

The June field trip was a mystery tour convened by Ailsa and Rob Harrison. I don't think anybody guessed the destination correctly as it was quite a surprise to be taken to the Akura Nursery where the Greater Wellington Regional Council grows the thousands of willow and poplar poles it coppices for land management work. One never thinks about that side of conservation so it was a steep learning curve for most of us. While walking around we watched out for birds and saw about 20 different species.

Mike Imber very kindly gave us a talk in July about some of the islands he has been to over the years. From the slides he showed, some of the places looked very remote and weather-beaten but the birdlife seemed to do very well there! The birds were very fortunate to be able to fly on and off these islands whereas the scientists weren't so blessed. They had to risk life and limb to carry out their work.

In August Trevor Worthy gave a talk and showed slides of some of the beautiful birds found around Cairns. He also allowed us to pick his brains on all sorts of queries. Including the similarity between the Orange-footed Megapode and Kiwi in that the chicks hatch already fledged!

Our August field trip was to Eleanor and Dave Sims to view his collection of specimen bird skins collected and processed over many years. And what a collection he has. Pelagic birds predominated including many species rarely seen.

From the largest of the Albatross family, the Royal, to the smallest very rare Yellow-nosed Mollymawk. The entire 'tube-nose' group was represented including shearwaters, prions and diving and storm petrels etc. The collection also included common birds seen every day around our gardens and in the bush.

All these birds were beautifully preserved and presented and we all agreed it was a privilege to have a 'hands on' experience.

BETTY WATT

## Wellington

In a well documented talk on 7th July Chris Robertson spoke about the "Seabird By-catch in New Zealand Waters", based on autopsy analysis of seabirds killed in New Zealand oceanic fisheries over a five-year period up to 2001. Forty-five separate fishing trips with on-board observers returned 2,159 bird specimens killed as by-catch to various forms of fishing practice, mainly squid, scampi and fish trawlers and domestic bottom liners. Twenty species were represented, with seven comprising 95.5% of all birds caught, namely Grey Petrel, White-capped Mollymawk, White-chinned Petrel, Salvin's Mollymawk, Buller's Mollymawk, Sooty Shearwater and Short-tailed Shearwater. Chris said that Grey Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, White-chinned Petrel and White-capped Mollymawk are the most commonly caught species, totalling 70% over five years. He added that only about 50% of fishing vessels caught birds, suggesting that fishing practices by crews have much to do with the incidence of by-catches. There is some evidence that mitigation practices by fishing companies are leading to reduced bird catches and Chris explained that the fishing industry recognises the need for it to do more to solve the sea bird by-catch problem. A promising theme is the encouragement of all fishing crews to follow best practices, including the elimination of the discharge of offal, that is now known to lead to a 60 per cent reduction in the bird by-catch. Efforts by the Department of Conservation and fishing companies are continuing, aimed at reducing the seabird by-catch during deep-sea fishing.

On 4th August Trevor Worthy described, to a large society audience, some findings of recent research by himself and several colleagues on the Miocene fossil assemblage of terrestrial animals at St. Bathans, Central Otago. Fossil evidence suggests that at the time the sediments were deposited (20 to 15 million years ago) the climate was probably warm and the locality was part of a large lake. Trevor explained that the St. Bathans deposits contain a rich fossil fauna that has allowed a wide range of birds and other vertebrates to be recognised. Illustrating his talk using slides and many fossil examples, he added that most bones and other remnants are small fragments and are predominantly of two groups of fish, gobids and galaxids. There are very few large fossil bones.

The most commonly recognised wetland birds include five species of ducks and shelducks, a goose and one species of diving duck. Two species of waders have also been recognised. Trevor explained that the less abundant bird fossils that have so far been found are a diving petrel, one and possibly more species of rails, a parrot and four species of passerines. Large fossil bones that have been collected indicate that a large bird was present in locality during the Miocene, possibly a moa-like bird. Other vertebrates that Trevor described include a gecko-like lizard, a tuatara-like reptile, a small crocodile and a bat.

Several society volunteers have been working regularly with DoC staff to monitor the movements and behaviour of a group of 11 Red-crowned Parakeets that were translocated to Somes Island/Matiu from Kapiti Island in June. The birds, all males, appeared to be active and healthy and were mostly feeding in kowhai, ngaio and pohutukawa trees. They are often seen and heard by visitors, although some birds are now thought to have left the island.

Monthly surveys of birds in the Pauatahanui Inlet have continued, and the July survey marks the end of the first year of the 2002-04 survey period. Allan Munroe, who recently summarised the records for ten of the more significant species that are dependent on the sea and mudflats of the inlet, is co-ordinating the survey. Forty-nine species have been recorded, the highest in any one-month being 41 (August 2002). Royal Spoonbills and Variable Oystercatchers have shown significant increases compared with earlier surveys, and the South Island Pied Oystercatcher has shown a slight increase. Five species, White-faced Heron, Reef Heron, Pied Stilt, Black Shag and Little Shag, have shown a significant decrease in numbers. Banded Dotterel numbers seems to be steady, and numbers of Little-black shag can only be described as being erratic. Royal Spoonbill is the most striking addition to the Pauatahanui Inlet bird fauna. It was absent 1982-84, was recorded on five of the 26 counts in the 1992-94 survey (three birds) and in the current survey has been recorded in 11 of the 12 counts with a maximum of 11 birds.

In early July several members helped with the winter counts for the quarterly survey of birds in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, despite the

bitter winter weather on the Saturday which meant that birds were not often seen, nor heard! Overall, three species show significant changes in conspicuousness compared to the baseline survey in July 1996-98, with Blackbird significantly down, and Eastern Rosella and Tui significantly up. Good numbers of Bellbird, Robin, Whitehead and Saddleback were recorded; all have been liberated since the sanctuary was formed. Less conspicuous species included Weka, New Zealand Pigeon, and Tomtit. Brown Teal are also present on the lakes.

Tui continue to be a conspicuous bird in the Karori Sanctuary and throughout much of the Wellington region. In an effort to better understand the distribution of Tui in Wellington, several society members recently banded 21 birds in the sanctuary as a basis for trying to determine their range and rate of movement.

A further survey of birds on Somes Island/Matiu, co-ordinated by Rod Orange, was held recently. Conducted quarterly since the survey period commenced in March 2002, it is conducted over a weekend and is aimed at building a systematic baseline for gauging changes over time in the species, seasonal occurrence, and populations of birds that occur on and around the island. The survey design is based upon three transects, including several fixed points, for making observations. Rod explains that it is too soon to draw any conclusions from the fieldwork that has been done to date.

IAN ARMITAGE

## Nelson

In March many members and local people visited the back garden of a Motueka resident to see a Marsh Crane feeding in a series of raupo clumps growing in a drain running along the back of several adjacent properties. The bird had been in the area for many weeks and appeared unconcerned about people standing around and looking at it, belying its reputation.

Willie Cook returned safely after another three-month sojourn at Ross Island, Antarctica, helping a team with Adelie Penguin research. He showed his superb slides at the June meeting. At the July meeting Jason Malham, who is working on Mauritius, showed very interesting slides of his work protecting the endangered and endemic Echo Parakeet.

Sam Leary filled in five atlas squares while working on D'Urville Island whilst others are finding their way through remote forestry blocks to fill in other seldom or never done squares.

In May Don Cooper saw Two Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes in the Tahunanui area of Nelson.

The winter census on Farewell Spit produced some interesting sightings. Three Eastern Curlews had remained for the winter, and Phil Battley identified an Arctic Tern within a group of Black fronted Terns, a first sighting for the Spit. In late June Don Cooper spotted an Arctic Tern in the Waimea Estuary.

Rob Schuckard's records for the last decade show a stable King Shag population of 645 in the Marlborough Sounds. The pair of Siberian Tattlers seen during the summer on the Motueka sand spit have remained for the winter, and in July Pauline Samways saw 60 Wrybills on the Motueka sandspit. Since then the numbers have ranged between 30 and 40.

Willie Cook found a Song Thrush nest in July with four chicks, surviving through hard frosty weather. Cirl Bunting numbers may be increasing with frequent sightings along the coastal areas between Nelson and Riwaka. Peter Field saw a Banded Rail at Cable Bay and the search for this bird along the coast is continuing.

GILLIAN POLLOCK

## Marlborough

The monthly survey of Lake Grassmere's salt ponds has continued under Jack Taylor. Each month has brought some new surprises; often reflecting the movement of species through the area. For example in July Wrybills dropped in on their way south to their breeding rivers and in August we recorded a major increase in Red-billed Gull numbers presumably on their way south to Kaikoura peninsula.

During July we had a visit to Maud Island to refurbish the Fluttering Shearwater burrows. We found 11 active ones and recorded five birds (all banded) occupying the burrows. At the same time we cleaned out the 50 Rifleman nest boxes (often taken over by geckos or bush wetas) in readiness for the coming season. Several Riflemen were seen near to the next boxes. We had an excellent view of the resident pair of Falcons. Brenda Oldfield put permanent markers out for the annual five-minute count to be made in October.

Currently some members are assisting DoC with a survey of shearwaters on Long Island. During this period we will be checking for translocated chicks which have returned to their natal colony rather than Maud Island. We will also be helping a contractor who is doing an environmental assessment of water birds and species using the Wairau River as a prelude to a proposal to use water for hydro-electrical development. We have also been approached to do regular monitoring on the Grovetown Lagoon, which is being restored as a wetland habitat.

Proposals in the near future are the annual count on Maud Island and





counts of birds using the Awatere and Wairau Rivers (beyond the specific area likely to be effected by hydro development).

BRIAN BELL

## Canterbury

Along with seemingly the rest of the country Cattle Egrets have been scarce in Canterbury this winter, with a poor showing of a dozen in the Motukarara area (Jan Walker) and a couple in the Waikuku area. In contrast the wintering population of Australasian Crested Grebes continues to climb on Lake Forsyth with an astonishing maximum count of 162 from Sheila Petch in July. In addition to this count Alan Collins found seven Crested Grebes on Lake Wainono, and Bev Elliott saw eight on Lake Rotorua, Kaikoura. The question has to be asked where are all these grebes coming from?

The only rarities of note have been the regular wintering Glossy Ibis at Travis Swamp (Andrew Crossland), a couple of Little Black Shags on Linwood Canal (Andrew Crossland), a Cape Barren Goose at Washdyke Lagoon, Timaru (Alan Collins), and a Reeve at the Rakaia River Mouth in late June (Nick Allen). The latter bird was found whilst helping with an independent census of Black-fronted Terns organised by Andrew Crossland and Scott Butcher.

Jim Briskie from the University of Canterbury gave a fascinating talk on the breeding biology of cuckoos and other brood parasites at the May meeting, much of it based on his work with Shining Cuckoos at Kowhai Bush, Kaikoura, and innate memory of introduced passerines to the threat posed by the Eurasian Cuckoo.

After her recent move to the Mainland from Auckland, Brenda Greene gave a detailed tour of the island sanctuary gems of the Hauraki Gulf at the June meeting, showing what is possible when predators are removed from an area, and illustrating the problems still faced in the area. Some great photos of nesting parakeets, and 'tame wild' birds from Little Barrier Island.

At the July meeting Andy Grant brought us up to date the work that the Canterbury Conservancy of DoC is doing with birds. This is quite extensive including continued projects to deal to boxthorn on Motunau Island and the captive rearing of and predator control for Black Stilts in the MacKenzie Basin. The tragedy that befell the Yellowheads and Orange-fronted Parakeets in the Hurunui Mainland Island when rats invaded in numbers a couple of years ago was described, along with the change in management there to try to protect the populations that are left. Orange-fronted Parakeet eggs are now being transferred when nests are found to a breeding unit at Te Anau with a view to eventual transfer to the predator-free (and other species of parakeet-free) Chalky Island in Fiordland.

In contrast to 2002, there was a good turnout for the winter wader count in June. Good numbers of Pied Oystercatcher were found (4444) for the region, with the majority on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary. Red-necked Stint numbers were higher than usual with 23 on Greenpark Sands being double what is usually present. Two Whimbrels were found on the Ashley Estuary.

The annual July count of the Ashburton Lakes (with Ashburton Forest and Bird) was conducted in the less than ideal conditions of driving sleet and snow, but nevertheless found similar numbers of birds to other recent years. Coot numbers have taken a bit of a dive in recent years in contrast to the Christchurch area where numbers seem to be increasing.

NICK ALLEN

## Southland

The annual winter wader count at Awarua Bay was a disaster. The weather was perfect – cold, clear and fine with hardly a breath of wind. Myself, Lloyd Esler and an interested observer, Jill Dixon headed out full of anticipation but as we made our way to the head of the bay it was clear that we should have been duck spotting rather than wader spotting.

There were large numbers of Grey Teal and Mallard with a few colourful Australasian Shovelers to add to the interest, but not a wader in sight. Even the ever-present Banded Dotterels were absent. The only birds of interest that weren't of the duck species were six Variable Oystercatchers, which were dozing on a mud bank. This would have to be our worst ever wader count, let's hope we have a bumper summer count to make up for it.

Our beach patrols have turned up plenty of birds but nothing very rare, although we found two Antarctic Fulmars on Oreti Beach which are the first for a number of years.

With the fine weather at the start of August some birds have got Spring fever early with six Grey Warblers chasing each other around an Otatara garden, New Zealand Pigeons and Tui have also been very active and a pair of White-faced Herons also put on a nice display.

Lloyd Esler is organising a bird weekend at Borland Lodge in October. This is an excellent venue with good chances of seeing Yellowhead, Yellow-crowned Parakeet and Falcon to mention just a few (phone 03 213-0404).

PHIL RHODES

## What's on



### Northland

Evening meetings, second Thursday of the month, ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954. West coast beach patrols (4/10, 1/11, 6/12) ph. Prue Cozens (09) 437 7760. East coast beach patrols (7/10, 4/11, 9/12) ph. Pauline Smith (09) 435 3060. Whangarei Harbour wader count (15/11) ph. Tony Beauchamp (09) 436 2661. North Kaipara wader count (23/11) ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954.

### Auckland

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month (except January) at 7.45pm 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 (Feb-Nov) at 7.45pm. Beach patrols ph. Rob Wheeler (09) 299 7069. Manukau and Firth of Thames censuses ph. Tony Habraken (09) 238 5284

### Waikato

Evening meetings, every third Wednesday, 7.30pm, DoC, London Street, Hamilton. Ph. Paul Cuming (07) 829 8215.

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 Clifford or Paul Cuming. Bird sightings and field trips (monthly) ph. Paul Cuming. Atlas sheets ph. Stella Rowe (07) 843 5199.

### Taranaki

Evening meetings – first Tuesday of the month (exc Jan) 7.30pm, ph. Barry Hartley (06) 757 8644. Field trips on first conducive weekend thereafter.

### Wanganui

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

### Manawatu

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

### Wellington

Evening meetings - first Monday of the month, DoC Science and Research Centre, 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. Mist-netting and passerine banding at The Zoo, various Saturdays, ph. Peter Reese (04) 387 7387. Informal field trips (can include atlassing), ph. Stuart Nicholson (04) 934 5940.

Beach patrols, ph. Jean Luke (04) 904 1704.

### Nelson

Evening meetings – usually first Monday of the month, 7.15pm upstairs in Café Affair, Trafalgar St, Nelson. Ph. David Melville (03) 543 3628 or Rob Schuckard (03) 576 5371.

### Marlborough

Lake Grassmere count – third Saturday of month. Ph Brian Bell (03) 570 2230

### Canterbury

Evening meetings last Monday of the month, Spreydon Bowling Club, Domain Terrace, Christchurch. Monthly field trips – dates vary. Ph. Nick Allen (03) 312 7183.

### Otago

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

### Southland

Evening meetings (in conjunction with Field Club) held second Thursday of the month at 7.30pm. Please phone numbers below for venue and further information, field trip usually on Saturday following. Monthly Beach Patrols during winter, phone Phil Rhodes (03) 213-1228 or Lloyd Esler (03) 213-0404.



