



# Southern *Bird*

No. 24 December 2005 • ISSN 1175-1916

A Volcanic Twitchathon

2005 OSNZ AGM Hamilton

So you've seen a rare  
or unusual bird, or  
one you can't  
identify?





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## Quotation

*He rises and begins to round,  
He drops the silver chain of sound,  
Of many links without a break,  
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake...*

*For singing till his heaven fills,  
'Tis love of earth that he instils,  
And ever winging up and up,  
Our valley is his golden cup  
And he the wine which overflows  
To lift us with him as he goes...*

*Till lost on his aerial wings  
In light, and then the fancy sings.*

*The Lark Ascending* by George Meredith.

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## Cover Photos

*Front cover: New Zealand Dotterel, Firth of Thames, June 2005, by Phil Battley*

*Back cover: Lesser Knot with Wrybills, Firth of Thames, June 2005, by Phil Battley*

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

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

## Publisher

Published on behalf of the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc),  
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We welcome advertising enquiries. Free classified ads are available to members at the editor's discretion.

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Several positions on Council will become vacant at the conclusion of the 2006 Annual General Meeting. Vacancies in the positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer will be created by the retirement in accordance with the Constitution of David Medway as President, David Lawrie as Vice-President, Claudia Duncan as Secretary and Mark Nee as Treasurer. Retiring Council members are eligible for re-election.

### NOMINATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS ARE THEREFORE CALLED FOR:

- PRESIDENT
- VICE PRESIDENT
- SECRETARY
- TREASURER

Nominations will close with the Secretary on **28th February 2006**. Nomination papers must be signed by two financial members of the Society and be consented to in writing by the person nominated who must also be a financial member of the Society. Would nominators please include a brief *curriculum vitae* of the nominated person if that person is not already a member of Council.

## NOTICES OF MOTION

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 2006 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before **28th February 2006** and be in writing and signed by a mover and seconder who shall be financial members of the Society.

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

*The 2006 Annual General Meeting will be held in Wellington  
on Saturday 3rd June 2006.*

Claudia Duncan  
Secretary  
P.O. Box 12397  
Wellington

## NOTORNIS - CALL FOR SUBMISSION OF PAPERS AND NOTES

Papers and short notes can again be submitted as paper copies, if desired, in the format set out in instructions to authors up to end 2003: electronic submission is no longer mandatory. Enquiries re suitability for publication are welcomed, in the first instance to the Editor, Dr Richard Holdaway, at P.O. Box 16 569, Hornby, Christchurch; piopio@paradise.net.nz. OSNZ members should remember that assistance is available through the Society's mentoring system to help you prepare suitable observations and data as short notes or papers.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Subscriptions are due on 1st January. Those members with email should have received a membership renewal form via that medium. Those members who do not have email (or those where the Membership Secretary has not been informed of an email address) should have received a renewal form as an insert with the previous issue of *Southern Bird* and *Notornis*. Please endeavour to pay close to the due date – the Society depends greatly on your subscription to continue the furtherance of its objects in encouraging and supporting the study and enjoyment of birds in the New Zealand region. If you have not received a renewal form please contact the Membership Secretary, Roger Sharp, P.O. Box 12-1039, Henderson, Auckland, phone 09 836 9931, email Roger.Sharp@xtra.co.nz.

## Interested in beach patrolling?

*The Society is seeking a convenor for the Beach Patrol Scheme.*

The job involves holding, ordering and dispatch of blank beach patrol and specimen record cards; checking and acknowledgement of returned completed cards; entry of data into a database; writing a short annual report to Council; and assistance towards the writing of an annual report for *Notornis*.

The job requires only a small amount of storage space (a few hundred cards) and a contribution of some time each week.

Please contact the Secretary at the address below if you are interested in helping your Society by taking on this role, and assuring the success of the Beach Patrol Scheme into the future.

*Claudia Duncan*

Secretary, Ornithological Society of New Zealand,  
P.O. Box 12397, Wellington. Email osnz@xtra.co.nz.

## Results of the Brand Name Referendum

After discussion at the June meeting of Regional Representatives and Council it was decided that individual RRs should poll their members on the subject of whether they would support or oppose the adoption of Birds New Zealand as a brand name for OSNZ. Polling closed on the 1st October. The results are as follows: for 207; against 19.

Any proposal for adoption of a brand name requires the submission of a motion to a general meeting of the Society.



Chambers, Stuart. 2000.

## Birds of New Zealand – Locality Guide (revised edition).

Arun Books, South Auckland. Soft cover.

This book is a combined guide to a large selection of New Zealand birds and to localities where each may be seen. The main part is a systematic list of a little over 180 species, including introduced birds. Each bird is described, together with a generally good colour photograph and notes on habitat and range. Possibly birds endemic to the Chatham Islands could have been omitted, in view of the comparatively few visitors to New Zealand able to travel there. For each bird a list of likely localities where it may be found is included. The coverage here is somewhat uneven; some have quite extensive mentions of places to search, whilst others strike the reader as brief. Contrast, for example, the many localities given for Royal Spoonbill with the comparatively few for New Zealand Pigeon, which incidentally has no South Island localities listed north of Dunedin on the east coast and the Hollyford Valley in the west. This must surely be an oversight.

Pages 329 to 391 comprise a long list of suitable birding localities through the three main islands, indicating the species likely to be seen, or at least possibly visible or audible at each place. In addition, lists are given for a few of the better-known offshore islands and for Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua. Inevitably there are some omissions, and Wellington readers, for example, will miss any mention of Wellington Harbour and of Pauatahanui Inlet, although a good selection of other places is given, namely Nga Manu, Waikanae Estuary, Waimeha Lagoon and Karori Sanctuary. The localities section is preceded by notes, written especially for beginners, on the main types of habitat, with representative birds found in each, and on bird watching in general. Pages 392 and 393 give a useful list of coastal vantage points for searching for seabirds.

Finally three bird watching excursions by car are suggested; one of eight days for the North Island, and two of similar length for the South Island. These are helpful guides for the visitor, although one or two of the days, e.g. day six for the North Island, could involve long driving times.

On the practical side, the book does not stay open easily, leading to the possibility of damage to the binding, especially from repeated opening in a car. A caution is worth mentioning about the index where localities are listed as a block within the index of birds and would have been better printed after the listing of birds.

*Birds of New Zealand – Locality Guide* can be confidently recommended, and the author is to be congratulated for bringing together so much locality information. It is certain to be useful to many readers, especially as a supplement to standard books such as *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* (which incidentally is included in a list of useful books) and should prove helpful to overseas bird enthusiasts coming to our country.

BILL WATTERS

Charles Hufflett, founder and managing director of Nelson-based Solander Fisheries and a member of OSNZ, was presented with the Seabird Smart Award on behalf of his company at the Southern Seabird Solutions' annual supporters meeting on 5th October.

# Bird People

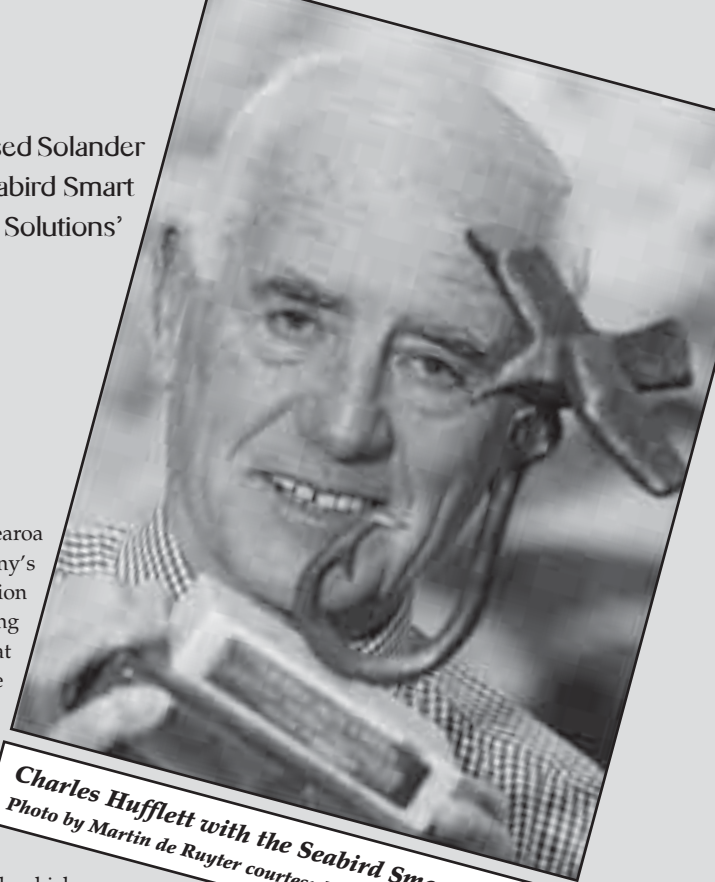
He was presented the award by Robin Hapi, chief executive of Aotearoa Fisheries, who described Mr Hufflett as "a driving force behind the company's commitment to seabird by-catch mitigation" and that "through his determination and commitment, he has personally had an enormous impact on setting the standards for by-catch mitigation in the industry". Mr Hufflett said that the award was more a thank you to the people at sea who developed the company's techniques. Solander Fisheries was one of the first companies to systematically record and report seabird by-catch, was using tori lines well before this became compulsory and has trialled new devices for repelling birds or putting bait out of reach every year since 1995.

The editor is grateful to *The Nelson Mail* for permission to quote from their article, which appeared on the 6th October and the reprinting of a photograph which appeared with it.

Secretary of the Canterbury region of OSNZ, David Clarkson won both the open division and best unpublished writer at this year's *Sunday Star Times* Short Story Competition. His winning story, *txt*, is about a boy's infatuation with a woman who is running a writing class.

It is with sadness that the Society learnt of the death in August of Jim Moore of Lower Hutt. Jim was the Recorder for the South-west Pacific Islands Records Scheme. His reports on Norfolk Island published in *Notornis* include records dating back to 1969, and two historical records from 1854. He was also a very regular contributor to Classified Summarised Notes, especially with records for the Manawatu region. Our deepest sympathy goes to Jim's wife Maureen, family and acquaintances.

Two other recent deaths took enthusiastic members from OSNZ. Louise 'Blue' Booth's ever-cheerful outlook on life and birding will be missed on Canterbury field meetings and indoor meetings, and Dr John Yaldwin will be missed by Wellington members. Our deepest condolences go to their families and friends.



**Charles Hufflett with the Seabird Smart Award.**  
Photo by Martin de Ruyter courtesy *The Nelson Mail*

## PACIFIC ISLANDS CHECKLISTS AVAILABLE ON THE WEB

Annotated and fully referenced checklists for 400 islands in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, and the Melanesian Islands of Indonesia are now available on the internet thanks to the hard work of Dr Mike Tarburton of the Pacific Adventist University in Boroko, Papua New Guinea. The website can be found at [www.birdsofmelanesia.net](http://www.birdsofmelanesia.net) with the lists provided in PDF format.

Besides listing birds for each island, annotations on their residence status (whether resident all year, or summer, winter, spring/autumn migrant), ecological preferences and abundance are provided where known.

Referencing of the information source used for each species is provided so that users can see the date and name of the observer or author. The majority of the references are original research papers. Annotations to the species entries clarify any certainties recorded for an island and report uncertainties when either of these are known.

Ecological behaviour and environment preference information are provided as annotations, allowing one to both help find the birds and determine how much of their habitat remains.

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

Gwyneth Armitage (Wellington), Sarah Chapman (Canterbury), John Cockrem (Manawatu), Helge Grastveit (Norway), Anna Hayns (Auckland), David Latham (Canada), Nora Leuschner (Auckland), Lesley Madgwick (South Auckland), Agnes Nee (Auckland), Tamsin Orr-Walker (Auckland), Douglas Pratt (U.S.A.), Chris Smuts-Kennedy (Waikato), John Woods (Auckland).

### *We also thank the following members for their generous donations to the Society:*

Paul Asquith, Ria Brejaart, Mike Bryan, Hugh Clifford, Mia Colberts, William Cook, Michael Criglington, Jack Davidson, Paul Davis, Audrey Eagle, Ian Farrell, Barry Friend, Jill Hamel, Colin Hill, Charles Hufflett, Ted Kirk, Rob Lawrence, Bruce MacKereth, Edward Minot, Philip Moors, Stuart Nicholson, Mrs G. Norman, Suzi Phillips, Marianne Power, John Ralph, Elizabeth Revell, Lorna Russell, Paul Sagar, Rob Schuckard, Ross Silcock, Elise Smith, Martin Snowball, Joy Soper, Mr D M Stracy, Ian Sutherland, Kenneth Thomson, Mr E. G. Turbott, Kerry Walshe, John Warham, Murray Williams.

Checklist - SOLD OUT
Chathams Issue - \$10
Index to <i>Notornis</i> 1939-1989 - \$10
Wader Studies - \$20
Birds of Hawke's Bay - \$10
A <i>Flying Start</i> - SPECIAL PRICE \$5
Stickers - Pied Stilt - specify outside glass/bumper or inside glass only - \$3, <i>Notornis</i> - \$3
Ticklist - \$1
Atlas microfiche - SOLD OUT

## OSNZ SALES

Items on sale from the OSNZ are a good way of keeping up with the society and identifying yourself as an OSNZ member. Keep those lists ticking over with a Ticklist. Look up all those old *Notornis* articles with a fifty year index (1939-1989), and then check out the Chatham Islands and wander through the waders in the special editions of

*Notornis*. Read up about our Society in *A*

*Flying Start*, your essential introduction to the ins and outs of why we are here as birdwatchers!

**SEND ORDERS TO:** Paul Cuming, OSNZ Sales, 2/7 Robins Road, Judea, Tauranga. Tel. (07) 571 5125, fax (07) 571 5126, email [birdo@post.com](mailto:birdo@post.com)

## Assistance to attend the 24th International Ornithological Congress

**Hamburg, Germany, 13-19th August 2006**

The New Zealand Ornithological Congress Trust Board is offering travel assistance fellowships valued at NZ\$1,500 each for up to two persons to attend and participate in the 24th IOC to be held in Hamburg, Germany from 13th to 19th August 2006. Information and registration papers for the Congress can be obtained from the 24th IOC website [www.i-o-c.org](http://www.i-o-c.org) on the Internet.

Preference will be given to (a) New Zealand amateur or professional ornithologists who are members of the OSNZ or the Royal Society of New Zealand, or (b) post-graduate students from a New Zealand university who are undertaking a topic relevant to the study of birds. Successful applicants will be required to forward to the Board by 30th November 2006 a report of their attendance at the Congress suitable for publication in *Southern Bird*.

Applicants for these fellowships should forward their ornithological CV, reasons for wishing to attend the Congress with supporting letters from two referees not being Board members to: NZOCTB Travel Fellowship, P. O. Box 12397, Wellington.

*Applications close on the 10th February 2006* and the decisions of the Board will be advised in March 2006. The Board reserves the right to make no awards.

C J R ROBERTSON  
Business Manager, NZOCTB

## OSNZ CONFERENCE AND AGM, WELLINGTON

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND, 1ST TO 4TH JUNE 2006

### THE SOCIETY'S CONFERENCE AND AGM WILL BE HELD IN WELLINGTON IN 2006.

*The 2006 conference will comprise three full days that will include two scientific days.*

*An extended format is being arranged next year as an opportunity to capture a range of scientific and technical expertise that exists in the Wellington region and beyond that will enable a novel and varied programme to be assembled and presented on a wide range of studies concerning birds in New Zealand and in the Pacific region. It is also an opportunity to emphasise the scientific role in the Society's objectives and to encourage new membership.*

The conference and AGM will be held at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington. Kilbirnie is close to Wellington Airport. Ample accommodation has been reserved at the Brentwood.

### AN OUTLINE OF THE CONFERENCE PROGRAMME:

**Thursday 1st June.** Registration of participants and an informal dinner.

**Friday, 2nd June. *Scientific Day 1*,** followed by a happy hour late on Friday afternoon and an informal dinner amongst all participants.

**Saturday, 3rd June. *Scientific Day 2*,** followed by a happy hour, Conference Dinner and AGM.

**Sunday, 4th June.** A range of field activities in and near Wellington, including visits to the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and Somes Island/Matiu.

**Monday, 5th June.** An option to visit Kapiti Island may be possible but this is entirely weather-dependent during winter.

The Conference/AGM registration and accommodation booking form is included as an inserted flier in this issue of *Southern Bird* and is also posted on the Society's website, [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)

# Volcanic Twitchathon

It was 5.30 am on Saturday 16th October 2004, it was raining and windy and I was about to find out how keen you have to be to take part in a Twitchathon – trying to see or hear as many bird species as possible within a 24-hour period.

who had planned a route through the central North Island which he assured me would allow us to see a large number of bird species. Kerry is a former regional representative for the OSNZ for both Wellington and the Volcanic Plateau regions. So with him, Alison Beath and Clarice Oates, (all Enviro Research employees) we should have been able to get a good haul.

I had been invited along by Kerry Oates of Enviro Research

The early start was too much for the girls so Kerry and I drove down to the Manganui o te Ao River where we planned to kick off the day with Blue Duck. It took less than five minutes for us to see a lone male grazing around the rocks in the river. We had our first sighting.

We got many of the 'easy' species on our drive back to Raetihi; birds such as Song Thrush,

...CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

# Volcanic Twitchathon

Starling, Chaffinch, House Sparrow, Australian Magpie and Blackbird. We picked up Alison, then Clarice and drove to Lake Rotokura, which is located in the Karioi Rahui. We were hoping to see or hear many of the bush birds in the Rahui, but the rain and wind seemed to have kept them in bed. The lakes did give us a few waterfowl including Mallard, Grey Teal, Grey Duck and Australian Coot. We also got to cross off Whitehead, Fantail, Grey Warbler, Bellbird, Tui, Silvereye and Tomtit but were a bit disappointed with the bush bird showing. Calling in to the Karioi Forest (where a Falcon had recently been seen nesting), we saw one, after a bit of looking, flying through a cleared area of the forest. At a swampy area at the side of the road nearby we played a tape of Fernbird calls but the Fernbirds did not respond.

By this time we were getting pretty hungry and it was raining steadily, but we took a quick detour towards Rangiwaea Junction on the off-chance that the regional council had not poisoned all the Rooks which lived in that area. Kerry and I left the girls sheltering in the car while we took the binoculars and soon spotted a flock of Rooks performing aerial acrobatics in the gusting wind.

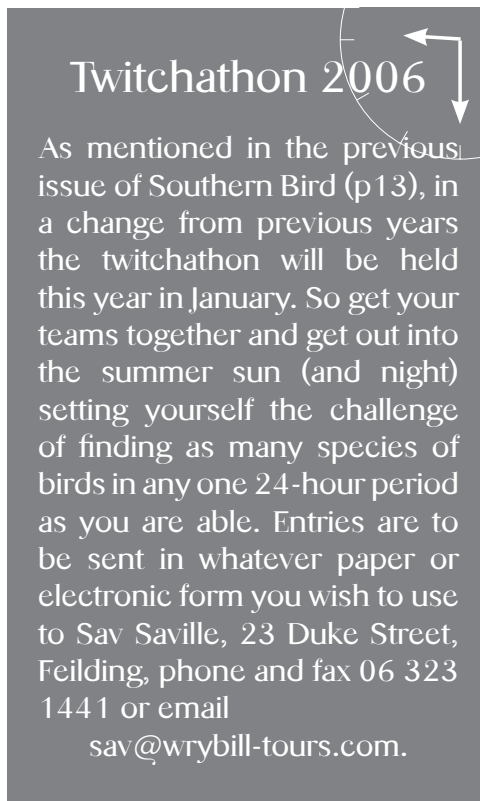
After stopping for a quick breakfast at Waiouru we headed along the Desert Road to try and see Banded Dotterels in the Rangipo Desert. The wind gusts were strong enough to rock the vehicle and it was difficult to see through the driving rain. My suggestion that the girls take a turn walking around outside looking for dotterels was met with some strong language and we decided to move on without being able to cross them off the list.

Lake Rotoaira was the next stop (this part of the trip set a record for the longest distance covered without seeing any new species), then on to Lake Te Whaiau where standing in the rain with a tape playing eventually paid off and I finally got to see a Fernbird. The girls watched with their noses pressed against the glass from inside the car!

The weather started to fine up a bit while we drove over the hill to Tokaanu. Short stops at the jetty and wharf on the shores of Lake Taupo got us a good haul including four species of shags, Australasian Bittern, White-faced Heron, Black Swan, New Zealand Dabchick and California Quail.

The rain started again as we drove over to Taumarunui via Highway 41 and we

experienced another bird drought, seeing nothing new except a couple of Feral Geese floating along one of the now flooding streams. After a stop at Taumarunui for take-aways we headed north along Highway 3 and finally managed to see Pukeko, a species which we had been looking out for all day. By now all of the streams were running a dirty brown and starting to overflow their banks, but every now and then the sun would force its way through a hole in the clouds raising our hopes that the weather would improve.



**Twitchathon 2006**

As mentioned in the previous issue of *Southern Bird* (p13), in a change from previous years the twitchathon will be held this year in January. So get your teams together and get out into the summer sun (and night) setting yourself the challenge of finding as many species of birds in any one 24-hour period as you are able. Entries are to be sent in whatever paper or electronic form you wish to use to Sav Saville, 23 Duke Street, Feilding, phone and fax 06 323 1441 or email [sav@wrybill-tours.com](mailto:sav@wrybill-tours.com).

During this part of our tour we saw Turkeys and Pheasants along the side of the road and added these to our list. We were soon walking again, this time in the mainland island at Mapara and had high hopes of hearing Kokako which are making a come-back in the area. Standing in the rain playing tapes of Kokako calls we did manage to add Kingfisher, Redpoll and New Zealand Pigeon, but after an hour of slipping around Mapara the batteries in the tape player were starting to go flat and we were about to give up on Kokako. While walking back to the car Alison stopped, saying she thought she had heard something. We all strained to listen through the patter of rain and just when I was convinced that she had mistaken a Tui's call for that of a Kokako we all heard the unmistakable flute-like notes coming from the other side of a small gully.

As it was getting late we decided to high-tail it back towards Ohakune and try for some of the missing birds on the way. We had been expecting to see some Mynas picking insects off the road, but did not see any until we had passed back through Taumarunui.

We stopped to play tapes in the bush behind Owhango, hoping to hear Shining, or Long tailed Cuckoos, but had no luck. The Whakapapa River was in flood and it was a bit frightening standing on the bridge over the river watching the huge standing waves and boiling eddies. We all had fond memories of walking the Whakapapa River during Blue Duck surveys. It was now showing us the other side of its personality.

A few weeks earlier we had seen some Eastern Rosellas between Owhango and National Park, but it was too dark and too cold for us to spend much time looking, and Allison who was recovering from the flu was sounding closer to death with every hour. The plan had been to go to the Waimarino Forest for Brown Kiwis, but the weather and Alison's condition were enough to convince us to leave it until the next day.

So another early morning on Sunday meant that we were standing in the forest before 5 am playing tapes of Brown Kiwi calls. In no time we had heard a Morepork but the kiwi were not responding to the tape. Kerry had transmitters on some of the kiwi in the Waimarino Forest so we knew they were close by and moving around, but we were running out of time before our 24 hours was up and we still had some more bush birds to get. Just as we had decided to give up one of the males answered the tape and we added Brown Kiwi to our list.

Quickly we drove up the Ohakune mountain road hoping for the bush birds which we had missed the day before. In no time we had a Kaka flying around in the trees above us and we also heard a couple of Robins calling. Then with less than ten minutes to go we finally managed to see a little Rifleman flitting around the trees high above us.

I have always been a bit cynical about people who race around the world crossing birds off a list as they see them, then moving on to the next species. However I have to admit that I enjoyed my first twitchathon. It was a good excuse to visit parts of the North Island that I enjoy, and spend time with great company.

Considering the conditions and that we never went anywhere near the coast the 57 species on our list was not a bad total!

NEVILLE TODD

# BIRD NEWS

THIS FEATURE CONTAINS UNCHECKED REPORTS. SOME SIGHTINGS REQUIRE CONFIRMATION BY THE DSNZ RARE BIRDS COMMITTEE

In a first for over a century a **North Island Brown Kiwi** chick conceived in the wild has hatched at Mount Bruce. The hatching was made possible by predator work done under the Pukaha Restoration Project. Just before hatching the chick was transferred to captivity so that its safety in hatching and for the first few predator-susceptible months can be assured and so that the kiwi population can be built up as quickly as possible.

Eighteen **Okarito Brown Kiwi** nests had been detected up to September, with an egg removed from an abandoned nest being incubated at Willowbank Wildlife Park in Christchurch. Low numbers of both rats and stoats were recorded in the forest in August, so hopefully this breeding season will be successful.

Further south thirteen pairs of **Haast Tokoeka** have attempted to nest. This season eight pairs of Haast Tokoeka are to have their eggs transferred to Willowbank Wildlife Reserve to test the effectiveness of Operation Nest Egg for this species of kiwi.

What is putatively the rediscovered **New Zealand Storm Petrel** dropped in for a lasagne dinner on Geordie Murman's fishing boat whilst moored off Little Barrier Island on the night of 4th November. The bird flew into the cabin, Geordie recognised it as being possibly being the elusive storm petrel that scientists were seeking and put it in a box. The next morning DoC island biodiversity manager Richard Griffiths and Karen Baird of Kiwi Wildlife Tours identified the petrel as a New Zealand Storm Petrel, took notes, measurements, a louse and feather samples (for DNA analysis) before releasing the bird.

After three years of stoat-trapping and six years of releases of captive- and wild-bred **Blue Ducks**, DoC staff are nervously awaiting the arrival of the first chicks to be hatched in Egmont National Park in decades. The work is helped by money from the Central North Island Blue Duck Trust and the Taranaki Kiwi Trust. Transmitters have been fitted to a further three female Blue Ducks in the Oparara River catchment near Karamea. A new section of trapline has been installed upstream of the Honeycomb Arch to protect a known nesting area. Near Hokitika the number of traps has almost doubled along the Styx River with a new trapline along the true left of the river to match that on the right. In Fiordland five eggs collected from

a nest on the Bowen River (Milford Sound) have been hatched in captivity at Te Anau as part of an Operation Nest Egg programme. The Bowen River has no predator trapping and the ducklings will be released into the stoat controlled areas of the Clinton and Arthur Rivers at 15 weeks of age. This ONE work is supported with money donated from ticket sales by tourism operator Real Journeys.

A second release of **Campbell Island Teal** back onto Campbell Island occurred in September when 22 birds from Codfish Island and 33 captive-reared birds from Peacock Springs in Christchurch and the National Wildlife Centre at Mount Bruce were transported south.

In a first for the species, backpack-mounted transmitters have been used on 30 captive-bred **Black Stilts** released into the wild this year plus five adult birds already in the wild. The eight gram transmitters have been funded through sponsorship by the Mount Cook Hotel Collection. They replace less-than-successful tail-mounted transmitters which had batteries that didn't last long enough. The batteries in the backpack transmitters last for 18 months and have a mortality mode. They should help workers find out what is killing Black Stilts and aid management decisions to reduce mortality.

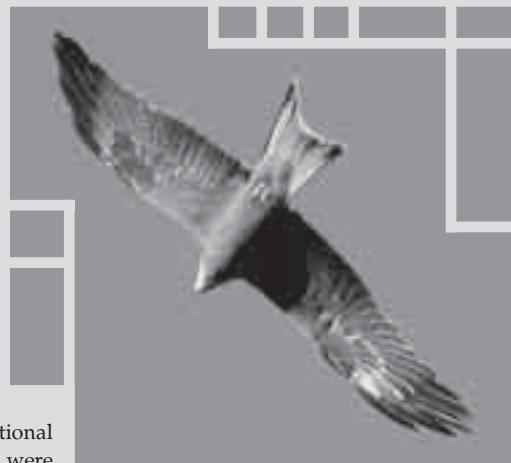
**New Zealand Dotterels** on Matakana Island near Tauranga are being helped by the purchase of a 4WD truck to be used for pest control operations. The truck carries colourful logos in addition to raise public awareness of the rare bird living on the beaches in the area.

The captive population of **Orange-fronted Parakeets** got off to a good start with three females sitting on eggs at Isaacs Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch, with one of the clutches being of 11 eggs. This compares with the 2004 season total of 16 chicks successfully fledged in captivity. The aim is to hold 10 breeding pairs in captivity and eventually release offspring onto predator-free Chalky Island in Fiordland.

Two groups of **Yellowheads** were sighted in the Lake Daniells area in the Maruia catchment. If confirmed this will be an exciting rediscovery of the species outside their known range.

Twenty **Saddlebacks** from Tiritiri Matangi were released on Motuihe Island in August, marking a return of the species to the inner Hauraki Gulf after a century's absence. North Island Saddlebacks are now on 12 predator-free islands plus the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary in Wellington.

**SOURCES:** What's Up DoC? Website newsletter, @DoC Canterbury email newsletter, Birding-NZ email group



Top: The Forest Lake snipe, by Hugh Clifford.  
Above: The Renwick Black Kite by Steve Wood.

## SHORT REPORTS:

A hybrid male **Cape Gannet** X Australasian Gannet has joined its pure-bred father at the Cape Kidnappers colony. The southern Waitemata Harbour probably hosted a **White-necked Heron** from September through into November. **Intermediate Egrets** were reported from Omarama in late October and near Napier in late November. The long-staying **Black Kite** has remained faithful to its Waihopai Valley Road location near Renwick, Marlborough through to late November at least. Another Black Kite was reported in mid-November from Cheviot, Canterbury. Both a **Mongolian** and a **Large Sand Dotterel** were at Karaka in late September along with a **Great Knot**. Three Large Sand Dotterels graced the Maketu Estuary in late October decreasing to one individual by mid-November. Forest Lake in Hamilton attracted a well-watched probable **Japanese Snipe** in mid-late November. Continuing its good run with the species Miranda attracted another **Ruff** in late November. A **Hudsonian** and **Black-tailed Godwit** stayed at Miranda into spring, with another Black-tailed Godwit taking up residence at the Ashley Estuary in North Canterbury. Miranda hosted a **Terek Sandpiper** in late October and early November. Amongst a host of other waders a **Wandering Tattler** and a **Marsh Sandpiper** were on the South Manakau Harbour in early October. A pair of **Red-vented Bulbuls** was reported from the Devonport area of Auckland. It was expected that the birds would be eradicated before they could found another population of the species. A **Red Wattlebird** was reported again in late October from close to the location of a previous report near Pukekohe a few months ago. In what would be a first for New Zealand an **Olive-backed Oriole** was reported by a Kaiapoi householder in late September.

# Southern Royal Albatross on Campbell Island

## DOC reply to OSNZ Council

In the previous issue of this magazine (*Southern Bird* 23: page 14, September 2005) an article by Moore & Charteris was accompanied by a reply from the "OSNZ Council". In the reply they criticised the Department of Conservation's decision to remove bands from Southern Royal Albatrosses on Campbell Island, except in study areas, and said this "cannot be supported scientifically, or indeed ethically". The OSNZ Council also questioned why DoC was spending its seabird research funds on a seabird species not known to be in decline. In view of these criticisms we feel that some further clarification and background information is needed about our programme.

### Bands found away from Campbell Island

More than 35,000 Royal Albatrosses were banded on Campbell Island between 1941 and 1999. Apart from some breeding studies in the 1940s and 1960s the main reason for large-scale banding of albatross chicks in the early years was to see where they dispersed to. The first 30 years of recoveries were summarised by Robertson & Kinsky (1972) and a 60-year summary by Moore & Bettany (2005) in the current issue of *Notornis*. In total there were 204 band recoveries reported away from Campbell Island from 1943-2003, illustrating the circumpolar migration to South America and back to New Zealand (see also Imber 1999). The peak in these recoveries was in the late 1960s coinciding with the peak in banding activity on the island. With more limited banding of chicks at two study areas on Col and Moubay ridges between 1987 and 1996, recoveries of banded birds at sea has dwindled to 1-2 birds per year.

### Bands recovered on Campbell Island, and why has it taken more than 20 years to fix the band injury problem?

Comparatively little effort has gone into band recoveries on Campbell Island and usually this was confined to the Col and Moubay study areas. Some injured birds were observed by Peter Dilks and Graeme Taylor in the early 1980s and they provided training to staff of the Meteorological Station to improve banding techniques. Moore & Moffat (1990) encountered further injured birds in their study areas in 1987 and began removing and replacing the offending bands, as did other DoC workers in the 1990s. However, as the full extent of the problem was unknown no further action was taken. Peter Moore returned to the island to conduct whole-island censuses of Southern Royal Albatross in 1994 and 1995 (Moore *et al.* 1997), and conduct index counts at different localities in 1996-1998. This more intensive study over five seasons gave him the chance to compile the most comprehensive set of band returns of this species since the 1960s. This made it clear there was a serious band injury problem for the Southern Royal Albatross, which was a mixture of poor banding techniques used in the past and a large springy stainless steel R-band. Peter circulated an unpublished report within DoC in 1998 alerting managers to this problem.

### Have we acted unethically or unscientifically?

Although the Banding Office kept paper records of birds banded and compiled an ongoing electronic band recovery file, there was no system in place to summarise or analyse this banding data. Peter's next step was to compile all the paper records and band recoveries onto computer files. The analysis of this large dataset confirmed that in some years birds were badly banded and that 7% of chicks may have been injured by their bands (up to 54% from the worst year). Clearly there was a lesson to be learnt about using volunteers to conduct widespread banding of a species over many years without adequate training or follow-up monitoring. Secondly, there was an animal welfare issue that had not been addressed.

This led Peter Moore to publish the band injury paper in *Notornis* (Moore 2003). He recommended that three years of island-wide searches should be made to find injured birds, with ongoing band maintenance to prevent future problems. There was much debate over who was responsible for fixing the problem, but several factors were considered in coming to a decision.

#### 1. Ability to do ongoing band maintenance

Southland Conservancy's responsibility is to protect species and their habitats on Campbell Island Nature Reserve. Long-term monitoring projects of seabirds on this island were therefore a low priority compared with tasks such as rat eradication. The Science and Research Unit in Head Office had limited capacity to conduct seabird research and could not commit to a band maintenance programme over several decades.

#### 2. Threat Ranking of Southern Royal Albatross was low

Under the NZ threat classification the species has the relatively low rank of "at risk", as a result of a previous human-induced decline, and IUCN rank "vulnerable". Although the species is largely restricted to Campbell Island, the population of c.8500 pairs (nesting annually) had apparently been increasing since the depredations of the sealing and farming era which ended in 1930. The species was not a large component

of fisheries by-catch compared with other seabird species in New Zealand waters.

#### 3. Band returns away from Campbell Island

Only 0.68% of banded birds were found away from Campbell Island. Although this long-term monitoring could alert us to changes in mortality rates away from the island, there are very few records per year and many biases influencing which bands are returned. Fishing observers on vessels give more useful annual data on fisheries by-catch rates. Satellite tracking and other new technologies will in the future provide a more complete picture of changes in distribution at sea than could be expected from the occasional returns of bands.

#### 4. Band returns on Campbell Island

Of the more than 35,000 bands applied, 42% were banded at Col and Moubay, but of 5,800 individual birds recovered (in 13,000 total recoveries), 66% were birds from the two study areas. We contracted Richard

Barker (a mark-recapture expert from Otago University) to analyse the data and he found that the previously low rate of band returns from outside the two main study areas were of little value in contributing to estimates of adult survival rates.

#### 5. Welfare concerns about injured birds

Most birds with embedded bands are crippled and walk with difficulty on the toes of the injured leg. Discussions with Kate McInnes (DoC's Veterinarian) indicated that the lesions caused by bands appeared to be progressive, starting as an irritation but developing into a chronic and potentially life-threatening injury. Although the overall proportion of injured banded birds was 2.5% this did not account for an unknown number of birds that may have died and were not found. This opinion is supported by a skeleton found in 2005 which had a band embedded in a severe bony growth.





Southern Royal Albatross legs with embedded bands.  
By Matt Charteris and Peter Dilks.

After discussing these various factors a compromise approach was reached. The preferred option was to remove all bands from outside the two study areas and to replace birds banded at Col study area with transponders to prevent the need to have a band maintenance programme on the island. A funding bid to carry out this work was secured in 2004 based on ethical considerations and the scientific value to be gained from the band recoveries.

Once the issue was public, there were some negative reactions to the plan to remove large numbers of bands from birds on Campbell Island. Knowing that OSNZ had concerns, Peter prepared a two-page summary of the reasons for the work for circulation at the OSNZ Council meeting in 2004. In essence DoC had no scientific evidence to keep the bands outside study areas and an ethical obligation to look after the animal welfare of a species under its care. The large size of Campbell Island (11,000 ha) simply means that an island-wide study area is impractical to monitor adequately for band recoveries in the long term and the few recoveries of birds away from the island are not contributing sufficient new data to justify the risk of injuries to birds carrying bands.

Ironically, the recent island-wide search for injured birds has had a positive spin-off to our study of albatross population dynamics. It will give us a more complete band recovery dataset than has been achieved in the previous 60 years of the programme, and will enable detailed study of chick dispersal rates on the island. Also, several cohorts of chicks that were banded at Col and Moubay study areas in 1987-1996 will offer a good measure of recruitment and age at first breeding in this species. Hence, rather than throwing away data, we will be maximising the value of the earlier work on this species.

Furthermore, we have not been deaf to the concerns from other experts and ornithologists (including those in and outside of DoC). In 2004 we consulted albatross biologists from the UK and band manufacturers in UK and Sweden to see if a stronger band could be constructed. The Swedish manufacturer has produced a 1.25mm thick band (the old bands are 1mm thick) and these are being trialled on Campbell Island so that up to 1,000 birds retain a visible mark at Col and up to 500 birds at Moubay. If these bands spring open though, they will be removed in favour of transponders. From 2005 we also plan to trial a locking clip band. If either of these new bands show no further problems they will be left on birds in the study areas.

DoC regrets that OSNZ is against band removal in this species but our actions are designed to protect the welfare of albatrosses while maximising the scientific value of band information. Incidentally the problem with R-bands has not been confined to Southern Royal Albatross. This band has also been used on several kiwi species and after finding problems caused by open bands many kiwi managers have removed them and used transponders instead.

The OSNZ Council reply also asks why is DoC not doing anything about the reported problems associated with flipper banding of penguins. This issue is starting to be addressed. Flipper bands were removed from Erect-crested Penguins on Antipodes Island and transponders have been used for marking Fiordland Crested Penguins for many years. Recently the Yellow-eyed Penguin recovery group agreed to retain flipper bands on this species only in areas where the birds can be monitored at least 3 times per year, otherwise transponders will be used. As the new banding officer, Graeme Taylor is surveying people who band other penguin species, such as Blue Penguins, to see if there is a band injury problem. The Banding Office, in association with OSNZ Banding Liaison Officer David Melville, will be taking a more proactive approach to ensure that standards for band applications are improved in all projects and that the risks to birds from marking programmes are monitored and reported in more detail.

PETER MOORE and GRAEME TAYLOR

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## OSNZ Council Replies

Council appreciates the Department of Conservation's response to its concerns on the scientific basis for the removal of bands from the Campbell Island Royal Albatrosses. The response does not, however, deal with the fundamental issues that seabird research by the Department seems to be funded only when there is an ethical problem, and that conservation research priorities are devolved to the conservancies and triggered only when a species' status reaches "Threatened". It could be inferred that seabird research is funded only when previous research programmes go awry. Even then, such problems as the penguin flipper bands have been present for years, without action. For the present issue, it is also a concern that transponders appear to have a much shorter useful life than bands, and that they typically require a much closer – and potentially more disturbing – approach for identification. Given that band removal has already begun, further debate on this issue is not productive.

The Waikato in winter can be a cruel, damp place, especially for air travellers, but we have Wellington to thank for taking all our fog this year! In fact, the weather seemed to be assisting delegates to attend this year's conference, with one particular Nelson flight a full 20 minutes early due to robust tailwinds.

# 2005

# OSNZ AGM

Attendees felt the warm welcome from the organising team of Waikato members from Thursday onwards, being deposited in a wide range of Hamilton's ample accommodation.

The Friday consisted of meetings of the Council and RR's, conducted in the sombre atmosphere of Lady Goodfellow Chapel, University of Waikato. With a piano in the chapel, one expected strains of Bach's Toccata and Fugue to be wafting over the campus during particularly tricky decisions...

Saturday's field trip was anticipated with great relish as we all knew what kind of tasks that most accomplished of taskmasters, Chris Robertson, had in store for us. With local knowledge from the Rowses and OSNZ Waikato grandmother to us all, Betty Seddon, setting the route, and Chris supplying the techniques, a dozen or so teams set off on set routes, and set rules, to follow. These well-followed (ha!) routes which took them from the deep dark recesses of Waikato's rural hinterland to our balmy and sun-drenched beach getaway, Raglan (ahem!) gave out-of-towners a chance to see another part of Waikato. Hence, most experienced the enjoyment of the ceaseless squalls, skies full of steel shot, cars full of camaraderie, and countless U-turns, all the while providing a chance for everyone to get together and doctor their mileage charts.

One must discuss nourishments at some stage during the weekend, so the ensuing post field trip meal is a good place to start. At all times during the long weekend, our catering crew from The Station Café pulled out all stops to satisfy even the most 'Jack Spratt and wife' appetites.

I must comment on the old Frankton Railway Station's atmosphere, which provided much admiring comment, even down to the "I can't ever believe that the trains got up this hill" (referring to the hill on which said café and University stand). It goes without saying that the building was moved up there late last century.

Formalities were resumed as the AGM was underway shortly after that meal, with the most memorable feature being the frequent use of the term 'co-opted'. Let's hope that that particular term comes to be used less in future, which also does reflect the general nature of comments made by our President with regards to the matter.

Sunday dawned clear, fine and was the best day of the 2005 Waikato winter. Therefore it was the perfect day to hold an indoor scientific day. Dai Morgan and Phil Battley had assembled a stellar cast of speakers, who presented such a wide range of talks that one has a hard time summing up the highlights without becoming verbose.

One aspect of the day which impressed was the PowerPoint



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Photo 1 Walking down the main track within the Warrenheip fence. Photo by Nick Allen

Photo 2 Conference delegates at Maungatautari. Photo by Paul Cuming

Photo 3 A break in proceedings during the scientific day. Photo by Paul Cuming

Photo 4 Ted Wnorowski (left) receives his Meritorious Service Award from President David Medway (centre) and Atlas Convenor Christopher Robertson (right). Photo by Nick Allen

Photo 5 Looking at Brown Teal at the lower end of Warrenheip. Photo by Nick Allen

presentations which were seamless and gave the impression that it was all a well-oiled machine. Congrats to Dai and Phil. Backgrounds to the speakers in the abstracts show that we had university students, conservation employees, conservation organisations both governmental and private, and amateur ornithologists, all contributing to the aim of the day; the presentation of data gathered in the name of bird study in New Zealand – oh, and some offshore islands of Britain!

Another feast awaited us at the train station, followed by an entertaining and generous presentation of awards from the previous day's shenanigans in the field. I for one was most appreciative of the award for most species

# M Hamilton

of birds seen whilst travelling at 89 km/h divided by the number of litres of our engine minus the average number of birds seen flying during semi-automatic gunfire at Whangamarino Swamp. Chris' generosity in all seriousness was recognised when he was given an original Keith Woodley painting to adorn one of his walls in Wellington.

Monday's field trip was to the jewel in Waikato's less than gleaming natural crown (referring to its track record of not keeping its bush cover), Maungatautari. This mountain is southwest of Cambridge, and is the subject of a predator-proof fence similar to Karori. However, as far as size is concerned, Karori is David to Maungatautari's Goliath.

The first part of the morning was a quick dash down to Warrenheip at Karapiro, the place where the development phase of the fence took place. Jillana Robertson amiably demonstrated the many-hectare property of David Wallace, the instigator of the project. She even paid a Giant Weta to appear, along with a few of their star birds, namely Brown Teal. Brown Kiwi are also present in the enclosure. Then there was a rather intriguing video showing the fence undergoing multiple attacks by pest and predator alike. It opens the eyes to see what lengths animals go to climb fences.

After the theory, it was time to put our recently-acquired knowledge of fences to the test, but not until after a feed at the Out in the Styx Café, part of the sprawling metropolis of Pukeatua. Pukeatua is about 20 minutes south of Warrenheip on the southern slopes of Maungatautari. All six residents turned up to greet us. Thankfully one of them was the chef.

After a particularly memorable multi-dish lunch, it was off up the hill to work off those calories. Jillana introduced us to the mountain and filled us in on what we had forgotten back at Warrenheip. She also introduced us to Chris Smuts-Kennedy, who had just shown seabird guru Graeme Taylor a potential Cook's Petrel release site. Chris is scientific advisor to the trust which is pushing the fence through. Chris then completed a thorough inventory of possible species that could be released here, and then the group was ushered through the fence to see the practicalities of enclosing an area of bush within over 40 kilometres of fence. This is an enormous task, and the trust should be applauded at great length for their tenacity and for entertaining the possibility of such a huge fence.

One also must applaud members of the OSNZ Waikato branch, who, upon learning in 2004 that their Regional Representative was fleeing for the relatively warm (if not necessarily *dry*) climes of the Bay of Plenty, also learnt of the location of the next AGM, the Waikato! However bad it looked, I was NOT running from AGM duties at the time. Anyhow, the reins were duly taken up, and the whole weekend ran like a well-oiled machine. It goes to show that great things can get done with a small team, with help from Tom and Hazel Harty, who have a Diploma of AGM-Running with Honours.

PAUL CUMING



The Rare Birds Committee (RBC) was established by the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) to provide a means of independently verifying records of birds reported from New Zealand, they are also there to help anyone who simply can't identify a bird they have seen. The definition of New Zealand that the RBC follows is political insular New Zealand out to the edge of the 200 mile Economic Zone. The RBC is the sole arbiter of what species will or will not appear on the New Zealand List and advises the OSNZ Checklist Committee, whose role it is to produce a list of the birds of New Zealand that incorporates current taxonomic consensus.

## SO YOU'VE SEEN A RARE OR UNUSUAL BIRD?

### What do you do next?

#### Document it!

It doesn't matter if you have the world's best digital camera and a lens which takes photos of the centre of a bird's iris from 200 metres; you *have to* take some notes. A number of perfectly good records have been rejected by the RBC because the submitter either did not take any notes or didn't submit any with the photo they supplied. A photograph does not show every single plumage tract on a bird and some features that may not have been photographed (e.g. the underwing) may be crucial in the identification. In most cases a good photo will be enough but why not supply a few notes? We're not saying anyone in New Zealand has done it, but overseas a number of records have been submitted as photographs that have actually been of birds photographed in other countries!

### What notes should I take?

Look at the bird closely, not taking your eyes off it until you have identified every feature that you can see (and hear if you are lucky). This includes not only the diagnostic field marks, but the details that would enable you to describe that bird (say on the phone) to someone else. *Only once you have done this* should you take pictures, if you have a camera, or write down your description, or both (taking the pictures first). If you can sketch the bird, do so. Even if you are hopeless as an artist (and most of us are), you may be able to draw a wing or tail pattern, or a bill-shape or pattern. If similar or other birds are in the vicinity, write down its differences from them. When you have run out of things to say about its appearance, record its behaviour,

including posture, and try to transcribe or describe its vocalisations.

If you are with other birdwatchers, do not assume that they will write notes. If several of you are taking notes at the same time, the ideal procedure is for each person to write details without influencing the others. It helps no one if someone dictates to everyone what they are seeing. A suggestion to look at a particular feature whilst a number of people are observing, helps focus your attention on a potentially key identification mark, whereas a statement that the "*such and such* is quite striking" may influence the content of everyone's notes. Similarly, consulting references during the note-writing process can suggest the presence of features that are not actually present. Resist the temptation to record what you know is there. In a group situation, different observers' notes will be different. Do not worry about missing a detail that someone else has recorded; your notes will have value as an independent document.

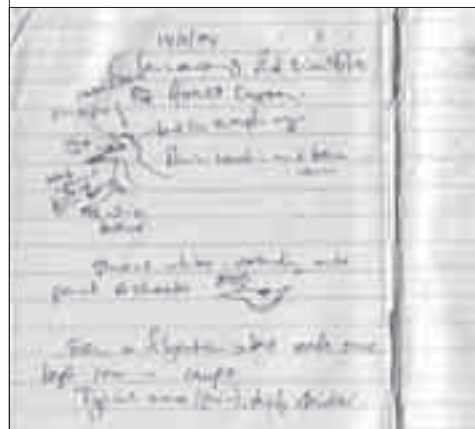
Many birdwatchers concentrate on observing and studying the rarity as long as possible, and then write notes immediately after the observation. Although this approach has its advantages, especially if the bird is difficult to observe or does not linger, there is always the possibility that some identification characters may be overlooked. Unless the bird stays around for days, there is little possibility of retrieving overlooked information. The likelihood of overlooking features is lessened if you scribble down notes during the observation, thus forcing yourself to look at the bird in more detail, rather than just observing basic identification features. Most people don't have a photographic memory!

The points that can wait until after the bird has gone are the notes on your distance from the bird, the relative position of the birds and the observer to the sun, the habitat, exact location, time and date, the optics you used, the names of your fellow observers, and your previous experience with the species.

The hardest habit to break is looking at your field guide when you should be looking at the bird and writing down what it looks like. Force yourself to leave the books alone, at least until you have written the best description you can. If you add anything to your notes after consulting field guides, indicate which features were prompted by looking at the books (and specify which books).

Field notes do not have to be neatly printed; information scribbled on a cigarette packet is preferable to nothing at all. These notes,

no matter how messy or soiled with mud, sweat, or food, constitute your original data, and, therefore, should be saved whether or not the information is later transcribed to a separate notebook or directly to a more formalised report (e.g., for submission to the RBC). The RBC prefers observers to photocopy their original notes and add them as an appendix to any major rarity. Scribbled notes on small, easily misplaced scraps of paper should be transcribed as quickly as possible to prevent possible loss. Notes in whatever bizarre short-hand you choose to make should be rewritten while information not recorded on paper can still be retrieved from memory. Just don't leave out any detail. It is very important to mention features that were not observed, though, if you are aware of them. Some observers feel that mentioning things you missed is a sign of incompetence, but frankly the RBC is more likely to look favourably on a record that has a lot of 'I don't know's' rather than one that just seems a little too perfect. No matter how good your memory, the more time that elapses between the observation and recording the information, the more 'fuzzy' or biased the details can become, if not forgotten altogether. Most birders would probably be amazed at their poor recall of plumage patterns and fine detail.





## Too much effort?

Note-taking won't be too much effort if you do a little preparation. Firstly, memorise the terminology describing the parts of a bird in the front pages of your field guide. Secondly, after learning the terminology, practice on the birds in your local patch, and force yourself to describe one bird every time you go out birdwatching (a juvenile Goldfinch one day, a godwit or oystercatcher the next, and so on).

## Fill in a unusual bird report form and send it to the RBC

You've gone to all that effort to document the rarity, the next logical step is an Unusual Bird Report (UBR) form, which is to be used wherever possible in the interests of uniformity when reporting sightings to the Committee for its consideration. These forms can be obtained from Regional Representatives or Regional Recorders or me (or from [http://osnz.org.nz/Media/NZ\\_rare\\_birds\\_form.pdf](http://osnz.org.nz/Media/NZ_rare_birds_form.pdf) as a PDF or [http://osnz.org.nz/Media/NZ\\_rare\\_birds\\_form.rtf](http://osnz.org.nz/Media/NZ_rare_birds_form.rtf) as a Word document).

## What does the RBC do once it receives a UBR form?

Reports received by the Convenor fall into various categories. In all cases, a copy of the report and any accompanying documentation is circulated among members, and they are given a period of time within which to get their comments back to the Convenor. In the case of first New Zealand records, Committee members need to be unanimous before

such records can be accepted. With other than first New Zealand records, generally the requirement is that two-thirds of members must agree on identity before acceptance. In cases of difficulty, expert opinion is sought from within or outside New Zealand.

Six-monthly reports are published in *Southern Bird* showing the status of records then before the Committee for consideration. In addition, a report will be published annually in *Notornis* describing the more significant records accepted by the Committee during the previous year. This will not, of course, prevent the observers of those birds from separately publishing their own accounts after their records have been accepted by the Committee.

## Will the RBC accept a single-observer record?

It is often repeated in bird watching circles that the only thing worse than not seeing rare birds is seeing one by yourself as the RBC won't accept it. Well in New Zealand that isn't true. In this country if we followed that rule, half the records we get would be thrown out as there simply aren't enough observers!

If the species is a first for New Zealand the record *will be* subject to an extra level of scrutiny, but there is no reason that a thorough record by a competent observer would not be accepted. Certainly a photograph (no matter how bad) significantly bolsters any single-observer record.

PAUL SCOFIELD

When thou seest an eagle, thou seest a portion of genius; lift up thy head!  
WILLIAM BLAKE

# a BRIEF PHILOSOPHY of Bird watching

A fact of life is that we are always, at least whilst awake, conscious of *something*. There is never a state of consciousness without what philosophers call intentionality. Our conscious selves are ever focussed on some object of interest within an ever-changing field of view. The American linguist Noam Chomsky once wrote that whenever we come to understand anything we call it a 'thing'. Hence it is in *naming* something that our expertise grows and we begin to master and relate adequately to the natural environment that surrounds us.

It was, therefore, interesting to watch the well known British ornithologist Bill Oddie describe something of the experience of 'birding'. He began with an open expanse filled with a variety of birds and began the steady process of differentiating and separating out. First the Wren from the Buntings, next the Warblers from the Wagtails. And so a complex scene

was broken down, abstracted and divided until it made sense and the species had been 'collected' in the mind's eye. Later in the programme a young boy was participating in just this process of abstracting and identifying, entering into the delight and accomplishment of *spotting* and *naming*.

A human being's 'watching of nature', from their energetic stillness in a hide or a paddock's corner, is a quintessentially laudable activity. To watch silently is to grow rich amid the ebb and flow of tides, the light and dark of days and the shifting seasons. In an increasingly disturbed

STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

# a BRIEF PHILOSOPHY of Bird watching

world it is to return to a lost unity within the pre-eminent sanity of the natural world. Indeed, Henri Sushon once said that everything that is valid in life is connected with either virgin nature or the sanctuary, so it is no overstatement to talk so strongly of the glow that occurs in human consciousness when 'watchers' experience first hand the beauty of nature's 'being'. Occurring, as it does, 'out there' on the estuary or treetops, but at the very same time in *their* conscious experience, occurring 'in them', so to speak.

As an infrequent 'birder' my motivation to return to the energetic stillness of watching is not especially to name things but to *participate in something*, to in some way *become* the scene I am immersing myself in. It is, for a while to be lost from the self. This deeper comprehension, the occasional sighting not necessarily of a rare bird but of the deeper comprehension of the sublime, of catching nature at its quiet and brilliant work, was surely experienced by Blake. What the watcher of the eagle is seeing is indeed a 'portion of genius'. The Canadian-born psychologist Eric Berne would no doubt have approved of Blake's sentiment, observing that 'the moment a little boy is concerned with which is a jay and which is a sparrow, he can no longer see the birds or hear them sing.'

'Naming,' of course, can be about control, about human dominance, in often subtle and various ways. To have a name for something is to exercise a certain mastery over it (think of the relief of naming a disease or unclaimed land; we have a low tolerance of the unknown). So, one may sort and order, identify and clarify, but never at the expense of the poetic. I have walked in the Wairarapas and the dappled forested foothills of the Tararuas with a keen birder often to be left in the shadow of 'not knowing.' Essentially, to have been without a name!

A seminal experience of this kind of 'deep seeing' that I have in mind lies forever in a famous poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins called 'The Windhover'. Hopkins caught sight of a windhover (kestrel) whilst walking the foothills of the Clwydian Range in North Wales. There, in the morning light, was a dappled falcon, riding and rolling on and off the air, swinging effortlessly through the huge thermals. As he recorded, for us, his heart was stirred by the bird, by the sheer 'mastery of the thing'. But it was more. He saw, deeper than 'mere appearance', in an instant, a flash of life that can be experienced but never captured. In the sheer unexpected gift of the moment was the 'plume' and 'beauty', the 'valour' and 'pride' of riding the tall 'air', the very fact that it was all occurring in that instant before him, and shining in one seamless experience of sheer delight.

What, in essence, had happened, and happens in the infrequent moments of our own when we 'really see', was that his conscious experience had opened in a pure and simple way to the gifts and secrets and beauty of nature's own being. Consciousness, so it has been argued, arises when, at least, three things occur. In the first place there is a self, there is *someone*, the birdwatcher! Secondly there is an *act*, the fact of looking at something. Finally there is what is *other* to the person, the thing looked at, and so entered into, the bird or the birds in the landscape or seascape. In a related way T.S. Eliot once referred to the intimate experience of listening to music by proposing that the listener 'is the music' while the music lasts. And so it is with looking deeply.

In a sense, the blessing which is the experience of birds in the natural environment is not so much to identify them and to master a species, as positive as that can be. It is rather, I suggest, to be lost a while to oneself, to leave the well-worn world of our thinking and preoccupations, the world of mass media and bombs and interest rates. It is, quite literally, and for a

while, to be free. It is to have our consciousness, and therefore our very selves, changed and enchanted by the simple fact of life being played out in front of us.

Paradoxically, as cultures homogenise and become similar the world over, the natural world expresses still a strangeness and wonder. So it is that we begin with the strange, the spare, the unique, the individual, the different, and patiently attribute names to plumes and habits and quirks engendered by stark naturalness. As Aristotle said 'To find out what is natural, we must study specimens which retain their nature and not those which have been corrupted.' The point is just that knowing is a matter of the heart as well as the eyes and this kind of looking transcends hemispheres and details, even if it starts with them! And it does so because the natural world itself is rooted in something larger.

As far as I know there is no current book entitled 'Zen and the Art of Bird Watching' and perhaps there should be. Its first chapter would encourage us not to look at birds and scenes because we have names for them but because the occurrence of life in these fleeting wings is beautiful, and more so, because it simply 'is'. Indeed, it is, as you would say, not so much about birds as the genius of life at wing.

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## The New Zealand Moulting Recording Scheme: a summary of records and reorganisation of the moulting database

A total of 2706 moulting records for 131 species had been received by the New Zealand Bird Moulting Recording Scheme up to the 1st May 2005. This is an increase of five species and 451 records since the full moulting records were last summarised in 2003 (*Southern Bird* 16, pp. 6-7). Just under half of the records (48.9%) were for birds in active moulting, the rest were for non-moulting birds. Over half of the records (57.8%) were for live birds.

Two species stand well ahead of others in the data set: House Sparrow with 462 records and Silvereye with 376 records. Next in order are Kaka and Fairy Prion (87 each), Bar-tailed Godwit (85), Pacific Golden Plover (67), Banded Dotterel (66), Lesser Knot (58), Redpoll (57), Blackbird (55), Australian Magpie (54) and Australasian Harrier (49). A summary of all records received so far is given in the table.

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## Summary of moult records received to date

Species	In moult	Not in moult	Alive	Dead	Total
Antarctic Prion	1	0	0	1	1
Arctic Skua	2	0	0	2	2
Australasian Bittern	0	1	0	1	1
Australasian Gannet	35	1	6	30	36
Australasian Harrier	39	10	1	48	49
Australian Magpie	48	6	44	10	54
Banded Dotterel	23	43	0	66	66
Banded Rail	0	5	4	1	5
Bar-tailed Godwit	13	72	1	84	85
Bellbird	13	6	19	0	19
Black Petrel	0	2	0	2	2
Black Stilt	5	4	0	9	9
Black Tit	4	2	6	0	6
Black-backed Gull	14	3	2	15	17
Black-billed Gull	4	1	2	3	5
Blackbird	25	30	46	9	55
Black-browed Mollymawk	2	36	0	38	38
Black-fronted Tern	3	1	0	4	4
Black-tailed Godwit	0	1	0	1	1
Blue Penguin	2	2	0	4	4
Blue Petrel	0	4	0	4	4
Bristle-thighed Curlew	0	3	0	3	3
Broad-billed Prion	1	1	2	0	2
Brown Creeper	1	0	1	0	1
Brown Quail	1	1	0	2	2
Brown Skua	1	0	0	1	1
Brown Teal	9	28	2	35	37
Campbell Island Teal	2	11	13	0	13
Cape Pigeon	0	2	0	2	2
Caspian Tern	2	0	0	2	2
Chaffinch	30	18	46	2	48
Chatham Island Pigeon	1	0	0	1	1
Chatham Island Taiko	0	3	3	0	3
Cirl Bunting	3	2	5	0	5
Common Diving Petrel	2	1	0	3	3
Common Myna	17	0	2	15	17
Cook's Petrel	0	2	0	2	2
Curlew Sandpiper	2	4	0	6	6
Dunnock	18	12	29	1	30
Eastern Rosella	1	1	0	2	2
Eastern Curlew	2	1	0	3	3
Fairy Prion	0	87	0	87	87
Fairy Tern	1	0	0	1	1
Fantail	16	20	34	2	36
Feral Pigeon	37	10	46	1	47
Fernbird	1	0	0	1	1
Flesh-footed Shearwater	0	2	0	2	2
Fluttering Shearwater	8	0	0	8	8
Goldfinch	14	12	15	11	26
Great white Heron	0	1	1	0	1
Greenfinch	27	14	39	2	41
Grey Duck	2	0	2	0	2
Grey Phalarope	0	1	0	1	1
Grey Teal	0	1	1	0	1
Grey Warbler	26	3	28	1	29
Grey-backed Storm Petrel	0	10	10	0	10
Grey-faced Petrel	0	1	0	1	1
House Sparrow	302	160	458	4	462
Hudsonian Godwit	0	3	0	3	3
Hutton's Shearwater	2	1	1	2	3
Kaka	12	75	75	12	87
Kea	1	0	0	1	1
Kerguelen Petrel	1	3	0	4	4
Lesser Broad-billed Prion	1	0	0	1	1
Lesser Knot	9	49	1	57	58

Little Owl	1	0	0	1	1
Little Shag	0	1	1	0	1
Little Tern	2	0	0	2	2
Little Whimbrel	3	2	0	5	5
Long-tailed Cuckoo	0	7	2	5	7
Long-tailed Skua	2	0	0	2	2
Mallard	9	0	8	1	9
Morepork	1	11	3	9	12
New Zealand Dotterel	5	13	1	17	18
New Zealand Falcon	8	8	0	16	16
New Zealand Kingfisher	11	8	9	10	19
New Zealand Pigeon	27	4	0	31	31
New Zealand Pipit	0	1	0	1	1
Oriental Cuckoo	1	1	0	2	2
Oriental Pratincole	0	2	0	2	2
Pacific Golden Plover	20	47	0	67	67
Pallid Cuckoo	0	1	0	1	1
Pectoral Sandpiper	4	12	0	16	16
Pheasant	4	3	4	3	7
Pied Oystercatcher	1	0	0	1	1
Pied Shag	1	1	0	2	2
Pied Stilt	7	27	0	34	34
Pukeko	0	3	1	2	3
Red-billed Gull	47	1	37	11	48
Red-crowned Parakeet	5	2	6	1	7
Red-necked Stint	2	12	0	14	14
Redpoll	16	41	57	0	57
Robin	10	19	27	2	29
Royal Spoonbill	2	0	0	2	2
Saddleback	2	1	1	2	3
Salvin's Prion	1	0	0	1	1
Sanderling	2	0	0	2	2
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	1	9	0	10	10
Shining Cuckoo	0	8	0	8	8
Shore Plover	8	23	0	31	31
Short-tailed Shearwater	0	1	0	1	1
Siberian Tattler	1	0	1	0	1
Silveryeye	204	172	364	12	376
Song Thrush	11	11	15	7	22
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	3	0	0	3	3
Spotted Dove	3	0	0	3	3
Spotted Shag	6	1	0	7	7
Spur-winged Plover	1	14	0	15	15
Starling	4	17	14	7	21
Stitchbird	24	7	31	0	31
Tomtit	10	1	11	0	11
Tui	4	17	16	5	21
Turnstone	11	18	0	29	29
Variable Oystercatcher	2	0	2	0	2
Wandering Tattler	2	8	0	10	10
Weka	0	1	1	0	1
Welcome Swallow	1	1	0	2	2
Westland Petrel	0	1	0	1	1
Whimbrel	1	3	0	4	4
White Tern	2	0	0	2	2
White-capped (Shy) Mollymawk	5	26	0	31	31
White-capped Noddy	1	0	0	1	1
White-faced Heron	3	1	1	3	4
White-faced Storm Petrel	2	3	0	5	5
White-fronted Tern	9	5	0	14	14
Whitehead	4	0	4	0	4
White-headed Petrel	4	0	0	4	4
White-winged Black Tern	2	0	0	2	2
Wrybill	9	34	1	42	43
Yellow-crowned Parakeet	1	1	0	2	2
Yellowhammer	2	1	2	1	3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1321</b>	<b>1385</b>	<b>1565</b>	<b>1141</b>	<b>2706</b>

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Over the years the following observers have made contributions to the scheme: N. Allen (8), R. Batcheler (217), P. Battley (32), B. Bell (337), D. Bettsworth (4), C. Care (192), J. Campbell (5), S. O'Connor (1), G. Dehise (2), P. Demonchy (3), R. Empson (19), B. Gill (155), T. Greene (2), R. Guest (17), W. Hare (3), A. Harvey (65), J. Hawkins (1), H. Heinekamp (119), M. Hunt (5), N. Hyde (1), M. Johnston (35), A. Jones (71), E. King (2), J. Knightmans, B. Machereth (5), J. McCallum (2), D. Melville (705), N. Millus (2), C. Miskelly (14), S. Moore (32), K. Morgan (33), S. Nicholson (1), J. Oates (54), D. Onley (345), P. Pearce (1), S. Petch (6), S. Phillips (1), R. Powlesland (5), P. Reece (3), H. Robertson (24), J. Riley (30), P. Sagar (106), M. Snowball (1), M. Taylor (23), J. Woon (1) and G. Vaughan (9).

With OSNZ funding, Gemma Bowker-Wright was employed through November and December 2004 to transfer outstanding moult records onto an Excel database. All 2576 records received up to the end of 2004 have now been checked and recoded. This is the first major transfer of data since Kim McConkey updated the database in 1995. Data from this moult archive are potentially available for use by OSNZ members or other *bona fide* researchers. They are now more accessible than in earlier years when held on a mainframe computer. Over the summer we updated analyses of the moult patterns of the two most prevalent species, the House Sparrow and Silvereye, prior to publication. We plan to complete the Moult Scheme overhaul during 2005.

Our thanks to Council for providing the necessary funds for upgrading the moult cards and the moult database, and thanks too to all those who have sent in records over the years. The post-breeding peak of bird moult will be on us from late summer to autumn, so hopefully more records can be added to the scheme by your efforts of completing moult cards and non-moult forms. To date we have a total of 2706 moult records for 131 species, let's set a target of exceeding 3000 records for the scheme and some new species in 2006!

**BEN BELL and GEMMA BOWKER-WRIGHT**

## Regional Roundup



### Far North

Following on from our last round-up, Laureen Alston, a former Auckland Regional Recorder has agreed to take on this job for the Far North region following her move to the area. After the meeting at which Laureen was voted in, local member Russell Thomas gave a very interesting illustrated talk on his past adventures in Patagonia and on Easter Island.

Following the recruitment of some new members we decided to hold a beginners' field meeting in September. We were delighted when Laureen offered to take a group of us over to Moturoa Island on her boat for the day. Apart from a good selection of commoner species we managed to find a couple of the resident New Zealand Robins.

Some members have continued to support local Forest and Bird events, and the Far North beach patrols which take place every fortnight. There was also a repeat New Zealand Dotterel census in October at some sites in the 'far far north' where coverage was scanty last year. The results are not available at the time of writing but we hear that the count is somewhat higher than last year.

**DETLEF DAVIES**

### Northland

Ross Atkinson from the Department of Conservation talked at our September meeting about how the various pieces of legislation deal with dog control issues on beaches, particularly in wildlife refuges and other reserves, and how OSNZ members can help deal with these issues when they are on beaches.

At our October meeting we had a farewell supper for Richard Parrish, and had a great time reminiscing on some great birding trips over the years. David Crockett gave an update on the recent work done for the Chatham Island Taiko, and at the camp, at the November meeting. We also had a look at Pru Cozen's great photos from the same trip.

We will be finishing the year with a pot luck barbecue in December, and carrying out the wader count on the Whangarei Harbour in November. The count on the Kaipara Harbour found fewer waders on most of the sites due to big high tides and overgrown paddocks where the birds would usually go to roost. We are not sure where they went this time.

The last of the seabird surveys on the Chickens Islands, in conjunction with DoC as part of the restoration plan for the island group, has been completed. Fluttering Shearwaters were heard around the island but no Common Diving Petrels were seen or heard on Coppermine, although they were heard and are present on Lady Alice and Middle Stack. Both seabird species are likely to colonise all the islands in the group on their own without re-introductions being necessary.

**KATRINA HANSEN**

### Waikato

The Waikato region has been treated to a number of excellent speakers at our monthly meetings, covering a diverse range of subjects. In August Andrea Brendan, from the Department of Conservation, gave a summary of the research that she has been involved with looking at threatened native plants in the Waikato; in September Ross Martin, from Hort Research, gave an overview of the exciting Scintinel (automated

small mammal monitoring device) that has been developed by Dr Kim King and her team; and in October Eric Fox talked to the group on research that is being currently undertaken on the numerous captive birds at the Otorohanga Kiwi House. Waikato OSNZ wishes to thank all the people that came to talk about various research projects and ornithological interests over the year.

Beach patrolling this year has involved the usual amount of fresh air and exercise, but has not produced many dead seabirds. January with two birds per kilometre has been the best month so far in 2005, followed by February and March with one bird per kilometre. From April to September there were very low numbers but then October brought an increase to one bird per kilometre. This was still a low tally but it included species that we haven't seen in numbers or at all for quite a while, such as giant petrel, Antarctic Fulmar (eight of this species), White-headed Petrel, Blue Petrel and Cape Pigeon. Unless there is a dramatic increase in beach wrecks in November/December it seems that 2005 will have been a good year for the birds, but a dull year for Waikato beach patrollers. Are we downhearted? No, we shall plod on, always hopeful of better times to come!

Kaka seem to be making a bit of a come back in the Waikato lately. Neil Fitzgerald reports that two were seen on Maungatautauri (13/10), two were spotted at Renown, west of Huntly (22/8), one on Ryburn Road (11/8) and three are commonly seen at the Taitua Arboretum. Furthermore, one was seen near Orini (Theresa Balvert, 1/6) and another at Byrant Beach, Raglan (Hugh Oliver, 19/5).

In other sightings, Jane Ashby spotted a parakeet nibbling on Tree Fuchsia in her backyard, 30-35 Royal Spoonbills were seen on the Aotea Harbour, a New Zealand Falcon was seen near Ruapuke by Tim Stoddard (14/8), and Hugh Clifford saw one Lesser Knot feeding and another roosting with a New Zealand Dotterel at Taharoa Beach (14/9), and has a Morepork regularly visiting his house in Chartwell.

Lake censuses have been continuing with vigour around the region. Lakes regularly counted by Barry Friend (and co-workers), Hugh Clifford, and Brian Challinor have recently produced good numbers of Coots, Pukeko and Mallards. In addition, Brian Challinor reported that a Japanese Snipe was present during his September census of Forest Lake; quite a rarity for that lake.

**DAI MORGAN and HUGH CLIFFORD**

### Taranaki

With winter having been so mild and short, attendances at indoor meetings have been very good as was the case with the September meeting, when we were joined by a rather unwell Ralph Powlesland in town to check up on a Tui and New Zealand Pigeon study, and looking for volunteers to monitor nests.

Claims in the local newspaper by the Regional Council that the Magpie population was increasing caused considerable discussion as to whether they are or not, with the conclusion being no increase had been noted by members. Beach patrols are yielding few returns, with a Cape Pigeon being the major find.

Thirteen Royal Spoonbills were seen at Mokau just above the main road bridge. This is probably a record for the Taranaki region.

Helen Elder and Marie Mitchell with the aid of maps, pamphlets and photos gave us a talk on their trip around Texas, Colorado and New Mexico. Among the 114-plus bird species seen were American Robin, American Kestrel, Northern Mockingbird, Turkey Vulture, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, and everyone's favourite the Greater Roadrunner.

A field trip to Lake Rotokare was held on a beautiful fine and warm spring day. The bird life was prolific and vocal, so there was no need



## Festival

Dear Sir,

Through *Southern Bird* I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for the memorable weekend my brother and I had at the BirdsAPlenty Festival in October. The activities we were able to attend were so well organised and all the people we met so friendly that it was a wonderful experience.

Don Merton's talk, which opened the festival, was extremely interesting; I, for one, had no idea he had been the driving force behind so many overseas recovery

programmes. We were all honoured to have him join the outing to Ohiwa Harbour the next day and to have the opportunity to talk to him afterwards.

Because the Whale Island trip was cancelled we were able to join the Nukuhou Saltmarsh Care Group doing their monthly bird count early on Sunday morning, and were rewarded by close encounters with Fernbirds. What an experience!

Over the four days we also saw a Reef Heron, a very brief glimpse of a Spotless Crane, followed by a good view of a Banded Rail

pottering around the edge of a wetland, besides hearing Brown Kiwi calling at night.

Thank you, REAP and all the other groups involved in the festival. I am looking forward to coming again next year, and maybe, this time, Whale Island might be accessible.

Yours sincerely,  
PEGGY MALLALIEU

to engage in botanical studies. A walk around the lake produced 21 native bird species and 11 introduced, with the highlight being some very vocal Spotless Crakes. In the afternoon Fernbirds were calling all around. Soon after our visit two or three Kaka were heard in the bush and a Brown Kiwi heard at night. It really is a wonderful place. Predator trapping is well underway, as is fundraising to predator-proof fence the area.

At the October meeting Graham Bird gave us a brief outline of his trip to Stewart Island, finding Tui to be the most numerous bird, Kaka and Kiwi seen, and also Brown Creeper and both parakeets on Ulva Island. Wayne Peters reported that on a recent fishing trip to one of the rivers around Lake Taupo that Fernbirds were really abundant, but trout not so.

Dave Bell gave us a report on his progress in plotting Falcon sightings around Taranaki and a recent trip to Kaingaroa Forest to help out with banding Falcons that live around the cutover pine forests, and also the dangers of getting too close to Falcon nests. Migratory wader sightings around the coast have been rather sparse so far. The field trip to Looney's Lake and Sandy Bay on the South Taranaki was held in indifferent weather, three Fernbirds at Looney's Lake may be the only record on the Taranaki ring plain.

At the November meeting David Medway reported that beach patrols during October were more productive with three Buller's Shearwaters, a Gannet and a Cape Pigeon, but the main interest was the four Antarctic Fulmars, these being the first for some years. A few more migratory waders had been seen around the coast giving hope to keen watchers.

Janice Malloy, in town to visit family and friends, volunteered to speak to us about her work with pelagic birds, and a three year stint with Southern Seabird Solutions which involved working with Southern Ocean fishermen finding solutions to seabird by-catch problems, and trying to raise awareness of pelagic birds amongst the general population. The field trip to Koru Pa was very interesting with 22 bird species recorded. The Stony River Walkway became a route march with all participants somewhat exhausted by the hot humid weather.

A question raised by one member should keep us all thinking as this year draws to a close and we head into the next. Why do some birds walk and others hop?

PETER FRYER

### Wellington

In an engaging address in early September entitled 'New Zealand's Bird of Mystery', Colin Miskelly summarised his adventures with, studies of and conservation work with snipe to the south of the country. In a well-illustrated presentation with sound effects Colin explained that snipe are a little known species group that was formerly widespread in New Zealand. Extinction on the North and South Islands and losses elsewhere are attributed to Ship Rats and Kiore. Three genetic groups are now recognised, based on recent genetic research that has more clearly defined relationships between populations.

Colin explained that snipe are shy, well-camouflaged birds that are difficult to see, but that despite their reclusive nature quite a lot is now known about their biology. Courtship feeding has been observed where males feed females (females are heavier than males) and there is a long period of parental support to chicks. Both sexes share incubation. One of the mysteries about snipe is the presumed aerial display at night by some birds that has given rise to the name 'hakawai'. Although he has never seen this, Colin said that indirect evidence, such as broken tail feathers, suggests that snipe may fly high and dive at speed towards the ground giving rise to the roaring sound that he and others have occasionally heard. The mystery is why snipe fly this way, especially

## Regional Roundup

given that some species, including the Snares Island snipe, are approaching flightlessness.

Thirty Snares Island Snipe were moved to the Muttonbird Islands near Stewart Island in April 2005 as the first major translocation of this mysterious species. Finally, Colin described studies and conservation work concerning the Campbell Island Snipe.

Graeme Taylor entertained members in early October with his studies on the South Georgian Diving Petrel. The only known breeding ground in the Pacific Ocean for this species is the dunes of Codfish Island/Whenua Hou, near Stewart Island. That the species bred at this site was discovered in 1978 by Mike Imber and Ron Nilsson, and it is the only known sea level breeding site for the species. Graeme brought us up to date with recent research on this small bird, explaining just how precarious its breeding site is. The preferred breeding site is sand dunes that are threatened by storm action, sea warming, weed growth, and forest regeneration. A storm in September was devastating, wiping out an 850 m by 10 m strip of sand dunes. Some of the remaining burrows looked like Kingfisher holes in the escarpment!

Graeme said that birds have been captured, 94 have been banded, and some have been recovered giving an estimated population of about 170. Monitoring of the 1-1.5 m-long burrows during the breeding season has given a current estimate of between 50 to 80 breeding pairs. Common Diving Petrels share some of the burrows, complicating matters considerably. The dunes are too fragile for study hatches to be built so only adults have been captured. Youngsters seem to fly out to sea on their first night out of the burrow so estimating bird ages has not been possible.

In 2004, 108 burrows as well as nine scrapes were found. Of these burrows 55% contained birds and 32 others showed regular activity. Only one egg has ever been retrieved. Graeme reported the recent discovery that the South Georgia Diving Petrel can now be more readily distinguished from the very similar Common Diving Petrel in the hand than previously thought. The former has a dark tip and white base to the upper tail coverts. They are also heavier, probably from pelagic feeding trips. Graeme concluded with the comment that gathering evidence suggests that the New Zealand population of the South Georgia Diving Petrel is genetically distinct from other similar species, with a separated evolution of about 200,000 years.

Beach patrols, done by several members, continued through the winter along Wellington and Kapiti coastlines. Few beach wrecks were reported but of a good variety of species. Several live (exhausted) and two dead Antarctic Fulmars were found on the southern Wellington coast in October.

The most notable recent live observation was of a Yellow-eyed Penguin in late September swimming close to a beach at Eastbourne, in Wellington Harbour, well north of its normal range.

Under the enthusiastic guidance of Peter Reese, several members have again helped with bird capture and banding work at the Wellington Zoo. Yellowhammers, Blackbirds, Dunnocks, Starlings, House Sparrows, Silvereyes and Greenfinches continue to be caught frequently at the zoo during the winter. The information being collected through banding and recaptures is steadily adding to the database of knowledge of the distribution and age of the smaller birds that are commonly seen in Wellington.

IAN ARMITAGE and STUART NICHOLSON

# Regional Roundup



## Nelson

The Gannet colony at the end of Farewell Spit suffered damage from a severe south-easterly storm on or about the 17th September. Rob Schuckard made the discovery on the 20th September when he estimated that 60% of the nesting birds were affected.

Large areas where the birds were concentrated had been swept away. Rob estimated that an average of 2,700 pairs had been nesting since 1999. A further visit made on the 5th November revealed that the eroded colony was relaying but was very vulnerable to any future southerly storms due to the loss of banks of Marram Grass. Time and weather did not permit a detailed survey of the current Gannet numbers but many of the unaffected pairs had large chicks.

The nearby Caspian Tern colony had 43 birds sitting on nests. It was good to see that these birds had been relatively unaffected by the storm.

The Caspian Terns which nest on the Waimea Inlet at Bells Island shellbank numbered 32 pairs in mid-November, with some chicks well-advanced for the time of the year. Willie Cook is planning to do further banding of these birds. At the last visit a lone Canada Goose in close proximity to the nesting terns put on some aggressive behaviour indicating the possibility of a nest close by.

In September a single Red-necked Stint was seen with a small group of Wrybills on the shellbank. Regular visits to this area often reveal colour banded Bar-tailed Godwits, many of which were banded in the area. A bird banded in Chongming Dao, China is back for a second year. On the Motueka Sandspit a Lesser Knot with a yellow flag (North Western Australia) has been seen by two different observers.

Peter Gaze instructed a group on the procedure of five minute bird counts along a section of the Flora Track in the Kahurangi National Park. Pauline Samways is coordinating a monitoring project here and two of the three day programmes have been completed. Bellbirds and Riflemen are the most frequently recorded species. The Riflemen in particular created a lot of interest when a nest was discovered in a hole on a bank side.

In Golden Bay Richard Stocker is about to go back into the Henderson Basin to check out the Rock Wren population there. A single bird has been seen at least twice at Mt Perry. This is believed to be the most northerly sighting of the species.

December will be a busy month with the Australasian Shorebird Conference held in Nelson, plus plans for mist- and cannon-netting of migratory wading birds.

DON COOPER

## Marlborough

We have had quite an active early spring. The initial survey of about two thirds of the winery dams has been completed. They fall into two main classes: reservoir types, which provide next to nil habitat, and dams using the natural topography. Some of these are very good for birds, while others are still very new and have yet to settle. The former are well used by waterfowl, especially Scaup.

The Maud Island five minute count and check on the Fluttering Shearwater burrows went well. The counts have yet to be analysed but indications are that some species, especially finches, are down in numbers. The shearwaters are doing well with 17 pairs, five chicks and 12 eggs. Nesting appeared to be nearly a month ahead of normal. Unfortunately one of the chicks has since died.

Over the first two weeks of October, the Wairau River survey was well attended by members and the river was covered from the Wash Bridge to the SH1 bridge. The Black-fronted Tern count was approximately 1,000, but Black-billed Gulls only 360. This works out at declines of 25% and 50% respectively. The find of the survey was two Wrybills, which as far as we are aware are a first for the Upper Wairau.

Anniversary weekend was spent on Long Island checking Fluttering Shearwater bands and banding unbanded birds (over 600 of these). Members also mapped the colony and got an estimate of its size. This information will be important to DoC Wellington who are planning a transfer of shearwaters to Mana Island.

The Lake Grassmere surveys continue and the October count gave one of the better ranges of arctic waders – Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Knot, Turnstone, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint. We are hoping the summer surveys will continue to show a good variety. We have extended our counting areas for the summer to get a better look at visiting waders. It also serves as a monthly meeting where we discuss coming events and continues to be held on the third Sunday of each month.

The first weekend of November was the spring national wader count. We covered the entire Marlborough shorebird habitat. The highlight was an Eastern Curlew at Wairau Lagoons.

We are trialling a sample garden bird survey which may develop into a national scheme if it proves successful. Several members have already started, but we hope most local members will participate.

A preliminary look at the Royal Spoonbill colony on an island in the sewage ponds and one at the Vernon Lagoons found most nests containing very small young or eggs, but there were seven almost fledged chicks which we were able to catch and band. Further spoonbill banding is planned for a later date.

The Australasian Ornithological Conference was a major event for New Zealand ornithology and we were fortunate to be the host region. There were many overseas visitors, as well as kiwis, with about 200 attending. This meant there was a lot of organising to be done both before and during the conference.

A big effort will be made with our passerine banding programme which will begin on Waitangi weekend at Jack Taylor's farm near Ward, and continue each weekend through February and March. Those wishing to attend will need to bring their own accommodation (tent, food and utensils). Cooking facilities will be available (gas burners and barbeque). For those not wanting to camp, there are two motels in Ward and two places where meals can be obtained. If you are planning on coming, please let Mike Bell know closer to the time (phone 03 577 9818) and he will provide details of the location and what is and isn't available. There is a wealth and variety of birds. Many thanks to Jack for allowing us to camp on his property. This programme is also available to members in neighbouring regions. Later in the year the emphasis will change to the Wairau Lagoons.

BRIAN BELL

## Canterbury

Most of the scarcer species of wading birds at Lake Ellesmere have chosen the relatively difficult-to-reach 'tip end' of Kaitorete Spit, with highlights being up to 47 Turnstones (one with an orange flag) and a couple of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. Numbers of Pacific Golden Plovers have been good this spring with a number of members enjoying seeing remnants of their breeding plumage. Up to eighteen Cattle Egrets were seen in the Ridge Road area of Greenpark/Motukarara in early spring, and up to thirteen of the same species in their other regular local haunt of Tulls Road near Waikuku.

After a number of years of wintering in large numbers in the Lake Forsyth/eastern Lake Ellesmere area, Australasian Crested Grebes have finally settled down to nest, with back-riding chicks seen along one of the lowland rivers.

Black Stilts have been seen on the Ashley River close to Rangiora (the same banded individual as last year) and the lower Waimakariri River. A Brown Teal was seen on a few occasions on the Waikuku Beach freshwater lagoon. On the nearby Ashley Estuary a Black-tailed Godwit has taken up long-term residence, along with a couple of Whimbrels.

To the north at Kaikoura a Whimbrel was recorded near the seal colony and a Royal Spoonbill was seen roosting on Pahau Island. Up to 16 Cirl Buntings were seen feeding on grass and weed seeds at the South Bay recreation reserve in late winter and early spring. An Oceanwings pelagic in early September brought the unusual sight of a flock of 24 Antarctic Fulmars. The latter flock preceded the wrecks of the species in other parts of the country by a few weeks, plus the individual that Phil Crutchley saw flying well inland over his Motukarara house during a strong southerly.

Andrew Crossland led a short discussion in August on what birds might be re-introduced into the Christchurch area with plans to predator-proof fence one extensive area for the likes of Buff Weka and Fernbird, and control predators and improve habitat in others.

September brought the second members' night of the year (by popular request). Eric Spurr suggested means by which Bellbirds might be enticed back into towns and cities and possible monitoring schemes that could be used to keep an eye on population sizes of New Zealand birds. Slides were also shown of the recent trip by a number of Canterbury members to Mount Isa and the Birdsville Track in uncharacteristically damp weather.

An update on DoC's rare bird work in Canterbury was supplied by Andy Grant in October. The presentation focussed on Orange-fronted Parakeets and Yellowheads in beech forests and Black Stilts, Black-fronted Terns and Black-billed Gulls on rivers in the Mackenzie Basin. There are separate projects and budgets for the species and habitats, for example to prevent extinction of Orange-fronted Parakeets and Operation Ark in the beech forests of Arthur's Pass/Lake Sumner; and the Black Stilt recovery project, Project River Recovery to rehabilitate rivers/remove willows, and predator-trapping along the Tasman River. Despite these different projects and budgets, however, there is much interdependence and co-operation.

In contrast to recent years when high river levels and poor weather have conspired to prevent one or the other the region has helped the Ashley Rivercare Group with two surveys of the Ashley River this spring. Wrybill breeding pairs seem to have fallen this year to only two pairs (six last year). Black-fronted Terns are struggling to nest and are going down in numbers dramatically compared to historic numbers, and Black-billed Gull nests numbered the rather pathetic and disturbing one, compared to perhaps a few hundred only five years ago. These latter two species have chosen to nest close to Rangiora this year, and

# Regional Roundup



the presence on at least one occasion of off-road recreational vehicles driving through the colony and children throwing stones at the birds (watched by their parents) could not have helped matters. The Ashley Rivercare Group has put a lot of time and money into the education of people visiting the river and predator-trapping. It seems that education has little positive effect on helping these birds breed.

A pleasant morning was spent in a number of Port Hills reserves in October revisiting them for the regional Banks Peninsula Reserves presence/absence project. Tomtits were seen in their regular closest haunt to Christchurch, along with other commoner species such as Bellbirds and Fantails.

NICK ALLEN

## Southland

The biggest news lately was the of large scrub fire at Awarua Bay which raged over a large area and threatened power to the aluminium smelter at Tiwai Point. Thankfully it was brought under control but it is anyone's guess as to how many birds and nests were destroyed. The main threat would have been to the Fernbirds and Australasian

Bitterns that occur in the area. It will probably take a number of years before the area recovers.

Our intrepid wader catchers have been at the head of the Awarua Bay again (well before the fire) but unfortunately were foiled by high tides, strong winds and a couple of displaying Harriers that scattered the wader flocks. We hope that February 2006 brings them better luck, although I hear they did manage to catch a couple birds in Dunedin despite the efforts of a skinny-dipping jogger.

David Melville spotted four godwits that had been banded at Awarua in 2004. One of these birds headed up to Dunedin within a day or two of his sighting.

Lloyd Esler heard the first Shining Cuckoo of the year on October 1st at Otatarā and we have also had two reports of a Kaka in the same location. Where this latter bird has come from is a mystery, although it is still very welcome.

PHIL RHODES

## What's on



## Far North

Detlef Davies, Waipapa Lagoon, Landing Road, Kerikeri 0470. Ph (09) 407 3874. Email detlefdaviesd@yahoo.com

## Northland

Katrina Hansen, 3 Harbour View Road, Onerahi, Whangerei. Ph (09) 430 2133. Email khansen@doc.govt.nz

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

## Auckland

Suzi Phillips, 36 Beulah Avenue, Rothesay Bay, North Shore City, Auckland. Phone (09) 479 5395. Email suzi@dialogue.co.nz

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 Avenue, Mt. Eden.

## South Auckland

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

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

## Waikato

Laurie Hoverd, R.D. 3, Te Awamutu 2400. Ph (07) 871 8071. Email jlhoverd@xtra.co.nz

Evening meetings, every third Wednesday 7.30pm, DoC, 73 Rostrevor Street, Hamilton.

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. Bird sightings: Regional recorder, Dai Morgan dm30@waikato.ac.nz

## Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau

Tim Barnard, 23 Tennyson Drive, Owhata, Rotorua. Ph (07) 345 3433. Email tim.barnard@xtra.co.nz

## Gisborne/Wairoa

RR's position vacant.

## Hawke's Bay

Murray Jeffries, 2a Cobden Road, Napier 4001. Ph (06) 834 3865. Fax (06) 834 3867. Email mcjeffries@xtra.co.nz

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

## Taranaki

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

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

## Wanganui

Tom Teasdale, 33 Paterson Street, Aramoho, Wanganui 5001. Ph (06) 343 9992. Email teasdale.family@clear.net.nz

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

## Manawatu

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

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

## Wairarapa

Miles King, Olivers Road, R D 6 Masterton 5921. Ph (06) 377 5252. Email kingsmeade@contact.net.nz

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

## Wellington

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

Evening meetings - first Monday of the month, DoC Science and Research Centre, ph. Ian Armitage (04) 232 7470. Matiu/Somes Island surveys, ph. Rod Orange (04) 473 1912. Mist-netting and passerine banding at The Zoo, various Saturdays, ph. Peter Reese (04) 387 7387. Beach patrols, ph. Jean Luke (04) 904 1704.

## Nelson

Steve Wood, Hursthouse Street, Lower Moutere, R D 2 Upper Moutere, Nelson 7152. Ph 03 528 6438. Email utopia.landscapes@clear.net.nz

Evening meetings – usually first Monday of the month, 7.15 pm upstairs at 50 Halifax Street, Nelson. Ph. Steve Wood (03) 528 6438 or Don Cooper (03) 544 8109.

## Marlborough

Brian Bell (acting RR), 35 Selmes Road, R D 3 Rapaura, Blenheim. Ph (03) 570 2230. Email wmlblenheim@clear.net.nz

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

## Canterbury/West Coast

Nick Allen, 65 Allin Drive, Waikuku, North Canterbury 8254. Ph (03) 312 7183. Email nick\_allen@xtra.co.nz

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

Louise Foord, P.O. Box 12002, Maori Hill, Dunedin. Ph (03) 467 5041. Fax (03) 467 5071.

Evening meetings Otago Art Society building, cnr Albany & Great King Streets. Ph. Louise Foord.

## Southland

Phil Rhodes, 92 Marama Avenue North, R D 9 Otatarā, Invercargill. Ph (03) 213 1228. Email p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz

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

