



# Southern *Bird*

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**Australasian  
Ornithological  
Conference**

**Australasian  
Shorebird  
Conference**

**ASC Post-Conference  
Field Trip**

**Charles Fleming  
Biography Launched**





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## Quotation

*I caught this morning morning's minion kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing, As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!*

*The Windhover* by Gerard Manley Hopkins

## Contents

<b>Nest Record Scheme Report</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Australasian Ornithological Conference</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Australasian Shorebird Conference</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ASC Post-Conference Field Trip</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Charles Fleming Biography Launched</b>	<b>11</b>

## Cover Photos

Front cover: Snares Crested Penguin

Back cover: Common Myna

Both photos by Barry Hartley

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.

## THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

### Annual General Meeting

Wellington, Saturday 3rd June 2006

**Notice is hereby given** that the sixty-seventh Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on **Saturday 3rd June 2006 at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington at 8pm.**

#### AGENDA

1. Apologies.
2. Confirmation of minutes of 2005 AGM.
3. Result of elections for Council.
4. Reports of President and Treasurer and financial statements.
5. Appointment of Auditor.
6. Notices of motion - see below.
7. Presentation of awards.
8. General business.

#### Notices of Motion

The following two notices of motion have been received for consideration at the Annual General Meeting.

##### 1. Proposal to amend Clause 5.2.5 of the Constitution.

Clause 5.2.5 reads: *Fellow, who shall be elected by Council in its sole discretion on the unanimous resolution of all Councillors excluding any nominee and who shall be entitled to all the full rights of Ordinary Membership without the obligation to pay a subscription. They shall be persons who have rendered distinguished service to the Society or ornithology particularly in New Zealand, provided that there shall be no more than four Fellows living at any one time.*

Moved Chris Robertson seconded David Medway:-

**That the last sentence of Clause 5.2.5 of the Constitution of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. shall be amended by deleting the words "four Fellows" and replacing them with the words "six Fellows".**

This motion is self-explanatory.

##### 2. Proposal to adopt a brand name.

Moved Tim Barnard seconded Nicholas Allen:-

**That the Ornithological Society of New Zealand adopts the brand name of "Birds New Zealand" from 1st January 2007 and that this brand shall be used in all correspondence and communications in the public domain, written or otherwise.**

##### Explanatory note.

The advantages of adopting the new brand name are as follows:

- The new name will be more easily understood by the general

## Publisher

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public and non-scientific agencies and bodies - direct reference to birds clearly identifies the Society with its core interest area (many people do not know what ornithology is).

- The new brand offers the Society a better platform to promote its aims, which are broader than ornithology, for example, "to foster and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds generally".
- The new brand name embraces the nature of the membership of the Society more adequately. Many members would not regard themselves as ornithologists but as birders, bird-watchers or just individuals who have an interest in or passion about birds.
- By embracing the wider birding community in its name, the Society may make it easier to develop strategies to attract new members.

The branding will not diminish the importance of scientific research or the standing the Society has gained over the years for its outstanding work in ornithology. It will make the Society more accessible, if in name only, to a wider community.

The adoption of a brand name allows for the retention of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Incorporated as the official name of the Society. Thus Rule 1 of the Constitution does not require changing.

The adoption of a brand name whilst retaining an official title is not without precedent. For example Forest & Bird is the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand, and Birds Australia is the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union.

In 2005, members of the Society living in New Zealand were asked for their views over the adoption of Birds New Zealand as a brand name for the Society. The result of the poll was 207 in favour of adoption, and 19 against.

**NB.** Clause 15.6 of Constitution provides that "Members unable to attend any General Meeting may present in writing their views upon any motion before the meeting and such written statement shall be read to the members attending the meeting before a vote is taken, but the views expressed shall not be considered a vote".

**David Medway  
President.  
2 March 2006.**

## Nominations for Regional Representatives 2007

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

Nominations for the RR of each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 12397, Wellington) on 31 July 2006.

The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a member of the Society.

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

## Wanted Papers on New Zealand bird species

All citations, reprint copies or photocopies of papers on, or relating to, any New Zealand bird species that have been published in a scientific journal or general magazine other than Notornis. These papers or citations will be made available to all members, and a list of these publications will be published annually in Notornis.

Please send to the Secretary, Claudia Duncan, PO Box 12397, Wellington, or [c.duncan@clear.net.nz](mailto:c.duncan@clear.net.nz)

## Falla Memorial Award & A.T. Edgar Junior Award 2007

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

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

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

## 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 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 of the Society's objectives and to encourage new membership.

The conference and AGM will be held at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington.

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, Te Papa Tongarewa – Museum of New Zealand, the Kapiti Coast and Mana Island (or Matiu/Somes Is).

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 posted on the Society's website, [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)

## Personnel

The Waikato region of OSNZ unfortunately currently has no RR. Until someone agrees to take on this not-too-onerous job Martin Day has agreed to act as contact person. He can be contacted at 9 Conrad Place, Cambridge 2351, phone (07) 827 3047 or email [mday@wave.co.nz](mailto:mday@wave.co.nz)

Mike Bell has taken over from Brian Bell as RR for Marlborough. Mike's contact details are 42 Vickerman Street, Grovetown 7321, phone (03) 577 9818 or 021 734 602, and email [mikeandnoz@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:mikeandnoz@slingshot.co.nz)

Richard Holdaway has taken over editorship of Notornis from Murray Williams. Richard's contact details are P.O. Box 16 569, Hornby, Christchurch 8004, phone 03 349 3455 and email [piopio@paradise.net.nz](mailto:piopio@paradise.net.nz)

The address for submissions to the Rare Birds Committee is The Secretary, Rare Birds Committee, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, and not Paul's Christchurch address published in the September 2005 edition of *Southern Bird*.

Gillian Pollock, the South Island convenor for Classified Summarised Notes has moved house. Her new address is 41 Walnut Avenue, Ashburton 8300.

Atlas Convenor, Christopher Robertson's mobile phone number has changed to 027 602 7947.

Roger Sharp, Membership Secretary, Back Issues and Nest Record Scheme Convenor has a new home telephone number, 09 413 8580.

## Bird People

Graham Jordan of Jordan's Farm, Kaipara Harbour passed away in mid-January.

He will be greatly missed by all those who knew him. Ill health over the last few years has kept him out of the paddocks but he was always happy to let birders wander all over his farm and local wader-watchers are

very grateful for this. Graham also allowed holes to be dug in his paddocks and the setting off of cannon nets, although his sheep were not always so obliging! Much wader-banding work was done there in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Carol 'Kiwi' Donovan chalked up a milestone on 6th January, finally achieving her goal of seeing at least one species from

each of the 203 families of birds in the world. The sighting that clinched the achievement was that of five Gray-winged Trumpeters at Junglaven jungle camp in the Venezuelan Amazonas Region. Carol was formerly a Canterbury member, but nowadays is based in Southern California.

## New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Andrew Anderson (Canterbury), Richard Arlidge (Bay of Plenty), Marleen Baling (Auckland), John Ballantyne (Gisborne/Wairoa), Kirsten Campbell (Canterbury), Peter Carnall (Auckland), Phyllis Collins (Marlborough), Michael Durand (Canterbury), Bob Frame (Canterbury), David France (Hawkes Bay), Polly Hall (Canterbury), Carla

Innes (Waikato), Rebecca Kane (Marlborough), Sarah Lambert (South Australia), Dale McEntee (Canterbury), Audrie McKenzie (Canterbury), Iris Matthews (Marlborough), James Murray (Marlborough), David Nicholls (Australia), Pat Pilkington (Canterbury), Clio Reid (Wellington), Martin Sanders (Auckland), Zoran Stojkovic (Canterbury), Judith Szabo (Australia), Robin Toy (Wellington), Sandy Toy (Wellington), Susan Waugh (Wellington), Julia White (Wellington), Joanna Whitehead (Canterbury), Bruce Winslade (Auckland).

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

Dorothy Alloo, Sandra Anderson, Keith Bell, Sue Bell, Graham Bird, David Booth, Anthony Carey, Jacqueline Carr, Geoffrey De Lisle, Michael Fitzgerald, Chris Foreman, Paul Gasson, Peter Howden, Chris Lloyd, Sue McIntosh, Mr R. J. Meadows, Caroline Parker, Peter Penny, David Pye, David Seay, Ann Sherlock, Heather Smithers, Andrew Styche, Spencer Unthank, Penny Taylor, Jan Walker, John Woods.

## Nest Record Scheme – Report for the Two Years to 30th April 2004

I am very pleased to report that a total of 962 cards were received during the two years from 1st May 2002 to 30th April 2004, including 78 Colonial records and some 300 cards of quite historical significance.

Ralph Powlesland submitted 169 Robin cards completed in 1977 and 1978 while he was studying them at Kowhai Bush, Kaikoura and Brian Gill who was in the same area between 1976 and 1978 has transcribed his data to 90 cards for our scheme; data taken from his notes of the nesting of Grey Warblers. Twenty of these nests contained Shining Cuckoo eggs. In addition, some 30 cards recorded in the more recent past finally found their way to my post box! Thanks Peter Schweigman for your replacement of those Royal Spoonbill records known to have gone astray.

Another boost to the large number of cards received over this period is a spin-off from the research being undertaken by Ian Flux in Kiwi sanctuaries where stoat control is taking place but no rat control. It was aimed to study whether stoat control would allow rat populations to increase (they did to a greater or lesser extent) and how small passerine (Fantail) nests fared under these conditions (they varied greatly between sites). The recorders only looked at contents of nests if the nest was easily accessible with a mirror but this was not a priority and many nests were awkward to get at. A total of 320 cards were completed by the 11 field workers involved. A big thank you for your efforts.

Variable Oystercatcher, New Zealand Dotterel and Caspian Tern

records were again submitted in large numbers thanks to the regular monitoring by Northland DoC staff and others.

List of contributors in 2003 and 2004

N. Allen, B. Atkins, B. Barr & T. Thurley, A. Beauchamp, C. Bishop, C. Burt, W. A. Cook, G. Coulston, T. Crocker, P. Cuming, A. Davis & S. Gibbs, J. Dowding, D. Dombroski, B.J. Gill, D. Godfrey, W. Good, N. Gorman, N. Green, J. Guillotel, K. Hansen, J. Hawken, P. Langlands, A. C. Lenton, B. Mackereth, D. Mudge, K. Oates, R. Parrish, S. Petch, U. Poole & M. Booth & S. Parker & M. Robertson, R. G. Powlesland, J. M. Preddey, G. Pulham & S. P. Chamberlain, D. A. Pye, S. Rowe, P. M. Sagar, P. Samways, C. Scadden, P. Schweigman, R. Seaton & H. Downer, B. H. Seddon, D. Small (& OSNZ monitors at Karori Wildlife Sanctuary), R. Stolwerk, M. Smith, J. Tansell, J. Walker, A. Williams, R. Williams.

List of taxa recorded in 2003 and 2004

North Island Brown Kiwi 1, Australasian Crested Grebe 1, Pied Shag 3, Little Shag 1, Royal Spoonbill 16, Canada Goose 4, Pukeko 6, Pied Oystercatcher X Variable Oystercatcher hybrid 4, Variable Oystercatcher 85, Pied Stilt 2, New Zealand Dotterel 81, Banded Dotterel 10, Black-fronted Dotterel 1, Spur-winged Plover 4, Black-backed Gull 7, Red-billed Gull 12, Black-billed Gull 1, Caspian Tern 32, White-fronted Tern 10, Fairy Tern 4, New Zealand Pigeon 1, Morepork 3, Skylark 1, Welcome Swallow 3, New Zealand Pipit 1, Antipodes Island Pipit 2, Dunnock 3, Blackbird 18, Song Thrush 11, Grey Warbler 98 (includes 24 nests with Shining Cuckoo eggs), Fantail 321, Tomtit 5, North Island Robin 28, South Island Robin 169, Silvereye 6, House Sparrow 1, Starling 6.

Finally, I apologise for the long delay in producing this report and sincere thanks to all of the contributors and special thanks to Roger Sharp for taking over from me as convenor of the scheme.

RUSSELL THOMAS  
Nest Record Scheme Convenor (for the period of this report)

## Visible migration of White Heron

On 7th April 2005 at Marble Hill near Maruia Springs, we noticed a White Heron *Egretta alba* flying up the Maruia River. We followed it with binoculars as, with leisurely wing beats, it flew upstream for some distance before beginning to circle upwards gaining height rapidly with each revolution. It was 4.15 pm

when we first saw the bird and we watched it until it became a small speck high in the sky, well above the bush line, some ten minutes later. Before it disappeared behind a mountain spur, we saw it level out still heading in the direction of Lewis Pass.

White Herons are known to disperse widely after breeding (Heather and Robertson, 1996, *Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*) and normally travel from the Okarito heronry to their wintering grounds from

January onwards, some not arriving until April (Andrew, I.G., "White Heron Invasion", *Notornis*, 1957; 10:311). It would seem that this bird was making use of one of the more convenient routes to cross the Southern Alps to winter quarters elsewhere. It would be interesting to know if this is a traditional route and whether many individuals take advantage of it.

STELLA AND JOHN ROWE



# *Australasian Ornithological Conference, Blenheim, 2005.*

From December 6-10th over 230 ornithologists flocked to Blenheim for the Third Biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference. The AOC is a joint initiative between OSNZ and Birds Australia to promote ornithological research in the Australasian Region; it provides a forum for the exchange of information and ideas on a wide range of avian topics. This was the first time that OSNZ had hosted the event, bringing birders together from all over the country and from as far afield as Australia, South Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States.

Following registration, there was a formal opening reception, where Marlborough Mayor Alistair Sowman welcomed delegates to the region, and OSNZ President David Medway launched the *State of New Zealand's Birds*. This is the first independent overview written by senior New Zealand ornithologists on how our native birdlife is faring. Birds Australia CEO Graeme Hamilton spoke of BA's recently launched *State of Australia's Birds*.

The scientific programme ran over three full days, where contributed paper sessions and posters spanned the full spectrum of ornithology, from parasites to phylogeny, from songs to sex; there was something for every one.

Australasian Ornithological Conferences keep getting larger and the number of interesting papers offered overwhelmed us. We had to run two concurrent sessions for the entire duration of the conference, resorting to a third session for part of one day, started earlier and finished later than planned, and we were still unable to offer all those who wished to the chance to speak. Fortunately there was no limit on the number of posters, as some particularly interesting posters were offered after the official close-off date.

The programme contained the rich mix of science and conservation that has characterised all three AOCs. The plenary speakers set the scene. Richard Holdaway gave another of the quality talks OSNZers have come to expect from him. Beginning with old bones he gently led us through various complex analytical techniques to emerge with more new and exciting insights into pre-human New Zealand. Australian Mike Clarke and New Zealander Hugh Robertson spoke on the conservation of endangered species. Both showed how good science has been used to underpin conservation management and, in doing so, illustrated the very different problems and solutions that exist either side of the Tasman. In New Zealand the focus is on effective predator control and interventionist management of the endangered birds. In Australia the problems are caused by changes at a landscape level and the management is usually multi-agency. This is the strength of these cross-Tasman conferences. New Zealand and Australia are very different, we have contrasting conservation problems to solve and in response to this we have developed complimentary skills and approaches to ornithology, yet the people and the fauna are shared to a great degree. We have lots to learn from one another.

The programme featured four topical symposia: birds in developed landscapes, avian influenza, ethno-ornithology and land bird population monitoring. The monitoring symposium was of particular interest to OSNZ as the Society, in conjunction with other agencies, is currently setting up programmes that will allow us to follow population trends in selected species. A monitoring workshop followed the conference. We thank Eric Spurr for organising both the symposium and workshop and the speakers who came from Europe, the USA as well as Australia and New Zealand. Their contributions will greatly aid OSNZ as we develop our own schemes. As far as we know this was the first time an ethno-ornithology symposium has been held in a mainstream scientific conference. It was well-attended, interesting discussions followed and participants have formed an email discussion group to maintain the momentum.

One of the founding aims of the AOC initiative was to make the conference attractive to university students as a stepping stone to professional careers. Lincoln University students Dale McEntee and Kirsten Campbell believed the conference was definitely worthwhile and fulfils an important role. "It was wonderful to feel part of a large vibrant research community. Not only did we learn a lot from

presentations and by talking to experts in our fields, but the conference was also a great way to meet other students and make contacts for the future. Our student social functions were successful and good-natured even in the face of some inclement weather. This conference gave us the chance to present our own research to others and for many of us it changed our view of ornithology...it is far more exciting and fun than previously imagined!"

Pre- and Post-Conference field trips were run to some of the best birding spots in the top of the South Island, including seabird watching off Kaikoura, a visit to a mainland island project at Nelson Lakes National Park, and a rare chance to visit Maud and Chetwode Islands. All trips were popular, especially with overseas delegates and most saw the key species which could be expected on the trips.

The Organising Committee and Scientific Committee would like to thank all those who presented talks and posters. Without your input there would be no AOC. In addition, the chairs of each session are thanked for their input. We would particularly like to thank sponsors Grove Mill Winery, the Department of Conservation, and the Bio-protection and Ecology Division, Lincoln University, whose support was invaluable. Lincoln students Kirsten Campbell, Euan Kennedy, Dale McEntree, Te Ari Prendergast and Joanna Whitehead and Laura Molles are thanked for setting up the venue and loading presentations so everything ran so smoothly. Thanks to Brent Stephenson for all his work on the OSNZ website. Thanks to all the local Marlborough OSNZ members who helped out, especially, Heather Smithers, Bill Cash, Dave Baker and Will Parsons. Thanks to Bellafico Restaurant for the fine food, Marlborough Travel for field trip transport, Albatross Encounter for Kaikoura seabird watching, and especially the Department of Conservation for their cooperation in running field trips to island sanctuaries.

The Australasian Ornithological Conference is now a firm fixture in the calendar of both amateur and professional ornithologists in our region. It provides OSNZ members the chance to catch up on recent and current research in a truly international setting. An event not to be missed – see you at the next AOC in Perth, December 2007.

MIKE BELL and KERRY-JAYNE WILSON



Caption: Brian Bell feels satisfied that everyone has seen a Takahe on Maud Island (photo by Paul Cuming)

## *A Review of the Australasian Ornithological Conference*

In early December Blenheim had the honour of being the first place in New Zealand to host the biennial Australasian Ornithological Congress, jointly sponsored by Birds Australia and the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

Contributed papers covered a wide range of themes – kiwi, waders, wetland birds, seabirds, breeding, song, and – for those things that defied attempts at categorisation – an ornithological miscellany. Papers were also clustered into symposium topics; landbird monitoring, avian influenza, ethno-ornithology and birds in developed landscapes. Papers tended to concentrate on New Zealand or Australia, but some managed both, or ranged further afield. There was also a good selection of poster papers.



Chris Carter, Clive Minton and David Melville (left to right) giving their ASC speeches. All photos by Paul Cuming

The number of papers meant two concurrent sessions for most of the time, extending to three on one day. That meant making plenty of choices, and missing out on appealing topics.

One of the stated aims of the conference was to attract significant student input. This was the reason for the relatively low registration fees (as far as these things go) and no-frills approach. Did it attract students? It did, and it was very pleasing to see large numbers of young people from both sides of the Tasman embarking on their ornithological careers and presenting the results of their post-grad studies with flair and confidence. The only downside for this attendee is that student papers tended to be heavy on methodology, and the results occasionally somewhat underwhelming.

Overall there was plenty to keep interest levels high. Each day was kick-started with an impressive plenary. Hugh Robertson presented a compelling address entitled "Are kiwi doomed?", with the resounding conclusion that so long as the various taxa continue to receive care and attention, then they definitely are not. Richard Holdaway traversed an amazing amount of terrain, describing revolutionary techniques and discoveries that reveal in astonishing detail what conditions and the ecology of birds living in New Zealand were like up to 25,000 years ago. The implications for ecosystem restoration are staggering. Mike Clarke from La Trobe University outlined the extraordinary trials and tribulations of workers endeavouring to save Australia's critically endangered Black-eared Miner, and addressed the question "a flagship species or a waste of money". The conclusion was that conservation is not about 'either/or' single species recovery versus habitat restoration (including threat abatement) choices, but an integrated approach to whole-of-system management. This plenary combined important messages for anyone involved in conservation with some impressive ornithological detective work on a fascinating cooperative-breeding species.

Blenheim's wide variety of nearby restaurants provided the setting for a series of special interest dinners one evening. Following the conference dinner the following day was a comprehensive summary of a truly unique lifetime dedicated to conservation from Don Merton. The congress concluded with field trips to Pelorus Sound, Nelson Lakes and the seabirds off Kaikoura.

The venue was the Blenheim's St Mary's Parish Centre, and it proved an excellent choice. Credit for the success of this year's AOC goes in large measure to those who so ably organised the entire event, especially Brian, Mike and Sue Bell, and Kerry-Jayne Wilson. They were more than ably assisted by convenors, other members of the organising committee and conference assistants, and the result was a splendid example of the long tradition of trans-Tasman relations.

TONY CROCKER

## Australasian Shorebird Conference Nelson, 11th to 13th December 2005

For those not already conferenced-out, December 2005 provided ornithologists with a further smorgasbord of bird papers and studies to whet their collective appetites, namely the Australasian Shorebird Conference at Nelson.

While many made the trek over the hill from the Blenheim Australasian Ornithological Conference, it was pleasing to see a variety of new faces not seen at the earlier event. Tahunanui motor camp and the adjoining conference facility provided us with ample accommodation options. While some chose the classy luxury units, others made do with the odd caravan or motor home, depending on the size of their binoculars. Those arriving the night before were in for a treat when Clive Minton, Shorebird King of Australia, gave an illustrated talk to the crowded room to set the tone for the two-day powwow.

The following morning's official opening was of the highest echelon, with Chris Carter, Minister of Conservation, doing the deed, receiving complimentary copies of *Flying Start* and *Wader Studies in New Zealand* from President Medway. After a particularly robust, if brief, effort by the Minister, Chris was off to the airport back to Wellington. I say this because the conference was directly in the flight path of the Nelson airport, so speakers had to successfully judge their pregnant pauses in time with each Beech and Saab landing overhead. This minor fact aside, talks proceeded apace with subjects including many shorebird (and one stork) projects that even I had no idea went on. Both Australian and New Zealand studies prove that shorebirds are not neglected in this area as they are in others. However, the fact that little major Australasian academic analysis of shorebirds is occurring is food for thought – these studies are mostly voluntary!

The art of storytelling is easier when the subject is a bird species new to science, but kudos to Colin Miskelly who jump-started the talks with a fascinating account of the snipe discovered on Jacquemart Island and a grand story of his involvement with snipe in New Zealand so far.

There were some 'good news' stories – Chatham Oystercatcher numbers were at projected 2011 numbers by 2003; and there were some 'not-so-good news' stories – finding out the extent of land [re]clamations in China and Korea.

There were also some positive outcomes put forward for future action in the field of shorebird biology: the establishment, with 'poorer' countries, of a Flyway Partnership where states can sign and commit to an action plan where sustainable practices and community development are priorities.

There were also some negatives: we may be routinely underestimating our wader flock numbers by 10 percent!

Of course, ornithologists love to talk shop over a bit of tucker, so it would be unfair of me to dismiss the caterers. The conference dinner was a feast of surprises, with the meal revealing itself dish by dish to the delight of all the culinary connoisseurs. I believe that this was a short-notice caterer also, which makes it even more of a top-notch affair.

David Melville's calm exterior was sorely tested from time to time, and while this was rightly justified, the extreme effort he went to paid off with a hugely successful shindig. Big thumbs up from everyone I spoke to goes to show that you were a class act – congratulations to you and your support crew.

The next conference is in Perth, so it will be a big effort for Kiwis to make it, but I'd like to issue a challenge to all Nelson participants – see you in the West Island!

PAUL CUMING



## Bird News

This feature contains unchecked reports. Some sightings require confirmation by the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee.

**Albatross** data from satellite-tracked birds is being used (with permission) by a University of Cape Town researcher to plot foraging areas used by New Zealand breeding species. The results will be used by Forest and Bird as part of their evidence for designating marine important bird areas.

Locally extinct in the region for many years, **Brown Teal** have been re-introduced to the Bay of Plenty with the transfer of 28 captive-reared birds to Mayor Island, offshore from Tauranga. Mayor Island has been pest-free since 2002 and has wetland habitats likely to suit the birds. The released birds were bred by a number of private breeders and Ducks Unlimited, and were held and quarantined at Isaac Wildlife Trust near Christchurch before release.

Good weather during winter and at the start of summer led to an earlier breeding season for **Takahe** in Fiordland. The capacity of the captive-rearing unit at Burwood Bush has also been increased with sponsorship of an extra staff member over the breeding season, an extra incubator and a new holding pen by hardware giant Mitre 10. These additions will allow over 20 Takahe chicks to be reared instead of the usual average of 15 (a record 21 chicks were raised this season thanks to the additional facilities). Excess chicks and eggs are taken from pairs in the Murchison Mountains where the birds often encounter difficulties rearing more than one chick. The wild pairs are left to rear a single chick. In this way chick fatalities are minimised and productivity maximised.

Predators have been found to be having a huge negative effect on **Black-billed Gulls** in Southland. Otago University student Rachel McClellan is investigating reasons for the rapid decline of the species, thought to be an up to 80% reduction in numbers in the last 30 years. Using infra-red cameras set up on a colony of 5,000 gulls on the Aparima River she witnessed attacks by cats and ferrets using the colony like a fast food restaurant. The colony should have produced several thousand chicks, but instead probably produced just a few hundred, and most of the adults deserted the colony. In June 2005 the World Conservation Union listed Black-billed Gull as endangered, making it the most threatened gull species globally. Over 1,000 Black-billed Gulls have been colour-banded in Southland. Please keep a look out for these birds and report sightings to the DoC Banding Office.

Pounamu a young female **Kakapo**, and one of the four chicks hatched in 2005 was returned to Codfish Island in December after three months convalescing at Massey University following injuries to her neck and beak inflicted by a male Kakapo that entered her pre-release pen on the island. Treatment included two operations and initial feeding by use of a tube as her beak was too sore for her to feed herself. The Kakapo population currently stands at 86 individuals.

Five **Kaka** bred at Hamilton Zoo have been released at Mount Bruce to boost the re-introduced population there and increase the genetic diversity of the birds in the area as they are unrelated to the birds already there. This season has been a productive one for the species at Mount Bruce with at least five breeding pairs. The Kaka re-introduction at Mount Bruce was the first in a mainland situation and commenced in 1996

## Short Reports

**Fairy Prions** are breeding on Mana Island, with confirmation in the shape of a chick at the end of a burrow in January. The species was translocated to the island in 2002-4.

The post-breeding moult season has brought its usual rash of penguin sightings outside their usual ranges with a **Royal Penguin**, probably found in Hampden area, and taken into care, and an **Erect-crested Penguin** seen on the northern coast of Chatham Island, both in February. Hawkes Bay has re-emerged as the unusual egret capital of New Zealand with a **Little Egret** at the formerly regular haunt of Muddy Creek near Clive on 23/1 and an **Intermediate Egret**, near the Ngaruroro River Mouth, south of Napier in late November and early December, before moving to join the Little Egret at Muddy Creek on 23/1.

December saw a purple patch for Australian wildfowl with two **Chestnut Teal** at Christchurch Oxidation Ponds in mid-December, and

another two at Sulphur Bay, Lake Rotorua on 28/12. A **White-eyed Duck** was at Christchurch Oxidation Ponds on 17/12.

**Brown Teal** continue to wander parts of the North Island outside their normal range with singles at Miranda (22/11), Straka's Lagoon (2/1), and the Uretata Walkway, Tauranga (26-27/12).

The long-staying **Black Kite** remained faithful to its Waihopai Valley Road site near Renwick, being noted on 26/1 at least. Various people saw this bird displaying vigorously, and carrying sticks and food in spring and early summer.

The usual smattering of unusual migratory plovers was present in the northern part of the North Island with four **Large Sand Dotterels** on the South Manukau in December and single **Mongolian Dotterels** on the South Manukau and Big Sand Island in December. The (probably) long-staying **Grey Plover** was noted again on the Big Sand Island on 31/12.

An Expedition to Campbell Island by Colin Miskelly, dog-handler James Fraser, and Percy (an English setter) in January resulted in 31 sightings of the yet-to-be-described **Campbell Island Snipe**, with 17 birds in the hand (five chicks), the first sighting of a nest and proof that the birds perform the hakawai display with three birds displaying one night.

Finally providing good views of its important tail feathers the **Japanese Snipe** remained at Forest Lake, Hamilton until 25/1. The **Ruff** remained at Miranda until early December, and then probably wandered to Maketu/Little Waihi until mid-January. The long-staying **Black-tailed Godwit** remained at the Ashley Estuary until late January at least, but may have moved to the nearby Avon-Heathcote Estuary, as one was noted in the roost there in late February. Another was on Big Sand Island on 31/12. **Hudsonian Godwits** continue their good recent run with birds at the Manawatu River Mouth mid-December to January and along Kiwi Esplanade, Mangere on 30/1.

A **Wandering Tattler** was on the South Manukau in December, and the other of this tricky species-pair, a **Grey-tailed Tattler** was a long-stayer, but often elusive at the Ahuriri Estuary, Napier throughout. The Neck, Stewart Island doesn't often feature in reports, other than for kiwi sightings so a **Common Sandpiper** near the wharf on 30/11 was very unusual, with another seen briefly at the Ashburton River Mouth on 12/2. A **Marsh Sandpiper** joined the Ruff at Little Waihi on 15/1, being present into February. The **Terek Sandpiper** mentioned in the last Bird News was still at Miranda on 22/11, with another on Big Sand Island on 31/12. Lake Grassmere is becoming a magnet for stray **Red-necked Phalaropes**, with two there this summer.

Unusual terns have been a feature of the summer with a **Whiskered Tern** briefly staying for a couple of days on or near Christchurch Oxidation Ponds on 15-16/12, before it probably ventured north to visit the Blenheim Sewage Ponds on 4/1. **Gull-billed Terns** numbered three on Big Sand Island 31/12, and a **Common Tern** was at the Ashburton River Mouth in mid-February.

The only passerine news concerns the elusive **Red Wattlebird**, which was reported again from near Pukekohe on 2/2, but frustratingly is still to be seen by birdwatchers active in the area.

**Sources:** What's Up DoC? Website newsletter, Birding-NZ email group, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society e-News.

## Reviews

**Mary McEwen. 2005. Charles Fleming: Environmental Patriot.** Nelson. Craig Potton Publishing.

In his article in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* Dick Dell describes Charles Fleming as 'geologist, ornithologist, conchologist, conservationist' and provides a brief history of this most distinguished scientist. Mary McEwen, a daughter and scientist herself, has now provided the detailed biography, an account of his progression from shell collecting and bird watching through geology and palaeontology to biogeography and conservation. Entomology can also be added to this list, with his 12 years studying cicadas in his spare time!

The sub-title for the book, 'Environmental Patriot' is a particularly apt one for Fleming in the OED sense of 'one who exerts himself to promote the well-being of his country'.



# *ASC Post-Conference Field Trip*

*Birders stretch their legs in the Gobi Desert.  
Photo by Nick Allen*



*Wading through the tide on the walk to Mullet Creek.  
Photo by Nick Allen*



*The lighthouse at dawn.  
Photo by Nick Allen*



After being amply informed, entertained and wined and dined at the pleasant and comfortable surroundings of Tahunanui, around forty delegates and conference hosts decamped into a bus for the long journey over Takaka Hill to the possibly even more pleasant, if a little less comfortable, surroundings of Farewell Spit.

A stop was made at Motueka Sandspit in an attempt to see some waders at roost there. This aim was partly achieved, but most of the species stayed hidden either toward the tip of the spit or round the corner at its base. Some locally-banded Bar-tailed Godwits were seen, however, and the continuing disturbance issues of the area, especially due to dog-walking, were discussed. Nice views of short lines of waders flying along the coast to roost were a bonus.

Lunch was taken at Collingwood whilst all the gear that had somehow been shoe-horned into the bus from Nelson was piled in various parts of the more venerable all-wheel-drive vehicles that were to take us along the beach on the seaward side of Farewell Spit to the lighthouse near its tip.

Leaving the proper road at Puponga Farm Park for the twenty-odd kilometre journey on shifting sand, a bumpy journey across the base of the spit on the vehicle track was followed by a strange bus ballet as circles were driven on the lower beach. Apparently these circles act as signs to denote where to leave the beach should blowing sand make visibility poor. Thankfully the strong winds and smoke-like blowing sand that Farewell Spit has a reputation for were absent on both days of the trip.

A stop at Gobi Desert to view unusual plants was made a little more sudden than expected by one of the vehicles ploughing into soft sand. Participants also viewed the strange shapes and patterns made in the sand by the usually incessant wind. Playtime was had a few more kilometres down the spit at the tall dunes near Mullet Creek where, after enjoying the view over Golden Bay and the Tasman Sea, some of those present showed their prowess in descending the dunes in the fastest time whilst remaining upright. The problem wasn't the steep dunes themselves but the sudden transition to flat unyielding sand at their base.

Birds seen along the spit featured regular pairs of Variable Oystercatchers (one person counted 62 individuals along the spit), and scattered groups of Turnstones and Bar-tailed Godwits. Gannets passed just offshore commuting to and from their colony. Odd Black Shags roosted along the beach, and were the only species of shag encountered.

Arriving at the lighthouse, participants were allocated to their respective billets or tried to work out where to pitch their tent so that it would be less likely to be either blown away or squashed under a falling branch. Two trips went out in the evening, one to view the Gannet and Caspian Tern colonies at the tip of the spit, and one to perform mud-sampling on the inner shore. Close views were obtained of the Gannets, and participants were enthralled by their behaviour as they fed chicks on the incredibly low shell banks. The tip group also did well with viewing waders as flocks (principally Lesser Knots) came in to roost on a rising tide. As the tide rose so the weather deteriorated with light, then heavy rain. Before the rain became too heavy Gwenda Pulham, that most determined of band-readers, had found birds banded at several sites along the East Asia-Pacific flyway including China, using her scope whilst sheltering under an umbrella. The mud-samplers got back to base much later than the spit-watchers, and much more bedraggled, though still after having an enjoyable time.

Whilst the rain fell outside, and the meal cooked in the rather cramped kitchen, birders adjourned to the bar – well, equipment shed, and improvised seats, including partners' laps, and mostly talked birds whilst whittling down the boxes of beer that somehow had come on the bus. Cooking a meal for 40 in a tiny kitchen must have been an art, with juggling pans and crockery, but nonetheless a delicious meal was produced, and even dessert. The rain even stopped allowing a patter-free night for the campers.

A choice was offered the next day to either visit the Gannet colony area at the tip, or to walk down the inner shore to Mullet Creek about eight kilometres away. This latter option was quite a jaunt. First along the airfield then through Fernbird-infested scrub and swamp

– well most people saw one eventually once the inner shore was reached. After encountering a good flock of Bar-tailed Godwits and Pied Oystercatchers (sought after by some of the Australians present) and four Little Terns not far south of the lighthouse the tide came in at quite a rapid rate, so that for much of the time the only waders seen were of the human kind. After the only birds we were encountering were floating Black Swans, the decision was made to cut through to the seaward side of the spit. Then it was almost instant birds, with flocks sheltering on dry flats behind dunes. Most of the birds were, naturally, Bar-tailed Godwits and Lesser Knots, but among them were odd Red-necked Stints, Turnstones and Curlew Sandpipers, and there were always colour bands to check for. Thankfully the wind was light, but viewing was still not entirely easy as birds danced distantly in the haze. Given their position a close approach was impossible.

The tide began to drop before Mullet Creek was reached. I saw its associated flock smoke up into the sky and drift over to the uncovering sand flats on the inner shore. By now it was around midday and the only thing left to do was wait for the bus and try not to soak up too much of the sun whilst watching the Gannets passing along the shore, and discussing sightings with others in the group and those who got lifts down in trucks or walked down the beach. All in all a memorable and enjoyable trip. Thanks to the organisers for the logistics and the meal, and to DoC for allowing it to happen.

NICK ALLEN

*Playing on the dunes near Mullet Creek.  
Photo by Nick Allen*



*Part of the Gannet colony.  
Photo by Suzi Phillips*



*Australasian Gannet chick enjoying a feed.  
Photo by Suzi Phillips*



What emerges clearly from this account is that, although Fleming did have some advantages at the start of his career, coming from a relatively wealthy (although stifling) family, and through encouragement from some of the eminent scientists in New Zealand at that time, his success came not from this initial impetus but from curiosity, sheer hard work and a passion for science. He seems to have had for most of his life three careers running simultaneously: as a geologist with the Geological Survey; in ornithology, especially of sea birds; and as a professional conservationist, the last at a time when few others could claim this role.

A test of the value of the biography is how well it explains the key points of his career and in the recognition he achieved. Why geology rather than ornithology? Why a DSc and not a PhD? Why his FRSNZ, FRS and knighthood? How did he take up biogeography? Why his passionate involvement in conservation? The biography meets this criterion very well; there are insightful paragraphs and explanations for all of these questions.

His first interest as a young person was in ornithology, and the account of the birds on the Chatham Islands that resulted from his expedition with Graham Turbott in December 1937, when just 21 years old, was in fact his first published work. Why then didn't this interest progress to a full-time career in zoology? The author clears this up on page 61 in a revealing paragraph that highlights both the paucity of jobs available to scientists at the time and how chance intercedes in most careers. "In spite of his already substantial contribution to New Zealand ornithology Charles had been unable to secure his first choice of career as a museum zoologist. However, Charles desperately wanted to be able to support himself financially so that he could marry Peg, and escape from the atmosphere of Barochan, which he found increasingly restrictive. He fell back on his other academic strength as a career alternative." At the conclusion of his masters thesis (on the systematics of prions) he applied for a position with the Geological Survey and in December 1940 began work in the programme to map the geology of New Zealand.

His first job, therefore, was not his most preferred one in a museum where he could have professionally continued with his wide interests in the broad range of natural history, but in mapping geology, not even in the palaeontology that later occupied so much of his interest. As a matter of personal interest, however, I regret not finding out why the Chatham publication was authored by him alone and not jointly with Turbott, no mean ornithologist as well.

This paragraph on the selection of career is telling in another way. He was committing to a research career. There is no suggestion here that he wanted to be in a university with its demands of teaching and student supervision. Not until he retired from the Survey did he take up a position at Victoria University, and there is no record in the biography how involved even then he was in research student supervision. Nor did he covet the most senior administrative roles in either the Geological Survey or in Chair of Geology at Victoria, declining to apply for either. He explained his reluctance to take on these jobs in a revealing letter to the author (see page 165).

On page 127 the author writes "Biogeography – the branch of biology that deals with the relationships and geographical distribution of plants and animals – was arguably the subject to which Charles Fleming made his most important scientific contribution". I would agree, as his book *The Geological History of New Zealand and its Life*, published in 1979, gave teachers the first wide-ranging and accessible account of New Zealand's history and biogeography. However, it would have been of interest at this point to have had an observation about this from geologists and palaeontologists, representing his main-stream interest. Elsewhere in the book these people have been recorded commenting on his research. On page 95, for example, it is observed that New Zealand palaeontologists considered that his most important single idea was that fossil molluscs provided evidence of climate change, while on page 100 Professor R. M. Carter observes that none of his scientific legacies surpassed his account of the Wanganui Subdivision.

The explanation of why Fleming undertook to submit his work for a DSc rather than study for a PhD appears on page 101. Essentially, the Second World War intervened in his education (not least by spending a year on the Auckland Islands in the 'Cape Expedition') and by the time this was over he was already too well established in his New Zealand research to go overseas for the several years a PhD would take. Instead, he undertook a major palaeontological study of the genus *Pecten* and this formed part of his

submission for the DSc. This was awarded in 1952, a year of extraordinary achievements in which he gained his DSc, was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand and became chief palaeontologist in the Geological Survey. The author comments quite sharply (for a daughter) about Fleming at this time. "He became somewhat overconfident during this period and some of his colleagues who were not palaeontologists found him rather arrogant". This is not the first or only time the author comments in this way and serves to remind readers that family biographies may well be quite objective.

His next major step in recognition came in 1967 with his election as a fellow of the Royal Society of London. The official announcement stated that his main contributions to science were as "a biogeographer ... a palaeontologist, ... a pioneer stratigrapher, and an administrator and most unselfish promoter of the sciences." Through this honour he became to all intents our top scientist and increasingly he began to use his high status in New Zealand science for conservation, a status made even more compelling with the award of his knighthood in 1976.

The list of committees and campaigns he was involved with makes daunting reading. They were so comprehensive they serve as a history of the emerging environmental awareness in New Zealand. The biography demonstrates that Fleming was no paper member; he vigorously campaigned in most of the issues of the time, for the protection of marine areas and islands to the much more public campaigns for the protection of the Mamuku Plateau, Lake Manapouri, South Island beech forests, Snares Islands, Ahuriri River, Whirinaki, and Pureora. His location in Wellington allowed ready access to bureaucrats and politicians and he used this advantage strongly. There are many letters in the biography showing just how passionately he could argue his case.

This interest in the environment and its protection was not that of an aging dilettante but is evident from an early age. In the final paragraph of his 1939 account of the Shore Plover he writes 'but it is surely to be hoped that at some date the island (South East Island) may become a sanctuary. The Chatham Islands, botanically and zoologically, are one of the most important biological provinces of the New Zealand Region, and are at the present date the only such province in which no sanctuary has been set aside for the preservation of the characteristic flora and fauna'. Not bad at all for a 23 year old.

My visit with him to the Chatham bird islands with the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee marked almost the end-point of this sort of advisory committee, which were all swept away in the 'quango hunt' of the Lange Labour government. Fleming argued (unsuccessfully) for the re-establishment of some of them almost to his last days. I had not known in this visit to the islands that he had already suffered his first, and life-threatening, heart attack (in 1971) and he seemed as fit as any of us in the climb to the summit of South East. He probably shouldn't have done this but the attraction of seeing the islands again in which he had done such amazingly good work was for him apparently worth the risk. We all enjoyed his company.

Some recent biographies, including that of Niko Tinbergen by Hans Kruuk, make dispiriting reading in cataloguing the decline into senility or crankiness of once great people. Not so here. Fleming was active, optimistic, and hard at work almost to his last day. It is a happy ending really.

One of the many good things about this account is the reference section detailing as footnotes the authority for the comments the author makes. McEwen has sought comments and observations from numerous colleagues and documents personal correspondence. This is a comprehensive listing and gives confidence in the account.

Are there any shortcomings, then, in this excellent book? There are few apparent errors to be sure. Spelling my first name correctly, where it is often in error, suggests that naming is probably pretty good. I did find one mistake in the photos, an easy one to make unless you have been to the Chatham bird islands. The headland in the background of the rock platform on Mangere is that of the bulk of Mangere Mountain, not Little Mangere as stated, which is far out to the left in this photo, but this is a trivial mistake.

More significantly there are two surprising omissions. Reading would have been much facilitated if the author had provided a succinct chronological record of Fleming's life. I had to go to the Dictionary of Biography to obtain this overview. What was also needed was a bibliography of his published work year by year so that the changing focus of his research could be more readily appreciated.

Without doubt this is an extremely valuable, interesting and enjoyable account of one of our best scientists. My regret on reading it was that I had not got to know him better. It is also an inspiring account. There was nothing flashy about his research. It did not require enormous technical equipment or resources. Success both in his research and in his conservation efforts came instead from commitment, intelligence and honesty. I only wish I had

achieved half as much, and that I could have done more to protect people like Sir Charles and Bob McDowall from the more extreme behaviour of the Crozations.

EUANYOUNG  
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## Charles Fleming Biography Launched

On 8th December 2005 *Charles Fleming: Environmental Patriot*, the biography of the foremost New Zealand scientist (and former OSNZ president), written by his daughter Mary McEwen, was launched at the head office of the Royal Society of New Zealand in Wellington by Hon Chris Carter, Minister of Conservation. A review of this book appears in this issue of *Southern Bird*.

At the launch, after thanking the Minister for launching the book and the numerous people and organisations that helped with the writing and production of the biography, Mary McEwen spoke about its writing:

"When I began the biography project I thought of myself as researching Charles's life so that someone could write a biography one day. It was only after some years that I became so obsessed with the work that I decided to write it myself. I found it all too fascinating to

hand over to anyone else."

"I was hugely aware of the pitfalls of a child writing about their parent in this way and the process has not been without its problems. In 1997 we went to East Africa and amongst other things climbed Kilimanjaro, probably the toughest climb I have ever made. Our local guides encouraged me to keep going with the Swahili expression 'Pole, pole Mamma. Slowly, slowly, and breathe through the nose'.

"When the going got tough while writing the book, this was the advice I remembered. 'Pole, pole Mamma'. Just take one step at a time and breathe through the nose."

"So now at last this big project is finished and I hope you will enjoy the result."

During the launch function the Royal Society head office building was named Fleming House by RSNZ President, Dr Jim Watson, to the delight of Mary. In a speech she said "And I know that Charles would also have been entirely delighted. He was involved when the house was purchased and moved a short distance to this present location. Sue Usher tells

me that while she worked here managing the Royal Society, Charles would drive down from Wadestown in his little dark green MGB-GT sports car and swing into the visitor's car park out the front before coming into the building in his dapper bow-tie."

"He wrote me a letter in 1984:

"The MOW has been upgrading the area around the Roy Soc Office building, laying concrete & a paved area under the front door awning. Also there is a new front door, with frosted glass panels, which I think will be left as stained wood. (I'm interested because I was so fed up with the old hardboard door that I offered to buy a new one & found it will cost me \$375 from the Charitable Trust)."

"The 'charitable trust', which had also paid for portraits to be painted of many former Royal Society presidents as well as for the portrait of the young Sir Joseph Banks that hangs in the foyer, was the Charles Alexander Fleming Trust. It came to an end this year in April when, under the terms of the 1964 Trust Deed, the capital of the Trust was passed to the Royal Society."

### Far North

We were not able to carry out a wader count in November 2005 through lack of manpower and the potential organisers being away. However, this was more than made up for by ten of us spending the weekend of 20th to 22nd of January at a bach in Pukenui, and two more joining us from closer to the area, covering as many as possible of the high tide roosts north of Kaitaia. Lynette and Bill Smith kindly offered the use of their boat, and we were in for some surprises, perhaps because of weather conditions. Kokota Sandspit which usually produces large numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits and Lesser Knots revealed only 700 Godwits, whereas Kowhai Beach, which often gets missed out on the counts through not having birds, had a flock of over 1,000. On the first day of the wader count two Australasian Bitterns were seen in Henderson Bay Road, one standing in the open for a long time and easily visible from the road. A tattler species was on Kowhai Beach and five Little Terns were found on East Beach on the Sunday.

We couldn't get to Walker Island because of strong winds, but as masses of birds could be seen at very long range from the mainland, four of us reconvened there on 4th February. This time a very high tide caused all the birds to move to East Beach, again a site not always checked, yet today a flock of about 3,300 Godwits rested there over 200 metres of beach. The Little Tern flock here had increased to at least 13, and we wondered whether the three Eastern Curlews on Walker Island were the same three that were here in June last year.

Other recent reports include a Marsh Sandpiper in Rangaunu Harbour and two Long-tailed Cuckoos near Kerikeri in early February.

We were delighted to welcome David Crockett as speaker to our January indoor meeting. Members, new and old, were treated to the story of the rediscovery of and protection measures afforded to the Taiko or Magenta Petrel on the Chatham Islands.

DETLEF DAVIES

### Auckland

The last year was another busy one for Auckland OSNZ and this report covers almost the past nine months.

An update on birds at Tawharanui Regional Park was provided by Jo Ritchie and Tim Lovegrove to the July meeting. Since the predator fence was completed, and the eradication operation undertaken, there has been a fast response to the improved conditions from all the wildlife. Bellbirds have self-reintroduced themselves from Little Barrier Island and become established in Ecology Bush (they also bred this season). Shorebirds such as Variable Oystercatcher and New Zealand Dotterel that

## Regional Roundup



nest on the beaches at Tawharanui have also thrived, and had a record breeding season this summer.

Research on Cook's Petrel on Little Barrier Island was the subject of Matt Rayner's presentation to members in August. Little Barrier Island is the major breeding ground for Cook's Petrel and there was evidence that kiore rats were involved in the decline of these petrels breeding there. Kiore were eradicated in July 2004. The breeding success of Cook's Petrels has been monitored on the island since 1971 through the use of 46 study burrows at the summit. The difference between the 2003 (one chick, one fledgling, many dead), 2004 (three chicks), and 2005 results could not have been more remarkable. In 2005, the team banded 25 healthy Cook's Petrel chicks and observed large numbers of other chicks 'exploring' the surface at night prior to fledging. This was backed up by anecdotal accounts of Cook's Petrel fledglings being found in large numbers at nearby coastal towns on the mainland and a record 80 of them taken to the North Shore Bird Rescue Centre in the peak of the season. Matt's study also involved an island-wide survey of Cook's Petrel population demographics with the help of many volunteers who scoured the steep island for burrows.

The Native Species Programmes at Auckland Zoo were outlined to the meeting in September by team leader of the zoo's Native Fauna Section, Andrew Nelson.

One of these programmes involves participation in the Bank of New Zealand's Operation Nest Egg, a kiwi recovery initiative. The North Island Brown Kiwi has a 95 per cent mortality rate for chicks under one year old in the wild due to predation of eggs and young, largely by stoats, possums, cats, dogs and rats. This project removes kiwi eggs from the wild to be reared in safety at the zoo. Kiwi chicks are first moved to a predator-free offshore island and then, when they are big enough to defend themselves against most predators, they are released back into the wild, to the area from which they came. Auckland Zoo has been involved in the programme since 1996 and in that time they have hatched and released more than 100 kiwi.

Auckland Zoo is also actively involved in a breeding for release programme for tuatara. Young are raised at the zoo and looked after until they are at least three to five years old. At this time, they are taken and released on to predator-free offshore islands.



There are seasonal conservation projects in which the zoo is also involved. Staff from the Department of Conservation sometimes bring in the eggs of New Zealand Dotterels, Brown Teal and Fairy Terns if the nests have been abandoned or are at risk from weather or predators. The zoo then incubates and hatches the chicks, to be released when they are able to fend for themselves. Much of this work goes on behind the scenes in order to reduce the disturbance to the young birds and prevent human imprinting which might disadvantage them once they are released. On-going breeding programmes for native species that breed at the zoo include North Island Kaka, New Zealand Pigeon, Brown Teal, Blue Duck, North Island Brown Kiwi and Mahoenui Giant Weta.

Pelagic specialists Chris Gaskin and Karen Baird talked about Hauraki Gulf seabirds and the New Zealand Storm Petrel in September. They discussed the variety of seabirds seen out on the Hauraki Gulf, and the background to the rediscovery of the New Zealand Storm Petrel.

In November, our planned speaker was taken ill, but members stepped in with some interesting presentations. Michael Taylor showed a fascinating set of slides that Sylvia Reed took during their expedition to Western Samoa in 1979. Chris Bindon talked about the bird monitoring at the 615 ha Atuanui DoC bush reserve on the Kaipara (formerly Mt Auckland) where the Atuanui Restoration Project is active. John Sumich updated progress at the Ark in the Park in the Waitakeres, John Staniland talked about activities at the Matuku Reserve and John Simmons reported on the monthly Muriwai Beach Patrol. November is also wader census month when many members and other volunteers, help with the counts for the Kaipara and Manukau harbours, Mangawhai and the Firth of Thames.

The annual November bird survey on Tiritiri Matangi Island had to be abandoned due to weather for the first time in 19 years of the survey's history. A Hauraki Gulf Pelagic from Leigh was enjoyed by 18 members in early December. The weather was almost too calm, but participants had a great run out to Little Barrier and the Mokohinau Islands. Highlights included Fairy Prions in good numbers, many White-faced Storm Petrels, Flesh-footed Shearwaters, and an Arctic Skua.

There was a good turnout for the Christmas meeting and our traditional birding quiz was enjoyed by the four teams with close scores at the end of a great evening. Many members had gone south for the Australasian Ornithological Conference which provided an excellent programme of speakers and field trips.

This year the annual summer picnic was held on a perfect summer's evening in mid-January. Waiatarua Reserve is a pleasant mixture of wetland and bush, and even though it is located in the central city close to Remuera Golf Course it can produce some surprises. The White Heron that delighted us for so long last year had gone, hopefully back to South Island for the breeding season. No sign either of Bittern or Shining Cuckoo on this evening, but both have been recorded there recently. The tally seen came to 28 species, including Spotted Dove, Tui, Grey Teal, New Zealand Scaup, Little Shag and Little Black Shag.

Three speakers addressed the good turnout for the February meeting with something for everyone. First up was Anne Rimmer, author of the award-winning book on Tiritiri Matangi Island. Anne presented some of the early history of the island and old photographs as well as a summary of some of the translocations that have taken place over the past 20 years.

Some fascinating information on the ecology of New Zealand Pigeon in the Auckland area was presented by the curator of land vertebrates at the Auckland Museum, Brian Gill. Brian has conducted post-mortem examinations of New Zealand Pigeons from the Auckland area over the past 20 years. His studies have shown that the species has a clearly defined breeding season and a defined moulting period in the Auckland area. He assessed age, weight, moult, measured gonads, and assigned a fat score for the 104 specimens. He also looked at causes of death, the gonad cycle, and the sex ratio for his sample. There were several interesting conclusions able to be drawn from the study that is due to be published soon. He noted that while New Zealand Pigeons in the Auckland area have long breeding and moulting seasons, they are still well-defined. Breeding occurred only during spring and summer (September to February) in his sample birds and most birds moulted in the post-breeding peak (March to May). The sex ratio of the sample was heavily skewed towards females (1.7:1), but the reasons for this were unclear. The fat-score was highest in autumn and lowest in summer.

Rat research by University of Auckland students Jamie McKay and James Russell, was the last topic for the night. Jamie outlined the 'Rodent Invasion Project' that is looking at rat reinvasion on islands. The study showed that it was important to check islands regularly for reinvasion, six monthly at least. Tracking tunnels were more effective in detecting rat presence than long term 'rat nesting motels' that were sometimes used

on islands that were infrequently checked. They were also looking at rat behaviour on islands using tracking devices and noted that rats often ranged widely in search of food, often easily crossing an island in a night. One rat fitted with a transmitter swam 400 m to the nearest neighbouring island. The studies are ongoing, and the students are also helping to test the rat-proofing of predator fencing.

SUZI PHILLIPS

## Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau

This summer it seems that only one of our members is regularly checking the birds at our most productive sites; namely Maketu and Little Waihi. But what results he is getting! Mid December saw Tim Barnard reveal a Ruff at Maketu, all the way from Siberia via Miranda. While this was undoubtedly the star shorebird for the region this season, the star waterbird was Brian Chudleigh's Brown Teal, trying to camouflage itself amongst the Grey Teal at Katikati the same month. Brian regularly sends his wonderful digital images to us homebound ornithologists, and this bird was no exception. He has also heard Fernbirds just before the New Year at Uretara Stream, near Katikati.

Playing 'best supporting bird' was the Marsh Sandpiper back at Little Waihi. Early February saw both the Ruff and Marsh Sandpiper vying for telescope time.

Up to 40 Pacific Golden Plovers have made Maketu their home over the summer, with a Pectoral Sandpiper over the hill in Little Waihi thrown in to keep the birders on their toes.

The Ruff and Marsh Sandpiper took over from the Large Sand Dotterel that Tim had seen up until November 2005. It has been a constant procession of rarities at Maketu. Since July last year, 18170 birds have been reported by members and friends from both regions. Ah the wonders of Excel summaries!

All this talk about shorebirds gives the impression we don't have any bush or land birds in the region. In fact we have received two really good records, both of Falcons in the Bay of Plenty, one day apart in January. The first record was in the foothills behind Welcome Bay on a farmlet, and the second was a day later by Murray Smith, who broke ranks in the dire Papamoa traffic to view one in a roadside paddock. The traffic hadn't moved much whilst he watched the bird!

The White-fronted Terns of the wharves, those winged stevedores of steel, have raised a number of chicks this season. Both Coronation Pier, Tauranga City, and the old Hairini road bridge were the favoured sites this year, with a local chef looking after a chick fallen out of a nest on a wharf piling. No one had the chicken that night, after seeing the chef retrieve the bird from the water...

Rotorua seems to be a hive of activity at this time of the year (summer). Birds seen ranging around the lakefront have been; all grey Red-billed Gulls, a New Zealand Dotterel, two Royal Spoonbills, a gull chick getting mauled by others, and two Chestnut Teal. A Caspian Tern pair has hatched one chick this year near the Rotorua lakeside golf course. There were two eggs, but there was a hole in one... Sorry, a bit below par with that one!

Matata, which now has all that mud and boulders, continues to throw up interesting material in the form of Royal Spoonbills, 14 Pied Stilt chicks in December, and five New Zealand dotterel chicks just to the north on the coast – the last record thanks to John Groom. Flag sightings of New Zealand Dotterels are being reported from Little Waihi and Maketu, with yellow and blue being amongst the band colours.

Even urban estuaries sometimes provide surprises: namely a Coot at the Waikareao Estuary, Tauranga City in February.

The Grey-faced Petrels have had an appallingly bad year on Mt Maunganui/Mauao. No chicks were fledged as far as we know this season, due to rampant predations by stoat or stoats, and possibly cats. Watch this space as we battle the local bodies to get a decent pest control programme worked out. We will be showing the Kiwi Conservation Club around the mountain on two nights in May, where we hope to use Janet 'Catch a Petrel in 20 Seconds' Houston, one of our local OSNZ members, to great effect.

PAUL CUMING

## Taranaki

The final indoor meeting of 2005 attracted a good turn-out of members, with more discussion ensuing on the hopping versus walking bird conundrum, with some ingenious suggestions but no real conclusion reached, as there were so many exceptions to each rule.

Beach patrols in late 2005 once again produced few results, which was good for the birds but not so for the patrollers. A number of Tui around New Plymouth are calling with a single note, and this has been commented on by members. With the days getting longer and warmer we have all been out and about in our regular areas. Shining Cuckoos are still being heard, and Eastern Rosellas are now being seen throughout Taranaki.

Waiongana is still the place to go to see both resident and migratory waders and other wetland birds. Six Pacific Golden Plovers have made it their summer home this year, eight Royal Spoonbills have been busy feeding along the stream edge. Turnstones have been coming and going, with six being the most at one time, and a New Zealand Dotterel called in for a visit.



The December outing to South Waitaanga was as enjoyable as it ever is. The Robins were as numerous and confiding as they always are there with one dropping in to provide some lunchtime entertainment. We also enjoyed good views of a Long-tailed Cuckoo as it flew over the car-park.

Our January expedition was along the Rerekapa Track; a lovely walk with many trees and shrubs in fruit. Tui, in particular, were very active.

The February meeting being the first for the year we had much to report and discuss, with beach patrols turning up birds at last. The least common find was a White-faced Storm Petrel, only the second reported in 30 years and found in the same place as the first. It was found by two non-members. Other reports from non-members included a black Fantail seen in Egmont National Park.

More Blue Ducks are being released into the Egmont National Park, with a pair from a previous release producing two ducklings. The Taranaki Kiwi Trust has released two more North Island Brown Kiwi into the area and there are more to come. Variable Oystercatchers have had a poor breeding season, with only one pair at Mokau being successful with two fledglings. There were not many New Zealand Dotterels around the coast this year, and until recently no nests had been found. However, a pair currently has a three-egg nest which is unfortunately in a very precarious position.

An immature Black-fronted Tern was recorded flying close to the shore in central New Plymouth. After many years of trying Wayne Peters has finally seen an Australasian Bittern at a swamp just north of Taranaki. There has been a complete lack of Pied Oystercatchers flying up the coast this year in contrast to other years when many flocks have been seen.

PETER FRYER

## Wairarapa

The Wairarapa members have had an active and informative birding season. Field trips have included wader counts on Lake Wairarapa, the last shortly after a Canada Goose-culling operation performed by helicopter, with no migratory waders seen and little wonder why!

Several guest speakers have both informed and entertained us. These included a talk on avian flu, which was microbiologist Mike Lynch's subject. It was a fascinating talk taking us to the Spanish flu of 1918 through to avian flu of the present day. We learnt that the avian flu is a type A strain of the many flu viruses presently around. Avian flu, which naturally lives in waterfowl (i.e. ducks and geese), is very infectious to chickens. To complicate matters further, type A strain viruses can also be carried by pigs. Since many South East Asian people live in close proximity to ducks, geese, pigs and chickens, the strain can be transferred to humans. As it can take up to 9-12 months to perfect a vaccine there is real concern about the spread of the virus.

To date it has reached central China and now Mongolia, from Thailand and Vietnam, who are large exporters of chickens. Current thinking is that New Zealand is relatively safe from the virus and that migrating waders (which bear close watching) seem to be virus-free. Judging by the discussion and questions there was no doubt about the interest in the subject.

Barbara Lovatt, a local member, gave an entertaining and stimulating talk on their recent visit to the Murray-Darling Basin in Australia. Barbara imparted her enthusiasm for this unique travel adventure. The first part of their sojourn was in June, when they joined a small vessel, Spirit of the Coorong in Mildura, for The Great Murray River Run of ten days, and 1,000 kilometres through 10 locks, down this great river to near its mouth at Lake Alexandrina. They slept overnight in shearers' quarters, and old historic riverside pubs. The birdlife was prolific.

In September they followed the Darling River, from some of its upper tributaries and from Bourke all the way down to where it joins the Murray, at Wentworth. This was a land-based journey, again with prolific birdlife. Highlights were Wedge-tailed Eagles, White-winged Choughs, chats, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, egrets, Darters and lots of little brown jobs (and large ones too). Barbara described to us the vegetation of this area, and the marvel of blossoming wildflowers in very arid areas after rainfall. The distance between stations was immense and we were told of a 150 km drive on a dirt road, to take morning tea, with a station family. However, the 150 kms yielded a mass of wildflowers, and once again a prolific array of birdlife.

We received a very informative talk by Geoff Underwood on Australian endangered birds and animals while working at Healsville Sanctuary, in Victoria, and other Australian locales. Geoff is now on the staff at the Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre. He explained that not only do our Australian neighbours' fauna have to contend with loss and changing habitat, competition from introduced animals, introduced pests and predation but fire is also can play a major part in loss. An interesting discussion followed on fire protection and the use of fire to reduce burnable material and rejuvenate the vegetation.

MILES KING

## Wellington

At a well-attended meeting in early November Colin Miskelly summarised recent survey work in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and changes in bird occurrence in Wellington in an engaging talk about

'Managing Wellington City for Indigenous Wildlife'. Four questions that have been on the minds of many are, why are there many more Tui in Wellington than 10 years ago, has the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary made a difference to the bird species that were present before the fence was built, what happens to the birds released in the sanctuary that jump the fence, and does possum and rat control by the Greater Wellington Council affect bird populations?

Colin explained that construction of the fence has allowed locally extinct species to be reintroduced and that, so far, it seems that the fence does enable the predator-free status to be maintained. In short, the fence does work! A recently completed survey that involved many Wellington members provides a population baseline for all released bird species and enables comparisons to be made for the species that were present before the fence was built. Nine species have been released, so far. North Island Robins, Whiteheads, Kaka and Bellbirds appear to be increasing in numbers, and some Whiteheads are breeding outside as well as inside the sanctuary. Saddleback numbers are steady, and the recently released Stitchbirds appear to be adapting well.

Eight species that were present in and near the sanctuary before it was formed have increased in numbers but this is attributed mainly to effective possum, rat and cat control; the effect is especially marked for Tui that are now an increasingly common bird throughout the Wellington region. Colin explained that the fence has not made a significant impact on the populations within the sanctuary of Fantail, Grey Warbler, Silvereeye, and of most introduced passerines. There is a general consensus that intensive control of mammalian predators throughout the Wellington, Hutt and Porirua cities by the Greater Wellington Council has enabled bird numbers to increase, especially Tui, and animal control is also a factor that has enabled new species, especially Bellbirds, to become established.

The Christmas cake and drinks went a little further this year because the December meeting coincided with the Australasian Ornithological and Shorebird Conferences in Blenheim and Nelson. What the absent members missed was a nicely illustrated talk by Stuart Nicholson about a 12-month survey of the birds of the Whitiireia Peninsula. Whitiireia, a reserve, is the spit of land just north of Titahi Bay, bordered on one side by Porirua Harbour and Cook Strait on the other. It has diverse bird habitats. Mostly coastline, it has open grassland, cliffs, a small tidal area of wetland lagoon, some gorse and an area of regenerating bush. Two observers made a four hourly visit each month. Forty species of birds were recorded, an average of 25-30 species (250-500 individual birds) per month. Most of the birds observed in the recent Pauatahanui Inlet surveys were seen here too, for example, Black, Little, Little Black and Pied Shags.

Stuart and Colin tried to coax crakes out of the wetland margins using a recording of their calls but none appeared. Perhaps they are absent because of dogs which are often allowed to roam in this area. There was a lot of discussion and a recommendation that Whitiireia reserve should be watched and the survey repeated in five years' time. Cattle have recently been removed from the park and, as it reverts to a more natural state, we hope for positive changes to the bird population there.

At an engaging mid February meeting Nicola Etheridge (DoC, Turangi) spoke about the new 'Whio (Blue Duck) Recovery Programme'. Nicola explained that Blue Ducks are endemic to New Zealand, the species is a riverine specialist and its occurrence is an indicator of river health. They are long-lived, aggressively territorial birds and are monogamous with strong pair bonds. Breeding success is variable due to the dynamics of a river ecosystem. Features of its habitat include stable riverbanks, low sediment load in rivers and large catchments (10,000 ha +). Blue Ducks were historically widespread but populations have sharply declined, due to loss of suitable habitat, and predation by animals. The alga didymo, present in some South Island rivers, is a possible new threat to Blue Ducks. Following a recent technical review a National Recovery Plan for the period 2006 to 2016 has been formulated that aims to 'secure whio in both North and South Islands so that their populations are no longer at risk of extinction'.

Nicola said that key features of the plan include focusing conservation efforts in four priority core sites in each of the North and South Islands, ensuring that the population is large enough to reduce the risk of extinction over a certain time period, maintaining a minimum of 50 pairs per site spread over several reaches and investing maximum practicable effort to reduce threats to the populations.

Recent observations by Wellington members include large numbers of Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler, Paradise Shelducks and several New Zealand Scaup on the Pencarrow Lakes, and Banded Dotterels nesting on the beach nearby. An Eastern Curlew, two Bar-tailed Godwits and three White-winged Black Terns were seen at the Waikanae Estuary.

Whiteheads have again been seen in the Porirua Scenic Reserve and a Cape Barren Goose has been seen at Paraparaumu. Several members helped feed Fluttering Shearwater chicks on Mana Island for several days in January in support of DoC as part of a translocation attempt to introduce a breeding population to the island.

In late November we met with Manawatu members and the Manawatu River Estuary Trust to observe a range of bird species at Foxton, including recently arrived Northern Hemisphere migrants. Also in late November an enthusiastic group of members worked with the Department of Conservation to survey bird numbers on Kapiti Island, an annual activity for us.

IAN ARMITAGE and GORDON LEARY

## Nelson

Nelson was privileged to host the Australasian Shorebird Conference in December 2005 making a major impact on the local bird scene. David Melville and Rob Schuckard were very actively involved in the proceedings. Dr Clive Minton gave a very informative pre-conference address to a large audience. The highlight for some of the delegates was the post-conference field trip to Farewell Spit. For a few it was a rare chance to make a return visit, but for many of the 45 national and international participants it was a first.

Thirteen of the 39 known species of wading birds seen over the years on Farewell Spit were recorded along with a record number of flags and colour banded combinations. For Lesser Knot these included white/black (Shanghai-Zhejiang China), yellow (North West Australia), orange (Victoria, Australia) and white (North Island of New Zealand). For Bar-tailed Godwits they included, green/orange (Dandong-Tangshan, China), white/black (Shanghai-Zhejiang, China), yellow (North West Australia), orange (Victoria, Australia), white (North Island of New Zealand) and white/green (South Island of New Zealand).

The success of this overnight visit was thanks to the generosity of the Department of Conservation, members of OSNZ, and in particular to the logistic skills of David Melville.

Willie Cook has continued to band Variable Oystercatcher chicks this summer, the most successful year to date. For the first time 12 birds were banded in Golden Bay with assistance from Chris Petyt, these birds have orange flags on the left tibia. Nineteen birds were marked in Tasman Bay and have orange flags on the right tibia.

In November a pair of flagged Variable Oystercatchers on Rabbit Island was discovered to have a nest containing two eggs. Closer inspection revealed that these birds had consecutive numbered bands! They were from a nest of containing three young banded on 9th February 2003 six kilometres to the west on the beach at Rabbit Island. The pair hatched both eggs but neither chick survived to one week of age, the likely reason being that a cat and a family of Harriers were very active in the area.

Wader catching in Tasman and Golden Bay has been successful on four occasions. In November on Rabbit Island 60 Bar-tailed Godwits and 23 Lesser Knots were individually colour banded. This is the largest number of Lesser Knots caught in the South Island.

Other catches were made at Motueka Sandspit and Totara Avenue, Golden Bay. In late January OSNZ members spent a week on Farewell Spit to carry out the summer wader census and have another attempt at catching waders for the OSNZ/DoC wader migration project. After a series of failures over four days due to nets floating away in the tide, catching sites disappearing with moving sand, stoats running through, and too many birds in the catching zone, success was achieved on the last day, 2nd February. Seventy-seven Bar-tailed Godwits were caught. Only 25% of the birds were females and approximately 13% were juveniles.

The wader census showed that at Farewell Spit Bar-tailed Godwit numbers continue to decline. A total of 8,805 godwits were counted, the lowest number for 20 years. The count covered both sides of the Spit and was regarded as very reliable. Numbers of godwits have dropped from 15,000 in 1999 to less than 10,000. Lesser Knot and Turnstone counts were 9,026 and 993 respectively, suggesting a stable population.

The Gannet colony on the Spit has recovered from the September 2005 storm. Most chicks present were from the eggs laid in October and were showing an advanced stage of the final juvenile plumage. A few birds banded as chicks on White Island were recorded.

During an inspection of a trap line for the capture of mustelids along a creek edge leading into the Waimea Estuary a Spotless Crane was seen darting for cover. Banded Rail and their young have been seen recently by Peter Field in this vicinity.

Thirty-six traps are presently set along stop banks and creek sides bordering part of the Waimea estuary in an attempt to reduce predation on the rail species in this area.

Intensive effort continues in surveying the Rock Wren population in the Henderson Basin, Kahurangi National Park. A good breeding season within the study area has meant a doubling in the population to an estimated 25 birds. Four nests were located and monitored. Marian Milne and Richard Stocker were lucky enough to see chicks emerge and tumble from one of the bluff nests. The Milne tribe and Ross Stocker had

great success banding juveniles with "five birds before breakfast" and 10 in total. Post trapping continues with four early kills but none through the post-nesting period.

A Weka left with one leg after a trapping injury was nursed, then underwent a soft release at Rockville. The bird was originally found on the Takaka Hill, a site where few of the species have been recorded recently. A transmitter was fitted to the Weka to see if he would hop home. It was removed after two weeks as he quickly joined the local population some two kilometres from the release site.

Two juvenile White-faced Herons were found with rotated wing tips and one also with a wry beak, both from immediate Takaka area. Could this be a birth defect with a genetic or toxic origin?

DON COOPER and MARIAN MILNE

## Marlborough

The biggest event for the region has been hosting the Australasian Ornithological Conference in December. Over 230 ornithologists and birders came to Blenheim for the event, including three days of scientific papers. The conference was enjoyed by all attending, many of which went on post-conference trips to good birdwatching sites. Local members played a key part in the successful running of this event.

During December Brian stepped down as RR, and I took over in January. I am sure all Marlborough members will join me in thanking Brian for all the hard work he has put into OSNZ within this region. An increasing local membership, and a core group of members attending a regular and diverse range of activities is credit to all the hard work Brian has put in over the past few years as RR. Thanks Brian.

Regular counts at Lake Grassmere continue with exciting results, including Pectoral Sandpiper (1), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (maximum count 5), Curlew Sandpiper (3), Red-necked Stints (7) Golden Plover (7) and two Red-necked Phalaropes. The Wairau Lagoons have also been turning up some good birds too, including a Black Stilt, Eastern Curlew, as well as Little, White-winged Black, and Whiskered Terns.

Over Waitangi Weekend members continued our banding programme at Jack Taylor's farm at Ward. We banded 284 birds, the highlights being 11 Cirl Buntings, 13 Welcome Swallows, eight Bellbirds and two Kingfishers. The Cirl Buntings are being banded with a colour cohort combination for Jack's farm, a second combination will be used at the Wairau Lagoons in winter to try and investigate the movements of Cirl Buntings in Marlborough. Anybody visiting the region that sees Cirl Buntings is asked to check for colour bands.

MIKE BELL

## Canterbury

It has been a fair season for birds on Lake Ellesmere, with the usual migratory species coming across to the accessible Greenpark Sands from the relatively inaccessible Kaitorete Spit side of the lake. In common with the past few years there nothing outstanding has turned up, however. It is a little while now since the last 'first record' there. I'm confident that a Wood Sandpiper will eventually spy the huge expanse of water from afar and make a bee-line for the relatively fresh ponds at the top of Embankment Road. Anyway, this summer the lake has turned up about 70 Pacific Golden Plovers, up to 16 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a Pectoral Sandpiper, an unusually large flock of around 200 Bar-tailed Godwits, low numbers of Red-necked Stints (maybe only about 50, possibly due to poor breeding success in recent years), and the first Eastern Curlew in about 10 years. As well as breeding at the Kaituna end of the lake Australasian Crested Grebes have also been found breeding at the well willow-endowed (and therefore eminently suitable) Hart's Creek, with small chicks seen by Rosalie Snoyink.

Andrew Crossland has been busy, as usual, at various spots in Christchurch and beyond, finding a Long-tailed Cuckoo on the Rapaki Track in November, a Whiskered Tern on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary next to the sewage ponds in December, a Chestnut-breasted Shelduck on the Christchurch sewage ponds also in December, a Kea along the Summit Road in the Port Hills (the first for about ten years) and a Common Tern and Common Sandpiper at the Ashburton River Mouth in February. The Whiskered Tern is probably the same individual that visited the Wairau Lagoons, and attracted quite a few birders from outside of the area. These and other local birders whilst in the area either seeing or missing the tern searched super-diligently through the thousands of wildfowl that make the sewage ponds home, finding a White-eyed Duck amongst thousands of New Zealand Scaup and a Chestnut Teal amongst the Grey Teal. Re-finding of these ducks was found to be almost impossible by those birders coming along later – like finding a needle in several haystacks.

The Ashley Estuary has continued to attract big waders with down-turned beaks, with up to six Whimbrels and three Eastern Curlews present, along with a long-staying Black-tailed Godwit. In the foothills nearby Bev Alexander found a very noisy Kaka in Wooded Gully in late January. A kayaker reported an obviously lost White-flipped Penguin at Kerrs Reach, half way along the Avon River to Christchurch city centre in January. Probably due to the unseasonable weather a young Wandering Albatross was found in a paddock well inland at Greenpark in January. DoC staff took it to Godley Head, where it sat around for a couple of days before heading out to sea.

Cape Barren Geese continue to wander the area, with birds noted near the Styx Mill Reserve near Belfast, Ohoka, and Lake Ellesmere, well away from their usual grazing grounds of St Anne's Lagoon, Cheviot, where the species has been more difficult to find of late.

White-winged Black Terns may be becoming more common again after a couple of relatively lean years. One was a flyby at Caroline Bay, Timaru, in early January, and four found along Kaitorete Spit during the February wader count.

Black Stilts, most (if not all) released birds from the Mackenzie Basin continue to wander to coastal districts in fair numbers. Formerly a winter phenomenon, the birds now seem to be staying all year, or wandering short distances up rivers in spring and summer. So there has been one bird associated with the Ashley River and its mouth, two individuals at Lake Ellesmere and one at Lake Wainono. In South Canterbury a non-breeding-plumaged Cattle Egret was at Washdyke Lagoon in early December, either an early returnee or a bird that has summered-over.

With Christmas and the New Year intervening there have not been many meetings to report on. I stood in for Paul Scofield (who was away) and gave a short presentation on how to write a rare bird report up, so hopefully some members may feel a little less daunted by the

procedure. The November field meeting was the second survey of the year of the Ashley River, thankfully finding more birds than the first, though breeding success for Wrybills and Black-billed Gulls has taken something of a dip. Commoner species such as Banded Dotterels and Pied Stilts are successfully holding their numbers. The other two field meetings have been the summer and February wader counts, both finding moderate numbers of waders at Lake Ellesmere, the first with most waders concentrated at the Greenpark Huts end of Greenpark Sands (a little unusual) and the second liberally scattered along the entire length of these mudflats. The February count also included a count of all waterbirds at Lake Ellesmere, the first time such a count has been performed in over a decade. Both counts were followed by enjoyable meals – the first a barbecue and pot-luck at Colin Hill's farm, where Colin, as usual cooked up some gorgeous meat, the venison being divine. In February we counted in the afternoon and adjourned to the nearby Halswell Tavern for an enjoyable repast and get-together.

NICK ALLEN

## What's on



### Far North

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

### Northland

Katrina Hansen, 3 Harbour View Road, Onerahi, Whangarei. Ph (09) 430 2133. Email 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. Whangarei 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, Rotheray 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

RR's position vacant. Contact person Martin Day, 9 Conrad Place, Cambridge 2351. Phone (07) 827 3047, email mday@wave.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, Owkata, 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. 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

Mike Bell, 42 Vickerman Street, Grovetown 7321. Phone (03) 577 9818 or 021 734 602. Email mikeandnoz@slingshot.co.nz  
Lake Grassmere count – third Sunday of month. Ph Brian Bell. 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.

