



Southern *Bird*

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*The Magazine of the Ornithological
Society of New Zealand*



*Identification of
Black-footed Shags
Waikato Beach Patrolling
Exciting Flotsam
Birding the Coromandel*

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QUOTATION

Hūtia te rito o te harakeke. Kei hea te kōmako e kō?
Kī mai nei ki ahau. He aha te mea nui ki tēnei ao?
Māku e kī atu. He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

If you were to pluck out the centre of the flax bush, where
would the Bellbird sing?

If you were to ask me "What is the most important thing in
the world?"

I would reply, "That it is people, people, people."

Traditional Maori proverb

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COVER PHOTOS

Front Cover: Bar-tailed Godwit

Back Cover: Bathing Southern New Zealand Dotterel

Both photos by Glenda Rees

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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, and identification. Illustrations are
especially welcome, though they must be sharp. Copy deadlines are 10th
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

COUNCIL MEETING:

The Council of the Society is intending to meet on the second weekend in December at the Melville residence near Nelson. It should be noted that new Council member Sarah Jamieson will miss her first meeting because she was lucky enough to win the trip across the Australian Bight at the annual meeting. This trip was donated by Heritage Expeditions, and I am sure Sarah will make us envious with her sightings when she returns!

The meeting will consist of the normal management issues but it is intended to set aside a day for strategic planning as discussed at the Annual General Meeting weekend. Council will be basing these discussions on the notes of the combined RR and Council meeting held at Tauranga. If any members have any ideas or thoughts on future strategic plan issues they should be made known to me or any other Council member at the earliest opportunity so that they can be incorporated into these discussions.

FACEBOOK PAGE:

One of the issues that has been discussed in the past is the possibility of initiating a Facebook page as a way of encouraging rapid discussions and dissemination of information. This is also seen as a mechanism that may be able to generate some interest amongst young technologically-savvy potential members.

A site has now been established by Sheelagh Leary and I thank her for picking up on the challenge that was made during those discussions. She is now being assisted by Katherine Steeds, but they require input from as many people as possible to keep the site interesting and the discussions current.

The site can be assessed using the following link: <http://www.facebook.com/OrnithologicalSocietyNewZealand>

For you older members it is time that you all learnt a new trick, so get your grandchildren to show you how to operate this site.

WEBSITE:

Remember that the website has been substantially upgraded and now provides a wealth of information about the Society and its various activities. The website is easy to navigate, and for those with computers there is no excuse for not being able to access information, or Society contacts.

COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

A call will shortly be made for nominations for several Council vacancies to be filled at the annual meeting in June 2013. This is an opportunity for members who want to be involved in setting the future direction of the Society to put their name forward and be involved. For an organisation to keep relevant it is necessary for new ideas to be introduced to challenge conventional wisdom and perhaps learn from those already involved.

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR:

A little-known official role within the Society is the book review editor. This position is currently filled by Kevin Parker but he has advised that his workload has now increased to the stage where he is no longer able to continue.

This position involves receiving new books that are provided to the Society for review. These can either be reviewed by the editor or the books can be provided to other members to provide reviews, which ultimately will be published in either *Notornis* or *Southern Bird*.

This is an ideal position for someone who enjoys reading and is a good opportunity to view new books as they are published. If you are interested in this position or wish to know more either contact Kevin Parker directly or contact myself or the secretary.

END OF YEAR:

As this will be my last report for 2012 I wish all members an enjoyable Christmas and many happy birding days over the summer months. We look forward to your sightings being published in *eBird* and any really interesting observations written up for either *Southern Bird* or *Notornis*, as it is only by input of reports that these can be kept relevant and interesting.

Above all enjoy your birding.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Subscriptions are due on 1st January. Please endeavour to pay close to the due date – the Society depends greatly on your subscription to continue the furtherance of its objectives in encouraging and supporting the study and enjoyment of birds in the New Zealand region.

OSNZ PERSONNEL AND CONTACT CHANGES

The email address of the RR in Wellington is now osnzwelly@gmail.com

Stuart Wood has handed over the Nelson RR position to Gail Quayle. Gail's contact details are: 6 Tresillian Avenue, Atawhai, Nelson 7010. Phone: 03 545 0456, email: stagefrightmusic@xtra.co.nz. The regional recorder for Nelson has also changed, with Don Cooper handing over to Robin Toy. Robin's contact details are: 78C Little Sydney Road, RD3, Motueka 7198. email: twotoys@xtra.co.nz. Many thanks to Stuart and Don for the hard work they have put into their roles over the past few years.

FREE ATLAS FOR NEW MEMBERS!!!

The Society is extending the presentation of a free copy of the *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand 1999-2004* to each new member joining OSNZ while stocks last. In addition, all new members will receive a copy of the index to *Notornis, Fifty years of bird study in New Zealand 1939-1989*. Pass the word to people who maybe haven't got around to joining the Society yet that now is a very good time to do so. Not only do they obtain membership of the premier society for those with an interest in birds and ornithology in New Zealand and the South Pacific but they will also receive these two essential books on New Zealand ornithology. The atlas is an impressive and weighty book that which will be a delight for anyone with even a small interest in New Zealand's birds.

For details of how to join the OSNZ:

- Visit the Society's website www.osnz.org.nz and download a membership form.
- Contact the Society's Membership Secretary.
- Contact your local regional representative.



NOTICES OF MOTION

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 2013 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before **28th February 2013** and be in writing and signed by a mover and seconder who shall be financial members of the Society.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2013 Annual General Meeting will be held at the Hutton Theatre, Otago Museum Great King Street Dunedin commencing at 4:30 pm, **Saturday 1st June 2013**.

A page on the OSNZ website will give conference details. The registration form will be available for download soon.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The three year Council terms of Colin Miskelly, Murray Williams and Peter Frost expire at the next AGM. We also wish to fill the vacant position on Council to which Sarah Jamieson was temporarily co-opted. Nominations are called for these four positions. Note that the incumbents are eligible to stand again.

Nominations close with the Secretary on **28th February 2013**. Nomination papers must be signed by two financial members of the Society and be consented to in writing by the nominee, who must also be a financial member. Would nominators please include brief *curriculum vitae* of the nominee if that person is not already a member of Council.

Peter Gaze
Secretary
P.O. Box 834
Nelson

2013 NEW ZEALAND BIRD CONFERENCE AND OSNZ AGM

CALL FOR REGISTRATIONS AND ABSTRACTS

The first **New Zealand Bird Conference** and Society AGM will be held in Dunedin at the Otago Museum over Queens Birthday Weekend 1st to 3rd June 2013.

This will be the first Society Conference to be held under the banner of the **New Zealand Bird Conference**. We are planning to make this the premier New Zealand event for communication of new research findings on New Zealand birds, discussion and networking for birds and birders in New Zealand. Also this will be the first time for a number of years that Society members have come together in the south with the opportunity to see penguins and albatrosses on the field trips.

The NZ Bird Conference 2013 will also be the launch for the large website project New Zealand Birds Online, which will provide a comprehensive free resource about all New Zealand birds. This Society project working with Te Papa and DOC is an initiative to create awareness of and build enthusiasm for New Zealand birds.

Two days will be largely devoted to scientific presentations, Saturday 1st June and Sunday 2nd June. Both Oral and Poster presentations are welcome and Society members are encouraged to submit abstracts. A choice of workshops will be available on the Sunday morning.

There will be lots of opportunities for socialising with an informal dinner on the Saturday night at the Polytech Training restaurant 'Technique' and the Conference Dinner on the Sunday, which will be held at Cargills Quality Hotels. Accommodation has been arranged at a concessionary rate at Cargills Quality Hotel, which is just three minutes' walk from the conference venue.

Four field trips to local birding hotspots are on offer on Monday 3rd June:

- Catlins: With local wildlife experts Catlins Wildlife Trackers with a chance to see Yellowhead.
- Otago Museum: Back room tour especially designed with Society members in mind.
- Orokonui EcoSanctuary: Visit the EcoSanctuary and see Saddlebacks, Takahe and other forest birds.
- Otago Peninsula: Your chance to see waders, penguins and albatrosses with local experts Elm Tours

The Museum and Orokonui trips have been timed so that participants can still catch late afternoon flights out of Dunedin.

This Conference also will use online Registration as the main method of registration. A printed Registration Form will NOT be included in *Southern Bird*.

The Registration Form and further information about the programme, field trips, and accommodation and transport options are available on the Society's website www.osnz.org.nz

For those without internet access, a printed Registration Form and Information pack can be obtained by contacting your Regional Representative or by writing to Bruce McKinlay, 97 Tomahawk Road, Dunedin 9013, phone 03 454 4555.

Early registration is encouraged and Society members are advised to make early airline bookings to Dunedin to take advantage of cheaper fares.

Key Dates:

Deadline for Early Registration: 31st March 2013

Deadline for Abstract Submission: 31st March 2013



Both photos by Craig McKenzie

OSNZ SALES TABLE

Items on sale from the OSNZ are a good way of keeping up with the society and identifying yourself as an OSNZ member. Keep those lists ticking over with a Ticklist. Look up all those old *Notornis* articles with a fifty year index (1939-1989), and then check out the Chatham Islands and wander through the waders in the special editions of *Notornis*. Read up about our Society in *A Flying Start*, your essential introduction to the ins and outs of why we are here as birdwatchers!

Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ 1999-2004 – \$98 (within NZ only – overseas purchasers should enquire below for a quote)

Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ (1985) – \$14

Chatham Islands Ornithology – \$19

Fifty Years of Bird Study in New Zealand (Index to *Notornis* 1939-1989) – \$14

Wader Studies in New Zealand – \$24

Birds of Hawke's Bay – \$10

A Flying Start – \$14

Stickers - Pied Stilt (specify outside glass/bumper or inside glass only) – \$3, *Notornis* – \$3

Ticklist – \$1

Checklist (1990 edition) – \$9

Send orders to:

Paul Cuming, OSNZ Sales, 2/7 Robins Road, Judea, Tauranga

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A FLEDGLING FACEBOOK PAGE FOR OSNZ

Find our newly-hatched page with four words: Ornithological Society New Zealand. There's no 'of'. The site with 'of' is an inactive information site, inferior to our current web page. So far we have attracted a number of comments and 69 'likes', probably more by the time this reaches you. 69 is a long way from the 9,000+ for Forest and Bird's page. It was the September *Forest and Bird* magazine, page 39, that inspired me to 'give it a go'. This fledgling needs to be 'liked'. Diet: eats stories, information about events and photos. Conservation status: nationally uncommon but signs of growth.

SHEELAGH LEARY and KATHERINE STEEDS

CREATING 'NEW ZEALAND BIRDS ONLINE' (PART 6)

By the time you receive this issue of Southern Bird, it will be less than six months until the New Zealand Birds Online website is launched. This means that time is rapidly running out if you had intended getting involved, but hadn't got around to it.

Over 400 species texts have been received, and it is hoped that the few remaining texts will be received by the end of the year. Les McPherson has been busy loading sound files, and has calls of close to 350 species loaded. He is now moving on to increasing the diversity of calls for each species.

The most dramatic progress since the last update in September is that the pre-live website has been opened to contributing photographers. Nearly 100 photographers have registered on the site, and over 3,500 images of 357 species have been loaded. Many of the images are simply stunning, as the examples accompanying this article show. We are seeking images showing all life history stages, plumages and postures, as well as images of vagrant species taken both here and in their country of origin. There are still many gaps in the archive, with only 20 species having 'complete' portfolios to date. I have been surprised at the number of common species for which no images of nests, eggs and chicks have

yet been submitted, and so there is still plenty of scope to get involved and contribute.

The number of species for which we do not yet have any images is down to about 30. These are mainly vagrant species rarely seen in New Zealand, plus a few cryptic breeding species confined to single islands: Providence Petrel, Phoenix Petrel, Stejneger's Petrel, Gould's Petrel, Salvin's Prion, Bulwer's Petrel, Tahiti Petrel, Cory's Shearwater, Streaked Shearwater, Newell's Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, Kermadec Storm Petrel, White-bellied Storm Petrel, Leach's Storm Petrel, South Georgian Diving Petrel, Black Falcon, Corncrake, Auckland Island Rail, Baird's Sandpiper, Little Whimbrel, Upland Sandpiper, Oriental Dotterel, Grey-backed Tern, Channel-billed Cuckoo, White-throated Needletail, Fork-tailed Swift, White-winged Triller, Masked Woodswallow, Satin Flycatcher, Black-faced Monarch, and Fairy Martin.

At a broader level, the main areas where the image archive is a bit slim is of vagrant species (especially taken in New Zealand), migratory waders (including birds in breeding plumage and in flight), and seabirds at sea. We don't even have a good dorsal flight shot of a Buller's Shearwater yet, and there must be dozens out there!

Contributing photographers are issued a user profile and password that allows them to browse the entire image archive and upload images at their leisure. If you think you might have images that few other people would have, whether taken in New Zealand or abroad, please contact me promptly at nzbirdsonline@osnz.org.nz

The pre-live website will be locked down in February or March 2013 to allow image selection. This will include selecting the master image for each species, and organising the best of the remaining images in a logical and consistent sequence to illustrate all of the plumages, life stages and postures characteristic of each species.

The final area where you may be able to help is with supporting the website after it goes live. We seek a small team to respond to emails sent to the website, which might include submission of further images or sound files, questions or pointing out apparent errors. Hopefully enough people will come forward to spread the load and ensure that the website does not stagnate if one person is away or over-committed.

COLIN MISKELLY

Project manager, New Zealand Birds Online



New Zealand Dabchick adult with chick, Wanganui, December 2011. Photo by Ormond Torr, New Zealand Birds Online.



Royal Spoonbill carrying nesting material, South Westland, November 2010. Photo by Glenda Rees, New Zealand Birds Online.



Adult Welcome Swallow feeding cicada to a juvenile, Manawatu Estuary, March 2010. Photo by Phil Battley, New Zealand Birds Online.

NEW ZEALAND BIRD LITERATURE

A list of recent bird literature regarding New Zealand birds, excluding that published in *Notornis*.

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Mattern, T.; Houston, D.M.; Lalas, C.; Setiawan, A.N.; Davis, L.S. **Diet composition, continuity in prey availability and marine habitat – keystones to population stability in the Snares Penguin (*Eudyptes robustus*).** *Emu* 2009; **109**: 204–213

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WELLINGTON ISLANDS GET A SECOND SERIES OF COUNTS 10 YEARS ON

During 2012, we've been revisiting some of the count series that were started in the early 2000s. One in particular is the counts at Matiu/Somes Island. During 2002-5 quarterly counts were undertaken by a keen group of OSNZers, led by Rod Orange. This showed that species introduced to the island such as New Zealand Robins and Red-crowned Parakeet were becoming established, and showed which of the forest species was most common, but also did an important job of providing baseline information about one of the very few North Island Spotted Shag colonies. Since that time, Robins have dwindled in number to only a few individuals. However Red-crowned Parakeets are now one of the most obvious and certainly the most gregarious species on the island, and occur at nearly every count station.

Over the next 12 months, we will be repeating the island surveys quarterly. This involves a short ferry ride out to the island from either the

Wellington East-by-West ferry terminal on Queens Wharf, or from Eastbourne jetty. An overnight stay at the island is also part of the adventure, and it feels like a real away-from-town experience, with great views of the city lights from the island.

It's been a dynamic time at the island since the 2002 counts were instigated with the Port Nicholson Block Claim Settlement vesting the ownership of the island back to the iwi, while the DOC rangers continue to undertake day-to-day management at the site. A novelty too is having 24-hour electricity, as DOC has recently installed a wind turbine at the site, rather than using generators. Fuel consumption has dropped by over 95% according to the rangers, and DOC are carrying out an ongoing assessment of the potential impacts of the turbine on local fauna, with careful assessments of whether there is bird-strike around the pylon.

To join the upcoming December 2012, March 2013 or June 2013 surveys, please contact Delia Small. Places are limited, but we're keen to get a range of members involved, and this is an easy site for learning bird calls as the birds are not too concealed being in short vegetation. Around 30 species are present. The terrain is easy with graded paths around all areas. Delia's contact details are smalldelia@gmail.com or phone 021 803464

SUSAN WAUGH



OSNZ members Julia White (left) and Julia Stace survey birds on the top of Matiu/Somes Island early in the morning of the September quarterly bird count in 2012. Photo Susan Waugh.

RESULTS OF THE ROYAL SPOONBILL CENSUS 2012

The Royal Spoonbill Census 2012 was planned for 12th August with excellent support from all regions. However the weather was not so supportive. It was atrocious with rain and strong wind over much of New Zealand on the day, so some regions had to change the date to a week later. Nevertheless, most regions managed very well, carrying out the census close to the scheduled date. Thanks to all who took part in the census and contributed to this very good result.

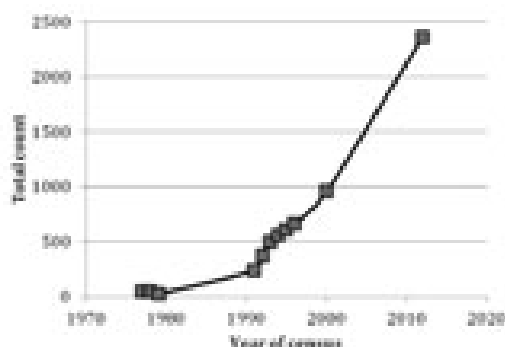
A number of observers noted that earlier in the year they had a far higher count than at census time. However, these would have been birds on the move. Most breeding colonies are located in the South Island, and a very high percentage of adults and juveniles move, after breeding, to the north of the North Island. It is not known what routes they take.

The first census that included a count of Royal Spoonbill was back in 1977. There were only 49, and two years later 26. The comment made in *OSNZ News* at that time was "we have a baseline against which to watch over the apparent slow decline of Royal Spoonbill in New Zealand". Fortunately, this prediction was not so. Breeding birds were found at Wairau Lagoon in 1979 and in Otago in 1984, with many more colonies establishing since. The last Royal Spoonbill census took place in 2000 with a total of 956. Now there are 2,361. On average this is about a 10% increase per year. It doesn't answer the question of whether this significant increase was due to further influxes from the Australian population or a very successful breeding pattern in New Zealand over the last 12 years. Perhaps a survey of nest numbers at our breeding colonies should be done. The table gives the totals for both surveys, 2000 and 2012, to show the change in number of birds per OSNZ Region. The graph shows the counts over three decades of OSNZ winter census data.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN and MARY THOMPSON
Co-ordinators of the Census

Regions	Counts	
	2000	2012
Far North	175	1061
Northland	77	68
Auckland	102	79
South Auckland	37	442
Waikato	95	143
Bay of Plenty	35	39
Volcanic Plateau	0	1
Gisborne/Wairoa	41	46
Taranaki	2	8
Manawatu	68	40
Wanganui	11	15
Hawke's Bay	35	37
Wairarapa	0	20
Wellington	10	10
Nelson	208	205
Marlborough	nc	53
Canterbury	59	52
West Coast	0	18
Otago	1	4
Southland	0	20
Total	956	2361

Increase in Royal Spoonbill in New Zealand using results from winter counts.



NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

arvensis (Marlborough); Marilyn Bartram (Wairarapa); Eileen Betts (Bay of Plenty); Grumpy and Maxine Bremner (South Auckland); Warwick Buckman (Bay of Plenty); Jane Chen (Canterbury); Alan Fielding (Wairarapa); Emily Gray (Otago); Tony Heath (Auckland); Patrick Kavanagh (Auckland); Blair McLeod (Bay of Plenty); Brian Murphy (Wellington); Paul Pope (Otago); Bill Smith (Waikato); Finn van Dorsser (Canterbury); Elise Verschoor (Bay of Plenty); Jane Walker (Waikato); Jemma Welch (Auckland).

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

William Abbott; Jane Ashby; Francie Beggs; Steve Braunias; William Cook; David and Ruth Crockett; Graham Don, Murray Gavin; Susanne Govella; Ian Jamieson; Ted Kirk; Jean Luke; Bruce MacKereth; Bruce McKinlay; Gregory Moorcroft; Philip Munns; Dan O'Halloran; Lance Pickett; Elizabeth Revell; Jenny Ross; Ann Sherlock; DM Stracy; Ian Sutherland; Michael Taylor.

IDENTIFICATION OF BLACK-FOOTED SHAGS

New Zealand has four shags (or cormorants) with black feet, two large (Black Shag and Pied Shag) and two small (Little Shag and Little Black Shag). Being largely black, or black and white, at first sight identity confusion within the group is a definite problem, sometimes for even the most experienced birdwatcher.

Incidentally the choice of whether to call these species shags or cormorants varies through the world – cormorant coming from the Old French for sea raven, and shag probably from Old English/Old Norse/Old High German words for tufts or promontories – referring to the crests found on some species.

Thankfully the New Zealand names for black-footed shags are really quite descriptive.

Black Shags are indeed almost entirely black (with perhaps a very dark brown tint on the wings) in its adult plumages, though with a white/paler lower face patch, and when breeding white filoplumes (thin feathers) on the neck and a white thigh patch. Young birds are a muddy brown all over, darker on the back and paler on the breast. The dark breast of the Black Shag separates it from the similarly-sized Pied Shag at all ages. The presence of some white in the plumage and its heavy grey beak with a yellow base separates it from Little Black Shag. The white-throated form of Little Shag is smaller than the Black Shag and has a short all-yellow bill, joining the head at a fairly steep angle to the forehead.

Pied Shags are also pied in all their plumages. Similar in size to Black Shag (though they are slightly smaller) they never have a dark breast. Bill and facial skin structure and colouration are similar to Black Shag, though a tad more colourful in the breeding season, with a handsome bright blue eye ring visible at close range. The pied form of Little Shag is very similar in the distribution of black and white, but the Pied Shag has a black thigh patch extending from the wings to the legs, looking a bit like it is wearing black trousers. The young Pied Shag is a sepia-toned version of the adult, with paler brown streaks blurring the sharp demarcation with white otherwise seen in the adult.

Little Shags are complicated in that some birds have black breasts (the white-throated phase) and some white (pied phase) and some are in-between to some degree or other (intermediate phase). Pied phase birds are happy to breed with white-throated ones. See above for separation of the white-



Adult Pied Shag. Photo by John Stewart-Smith



Pied phase Little Shag. Photo by John Stewart-Smith.

throated phase from Black Shag, and the pied phase from Pied Shag. The species can be separated from the similarly sized Little Black Shag by the presence of white somewhere on adult Little Shags, and bill colouration and shape. Little Shags always have a yellow bill (less colourful in young birds) that appears stubby and often feels a bit uptilted, the visible part of the lower mandible being much longer in comparison to the upper. Little Black Shags have an uncolourful grey beak that is longer and thinner than the Little's. Care needs to be taken with juvenile Little Shags of the white-throated phase, where the easiest distinction is beak shape (cf grey). Young pied phase Little Shags have a dusky patch around the eye.

Little Black Shags are most uniformly dark of our shags, lacking any white in their plumage except a few white feathers on the head when breeding. The only colouration is their reptilian green eye. Continuing the reptilian resemblance the upper-wing feathers are dark grey with darker tips, giving a scaly appearance in most lights. Juvenile and immature Little Black Shags are a slightly browner version of adults. The main confusion species is white-throated Little Shags in juvenile plumage, but the latter has a squat, pale-coloured beak. Little Black Shags habitually fish in flocks, something that Little Shags don't do, and are mostly found only in the North Island. Numbers and range in the South Island seem to be slowly increasing, however, with recent breeding in Christchurch.

Other confusion species

In the Marlborough Sounds area the King Shag is a pink-footed shag that resembles the Pied Shag, and further south the Stewart Island Shag (another pink-footed shag) can resemble both the Pied and Black Shags. The main points of difference are the white marks in the wings of King Shag and pied phase Stewart Island Shag, lacking on any of the black-footed shags. This is visible as a wing bar or bars on both roosting and flying birds. The distribution of black is also greater on the pink-footed shags around the face and neck. The dark (bronze) phase Stewart Island Shag is all dark, lacking any white, and has a pale, but not yellow-based beak.

In conclusion

Bill size and colouration, breast and flank colouration are the key identification markers between these species. Look for black trousers to identify Pied Shags, and a short stubby beak for Little Shag. A dark juvenile Little Shag often needs a bit more careful observation to separate it from a Little Black Shag.

NICK ALLEN



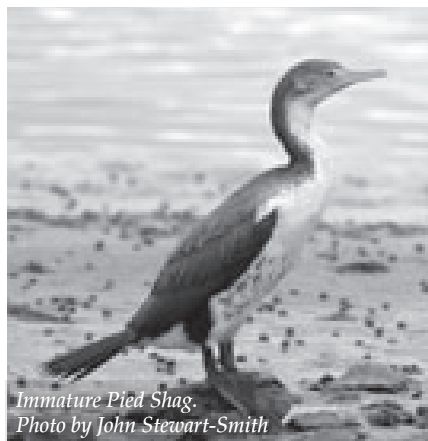
Black Shag in full breeding plumage.
Photo by Nick Allen



*Adult Little Black Shag.
Photo by Ormond Torr*



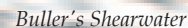
*Juvenile pied phase Little Shag.
Photo by Ormond Torr*



Immature Pied Shag.
Photo by John Stewart-Smith



Intermediate phase (towards white-throated) Little Shag on left and Pied Shag to right. Photo by John Stewart-Smith





For the novice patroller an informal apprenticeship with an experienced patroller over an extended period is of great value. A bad identification will devalue the database. It is much better to suspend judgement, bag the remains and pass the responsibility to someone with more experience. There are times when you might question this approach. You may be many kilometres from both your mentor and the nearest pickup point. You stumble across a huge bird. It is mostly buried, falling to pieces and decomposing very nicely. The prospect of returning it to base has little appeal and you must make a good effort to identify it. It has only happened once so far and the problem was solved in a few minutes when the bill was discovered. Mystery over, it was a spoonbill. These days we carry a camera and measuring devices for use on large birds like unidentified albatrosses.

On taking up beach patrols you quickly become aware of how much you don't know. Two years on and we both know a little more. Unfortunately the amount we don't know has also increased! Only one thing is certain. No matter how many smelly birds you might have come across you still have a great appetite at the end of a patrol. Those sandwiches always taste great!

RAY BUCKMASTER



Hugh on Taharoa Beach



Banded Dotterel nest



Wrybill. All photos by Ray Buckmaster



Shearwater, but which species?



Matt Jensen Young launching the bottle.



The barnacle-encrusted bottle.

As well as the possibility of finding exciting birds, sometimes beach patrolling turns up other interesting items, both natural and man-made, as the following account explains.

EXCITING FLOTSAM

What follows is an account of a patrol carried out from the south head of Aotea Harbour to the north head of Kawhia Harbour on Wednesday the 7th of November 2012. This is a fairly long patrol and often quite rewarding as it passes through a number of New Zealand Dotterel territories. This patrol was particularly rewarding as one of us discovered a newly arrived 'message in a bottle'. This was a first for all members of the team.

In the best of all possible worlds the bottle would have had a screw top or an attached corkscrew. Neither applied so we had to delay our gratification even though we could see that intriguing spill of paper within the bottle!

What the bottle did come with was a large growth of Goose Barnacles. The glue these creatures use is incredibly effective, making superglue look like wall paper paste. We could not detach the creatures, which was unfortunate as they were far from alive. In consequence we completed the patrol at a fast pace, surrounded by a miasma of decaying barnacle and with a large entourage of buzzy flies.

The bottle was finally opened and quickly disposed of. It was gratifying to see that it had travelled a fair distance in just over a year.

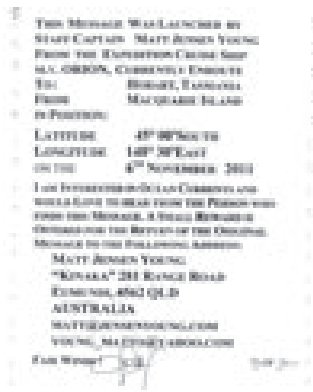
Matt Jensen Young, the good captain who had thrown the bottle over board was thrilled to hear of our discovery. We look forward to hearing about recoveries of other messages he has seamailed!

The find has raised our expectations for the next beach patrol. Some New Zealand Dotterel chicks would be great. Failing that, perhaps a lump of ambergris...

ANN and RAY BUCKMASTER, HUGH CLIFFORD.



Unfurling the message.



All photos by Ray Buckmaster

CIRL BUNTINGS AROUND WELLINGTON

Cirl Buntings are by far the rarest of the small introduced songbirds that have survived in New Zealand. Even in their strongholds in Nelson, Marlborough and Canterbury, they are greatly outnumbered by Yellowhammers and all the introduced finches. In the North Island they are considered to be almost absent. Few bird watchers have seen them, yet reliable reports stretch from Kaipara to Gisborne and south to Wellington.

The three of us have had very different experiences of Cirl Buntings around Wellington: David considers them to be resident breeders in low numbers at two coastal sites, plus has seen single birds at Waikanae, Paekakariki and Whitby, and groups of up to three birds in Upper Hutt over the past 21 years; Colin had seen two single birds (at Mana Island and Khandallah) over 20 years; until recently, Duncan had not seen any, despite being familiar with the species at Kaikoura.

The main difference in our experiences is that David is very familiar with the species and its calls, from keeping the birds in captivity. He long ago figured out the very specific habitats they prefer near Wellington. Since 1991, he has monitored small populations on scrub-covered coastal scarps and toe-slopes between Eastbourne and the Orongorongo River mouth, and also south of Titahi Bay. The population is typically two or three pairs only at each site, centred on a few traditional territories, but at its peak in the 1990s birds were scattered all the way from Eastbourne around Baring Head to the Orongorongo river mouth. They apparently died out in the early 2000s, but have recently reappeared at precisely the same locations near Baring Head and the adjacent Wainuiomata River mouth.

The only nest found (in December 1991 at Baring Head) contained three young close to fledging, and was about 1.5 m above the ground in a boxthorn. David found the nest by following adults carrying grasshoppers. A predator killed one of the chicks but the two others fledged successfully. Broods of two to three fledglings are seen most summers near the Wainuiomata River mouth, but the population south of Titahi Bay apparently has had low breeding success. However, this population may now be able to breed more successfully, as possum and predator control has recently been carried out in the area.

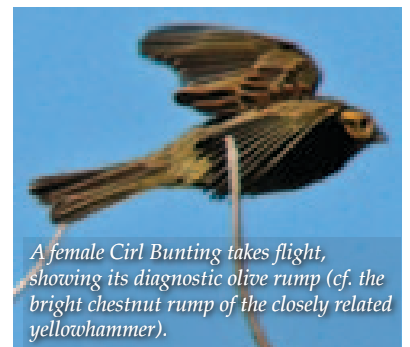
David located three pairs and a single bird near Baring Head in October this year, as well as three more pairs occupying territories at the site south of Titahi Bay. The three pairs near Baring Head were occupying the same territories as in the previous year; however they failed to breed successfully that season, perhaps due to the summer being very wet.

On 10th November the three of us with Dianne Parker and Alan Tennyson visited three territories at the Wainuiomata site, and found two of the pairs in the blustery conditions. The birds were very cryptic, staying in dense cover most of the time, and not allowing close approach, even in response to playback of Cirl Bunting calls. However, this may have been partially due to the presence of a group of observers; David has managed to approach the same birds more closely when visiting the site unaccompanied. Were it not for their distinctive calls, they would be very difficult to detect, which explains why most Wellington birdwatchers were oblivious to their presence. Where else are they hiding?

DAVID ANGUS, COLIN MISKELLY and DUNCAN WATSON



A male Cirl Bunting on its territory near the Wainuiomata River mouth, November 2012.



A female Cirl Bunting takes flight, showing its diagnostic olive rump (cf. the bright chestnut rump of the closely related yellowhammer).

Both photos by Duncan Watson

BIRDING THE COROMANDEL

The contrast with the Hauraki Plains with its bright green paddocks and multitudes of dairy cows is immense as you pass over the Kopu Bridge and onto the much more rugged and untamed Coromandel Peninsula. Outside public holidays and the peak holiday season, when the area becomes a favourite playground for Aucklanders escaping the city, a few days birding here offers relaxed birding off the usual beaten track and the promise of encountering scarce species such as Brown Teal and New Zealand Dotterel.

The forests of the Coromandel Peninsula were plundered for their Kauri by European settlers, and today are but a shadow of what they must have been. The birds present are mostly common species, but include Tomtit, plus Kaka in places, and one of the more northern populations of mainland Bellbirds. New Zealand Pigeons can still be seen in good numbers, and predator control in some areas is aiding the growth of a population of North Island Brown Kiwi.

The shore of most of the peninsula is rocky, with sandy bays, and a few mostly small muddy estuaries. With the exception of the Thames foreshore migratory waders hardly feature. However, there are important populations of New Zealand Dotterel, including a large flock outside the breeding season at Matarangi Spit. The coast also provides roost and feeding sites for Brown Teal, which have been the subject of a highly successful project to re-introduce the species to the northern part of the peninsula and protect them with predator control work. Large flocks can now be seen near Colville, at Port Charles and in Waikawau Bay. Indeed this is probably now the easiest place to see the species in any numbers on the mainland.

On the western shore of the peninsula Spotted Shags are often seen along the rocky coast north of Thames, these being birds from the northernmost Hauraki Gulf population. Reef Herons are also present in reasonable numbers and are well worth keeping an eye out for. Mangroves contain Banded Rails, which in some places, such as Opoutere on the south-eastern coast, are happy to leave the shelter

of their forest and strut around on the adjacent mudflats, no doubt due to reduced predator pressure due to trapping or poisoning. Thus it is possible to sit outside at the Opoutere YHA sipping a good drop of vino whilst scanning the nearby estuary for these striped strutters, whilst being serenaded by the area's Kaka. For those not staying at the YHA Banded Rails are often seen from the footbridge at the start of the track to Opoutere Beach, at the northern tip of the estuary.

With the presence offshore of the Mercury Islands and the breeding seabirds they contain, a pelagic trip from Whitianga is very worthwhile in the warmer months, especially to see the very localised Pycroft's Petrel. Other species likely to be seen are Fluttering, Buller's and Flesh-footed Shearwaters, White-faced Storm Petrel, and Cook's Petrel – so there are good opportunities

to practice telling Pycroft's from Cook's. It is necessary to join either an organised pelagic trip offered by a bird guiding company, which operate on an occasional basis, or charter a boat yourself.

For non-birders the Coromandel offers sandy beaches (including the opportunity to create your own hot pool at Hot Water Beach), coastal walks, boat trips to Cathedral Cave and an alternative artistic community, especially centred on Coromandel town. Here there are a number of arty shops and cafes, and an entertaining ride on a narrow-gauge train from Barry Brickell's pottery studios and kilns to New Zealand's very own Eyefull Tower, from where the views on a fine day befit the name.

NICK ALLEN



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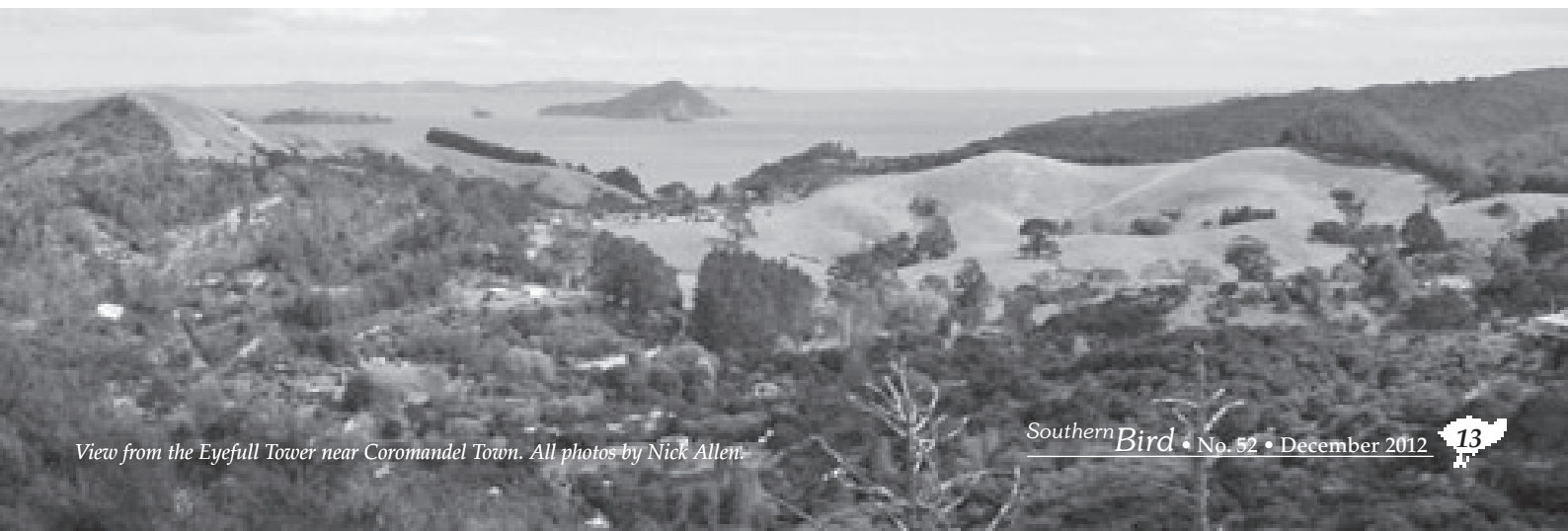
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The Brown Teal flock near Colville Junction.



BLACK-FRONTED TERN'S METAMORPHOSIS OR STERNA STUFF

The following verse, started in the late 1970's but alas only recently completed, tries to present the findings of a paper about Whiskered Terns (quoted in the final stanza) in a lighter vein than the original, and to suggest how a bit of help from nature and the supernatural might have helped it along.

The fact that the Black-fronted Tern had long been classified as a race of Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*) had often been questioned, and the appearance of Whiskered Terns at Lake Horowhenua in the late 1970's at last stimulated the authors of this paper to look into the matter again. These birds would have been Australian breeders moving north for the winter, but transported by adverse weather to unexpectedly chilly winter quarters, as has happened before to other Australian birds.

In trying to determine the Black-fronted Tern's relationship to Whiskered and other similar terns, the authors considered, amongst other things, their shape, measurements (especially of the legs), plumages, bare-part colouration, breeding habits and post-breeding movements. They also made comparisons with two other similar southern terns. Their conclusion was that the differences in both structure and behaviour of these two birds were not only far too great for them to belong to the same species, but would put them in a different genus, *Sterna*. So, instead of being varieties of the same bird, their ancestors must have diverged five to ten million years ago!

The diets of Black-fronted and Whiskered Terns, and the way they fly low to pick food from, or near to, the surface are very similar. This can be explained as convergent evolution. Because they feed on similar food in similar places they might well have evolved their feeding strategies independently, a coincidence which needs not indicate a close relationship (very handy if you are trying to prove otherwise!).

Now we are all up to date, and know what's what, and have got used to the new arrangement, all is in vain. A recent DNA study suggests that the Black-fronted Tern is a *Chlidonias* after all, so it looks as if feeding behaviour is the *only* reliable visible indicator, and all else is the work of the devil.

For half a hundred years or more,
Black-fronted Tern's concern
Was that they were thought to be
A race of Whiskered Tern.
"How can we show," a brooding bird
Thought as she incubated,
"That we are to *hybridus*
Distinctly unrelated."

She gazed upon the river bank's
Eroded pebbles round,
And thought "whoever saw a marsh tern
Nesting on the ground?
They seek the sombre, stagnant swamp,
Or mournful marsh to breed,
And lay their eggs on floating heaps
Of sodden, rotting weed."

"And even I can reason why
It must be quite erroneous
To place us with the marsh terns
In the genus of *Chlidonias*:
Our legs and tails are beautiful,
We nest on *terra firma*,
And together with sea swallows
Should be classed as *Sterna*."

Then passing Zephyr read her thoughts,
And with uncommon speed,
Blew in a Whiskered Tern fresh from
Maternal duties freed;
Who eagerly anticipated
Summer's warm rest-cure,
But found herself transported to
Lake Horowhenua.

Some said, "That's a Whiskered Tern,"
But others cried, "Not so!
The Whiskered's just another race
Of Black-fronted, you know;
With longer legs and tail whose tip
Is hardly bifurcated,
This can be to Black-fronted Tern
But distantly related."

And so, to sort the matter out,
There went an expedition
Of experts, impecunious,
But rich in erudition.
They climbed into their heaps of rust,
And with imprudent speed,
Drove to where the stranger flew,
Beyond the fringing reed.

With piercing eye, they noted well
Each detail most minute:
A Whiskered Tern it surely was –
Quite beyond dispute.
In silent thought they set off home,
Each knowing not that he
Unwittingly would bring to life
A fairy fantasy.

For soon a humble denizen
Of dismal swamp would be
Magically transformed into
A swallow of the sea;
Not by kiss of handsome prince,
Nor chromosome mutation,
But scrutiny of bones and skins
And learned dissertation.

They found, unlike its congeners,
The Black-front's shorter feet
Had even shorter, thicker toes,
And webbing quite complete;
And when they saw its hindmost toe,
Which was quite rudimentary,
Its relationship to *Sterna*
Seemed almost elementary.

Like offspring of the coastal terns,
The Black-front's chick, they found,
Was irregularly mottled,
To match the stony ground;
But when they saw that marsh terns fed
By methods much the same,
They decided, in their wisdom,
That Convergence was to blame!

And so they laboured, night and day,
With awesome erudition,
To define this bird's distinctive
Taxonomical position;
Contriving yet to lose us,
And these enigmatic birds,
In a veritable wilderness
Of scientific words.

Now all, at last, is publicised
In discourse long and weighty –
Vid. Lalas C. and Heather B.,
Notornis, nineteen eighty –
And Black-fronts proudly spread their wings
From Marlborough Sounds to Bluff,
Secure in the knowledge that
They're made of *Sterna* stuff.

JOHN SQUIRE

John has generously offered help for members visiting North Queensland, where he now lives, in experiencing the amazing birdlife on offer there. His phone number is +61 740 930 486. ED

BIRD NEWS

This feature contains news of sightings that have not received official acceptance by the Records Appraisal Committee of the OSNZ. Period covered: 1st June 2012 to 30th November 2012

Five **North Island Brown Kiwi** from the Coromandel population were released on the pest-free Motutapu Island on 23/10.

Twenty **Okarito Brown Kiwi** were released onto Mana Island in June, marking the return of the species to the North Island. The birds were hatched at the West Coast Wildlife Centre in Franz Josef then raised on Motuara Island in the Marlborough Sounds as part of Operation Nest Egg. The total population of Okarito Brown Kiwi is about 400 birds, with an aim according to DOC of raising numbers to at least 600 to make the species more secure. Five years ago the species was down to 200 individuals.

A recent census of **Brown Teal** in the Northern Coromandel recorded a dramatic increase in numbers since 2005 with over 400 individuals counted at known flock sites. A stable population of 160 birds was found in Waikawau Bay alone. Predator control work by the Moehau Environment Group, other community groups and DOC is credited for the increased population.

Seventy **Black Stilts** were released this year near Lake Tekapo as part of the continuing captive breeding programme for the species

Whiteheads have been re-introduced onto islands close to Auckland in the Hauraki Gulf, with 30 being released onto Motutapu and 20 onto Motuihe Island in June. A further release of 20 North Island Saddlebacks was made onto Motutapu/Rangitoto in June.

Short reports

The three **Plumed Whistling Ducks** remained at Taradale (Hawke's Bay) throughout the period, but either they or reports of them are becoming less regular. A pair of **New Zealand Dabchicks** bred again at Lake Killarney, Takaka (Golden Bay), currently their only South Island location, but for how long may this be the case?

Probably the most remarkable event this winter was an influx of **Australian Pelicans** to the northern North Island. A single bird was found in Kerikeri Inlet (Far North) on 7/8 staying until into November, with

probably a few sightseeing trips down the coast. The upper Kaipara Harbour near Ruawai (Northland) held an astonishing flock of up to 14, found by a sand barge operator on 6/8 they stayed until at least 13/9. On the opposite coast almost directly east Mangawhai Harbour (Auckland/Northland) held a singleton on 9/9, with 10 on 5 and 6/11. Nearby Ruakaka (Northland) was visited by one bird on 9/9. A smaller cousin of the pelicans, but no less exotic, an immature **Brown Booby** was seen fishing off Rabbit Island (Nelson) on 1/9.

Long staying **Little Egrets** were reported from the Clive Wetlands (Hawke's Bay), (probably throughout, but only reported 22/6 and 30/9); the Manukau Harbour (Auckland/South Auckland) up to two or three from June into August; the Ohau River Mouth (Manawatu) from 23/8 to 19/11 at least; and the Mangawhai Harbour from early June to 18/11. Another was at Mataia in the Kaipara Harbour (Auckland) on 23/6.

Another long-staying species, the **Glossy Ibis**, had regular individuals at Travis Wetland (Christchurch) and Wairau Lagoons (Marlborough) (two birds), probably throughout the period. Shorter-staying birds were at Miranda (South Auckland) on 10/6 and 16/6, and the Whangakopikopiko Wildlife Refuge, Opotiki (Bay of Plenty) with two present on 21/10.

The seemingly ever-present Renwick (Marlborough) **Black Kite** was reported on 9/11. However it was outnumbered by reports of that other regularly-reported Aussie raptor the **Nankeen Kestrel**, with sightings at Kaitorete Spit (Canterbury) on 27/7, and a long-stayer taking up residence near Kaitia from early June until at least late October.

Sanderlings were seen from the regular sites of Awarua Bay (Southland) with two present on 1/6 and 16/6, and Little Waihi (and sometimes the neighbouring Maketu) Estuary from 29/9 until at least 11/11. This latter bird disappeared for a few months this winter, or was maybe replaced by another. One also commuted between the tip of Kaitorete Spit and Greenpark Sands, according to the level of Lake Ellesmere (Canterbury), between 23/10 and at least 4/11. A **Black-tailed Godwit** was on the roost at Miranda, a regular site for the species, on 10 and 16/6. **Grey-tailed Tattlers** were found at Pounaweia (Otago) on 19/6, Manukau Harbour on 24/6, Mangere

(Auckland) on 9/10, and the Waimea Inlet (Nelson) on 22/10, with two there on 27/10. Consorting with Pied Stilts a **Common Greenshank** shared its time between the tip of Kaitorete Spit and Greenpark Sands, Lake Ellesmere between 23/10 and 10/11. That Southland hotspot Awarua Bay turned up a **Terek Sandpiper** on 16/6. On the coast just south of Napier a **Grey Phalarope** was seen on 12/7 feeding in a small pond close to a dead Humpback Whale.

The summer wader count on Farewell Spit (Golden Bay) turned up a **Grey Plover** in mid-November. Out of range **New Zealand Dotterels** were at the Catlins River Estuary (Otago) on 26 and 29/10, and the Ohau River Mouth (Manawatu) on 19/11. The regular **Lesser Sand Plover** was reported from the Awarua Estuary on 3/7, and its cousin a **Greater Sand Plover** was on Farewell Spit in mid-November. Fewer **Shore Plovers** graced the Plimmerton foreshore (Wellington) this year compared to last, with a maximum of 12 birds reported, and sightings from 14/7 to 29/9. A Shore Plover raised at Peacock Springs and released on Mana Island was on the Ashley River near Rangiora on 30/9, relocating to Greenpark Sands, Lake Ellesmere, where it was seen on 9/11. Another individual was seen in the same general area on 25/11, but this bird was raised at Mt Bruce before being released on the same island. A long-staying **Marsh Sandpiper** was at Miranda from early June until at least 8/11.

An immature **Little Tern** was at Aramoana (Otago) on 30/11. **Gull-billed Terns** continue to be seen following last year's influx, with two on Lake Forsyth (Canterbury) on 30/6 and at least up to five on neighbouring Lake Ellesmere throughout. Up to four were seen off and on at the Manawatu Estuary throughout, with two showing courtship behaviour on 4/11. A **White-winged Black Tern** was on the Wairau Lagoons on 9/6 and 31/8.

The only passerine record for the period concerns a probable **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** in the Pohangina Valley (Manawatu) on 22/7.

Sources:
Birding-NZ email group. Birding NZ internet chat group. What's Up DoC? electronic newsletter, Neil Hayes/Natalie Collicott.



Far North

A cool spring arrived in the Far North, and we have had fewer than usual reports of singing Shining Cuckoos, even well into October. A recent weekend trip to Parengarenga Harbour to welcome back the Arctic shorebirds produced many lingering Royal Spoonbills; 273 on the shore at Te Hapua and another 50 or so at the Unahi Road site at Awanui. The high tide wader flock on the Kokota Sandspit could not be found in the time available on the Sunday but a large flock of birds gathering on the eelgrass-covered mudflats as the tide came in on the Saturday were approached to reasonable range in Anthea's dinghy. A succession of 23 photos taken as the water rose around our ankles enabled us to count the birds reasonably well on the computer afterwards. The flock consisted only of Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Knots and Turnstones but the total tally of about 2,650 birds led us to hope that we weren't looking at the whole flock, as there should have been around 5,000 birds, and there must have been other species there somewhere.

We spotted some flagged birds, including a Bar-tailed Godwit with white over orange which we hear is one of those banded in South Korea in 2004, none of which have been seen since 2006. We plan to go to the area again before the end of the year and spend more time there.

12 people attended our indoor meeting in Mangonui in October when we showed the DVD *Emperors of the Ice*. It was good to welcome some new people.

The Australian Pelican which was found in Kerikeri in early August is suspected to be the same bird which was seen briefly at Waipu Cove and Mangawhai in late September but which is now back 'home' at least until mid-October. We know of no overlap in sightings. The Nankeen Kestrel is still present near Kaitia at the time of writing (late October).

Following demand from birders visiting from abroad, our region will be going out to sea from Whangaroa Harbour again over the summer, hoping to match the successes of earlier pelagic trips.

DETLEF DAVIES

Northland

Monthly meetings have been well attended in recent months, with a few new members giving the Northland Region a boost. One of our members, Julie Hudson, joined a tour to the Chatham Islands, and as our September speaker had researched the pertinent historical facts. The tour group was guided by Ruud Kleinpaste and included a visit to Pitt Island, but did not have a 'birding' focus. Julie's photographs featured the topography and geology of the islands and triggered a wave of reminiscences and stories among her audience, as at least eight of those present had been to the Chathams.

Volunteers who monitored the Fairy Tern populations for DOC were treated to a visit to the Auckland Zoo during April and were particularly impressed by the new aviaries. Fairy Terns are now returning to their preferred nesting areas on the Waipu and Mangawhai River spits for the 2012/13 breeding season and pre-breeding behaviour has been observed. Here's hoping for a successful and prolific breeding season this time around!

The monthly East and West Coast beach patrols have been continued, but with only a few of our members able to participate, a lesser distance has been covered on each coast with very few birds having been counted on the East Coast this year.

An occasional Reef Heron has been seen on the Whangarei Harbour and the shellbank at the end of Johnson Point Road, Waipu, held a flock of 23 New Zealand Dotterels during September. Eight New Zealand Dabchicks were seen at Waro Lake, Hikurangi. On the official count-day in August we tallied 70 Royal Spoonbills, but it is generally felt that there were more birds than that in the region, which were possibly not counted because of inaccessibility.

JANET SNELL

Waikato

Waikato OSNZ has had a full and varied year. We have benefited from the number of avian researchers based at Waikato University, visiting overseas scholars, those involved in so many aspects of the *Rena* grounding, local personalities and individuals involved in wider conservation activities in

New Zealand. We are fortunate that so many have given their time to address our evening meetings.

The Halo Project, a particularly local phenomenon, is worth special mention. Hamilton, surrounded as it is by rich agricultural land, is fairly remote from significant areas of native vegetation. However, it is just these areas, having received consistent predator control over recent times that have produced the huge increase in Tui numbers that we are currently enjoying. The country has come to town. Hamilton City Council, as a Conservation Week initiative updated and broadened the information captured in their website for the recording of sightings of these birds and also any of New Zealand Pigeons and Kaka. This is a sign of a widening interest in birds in this area.

Waikato is a huge region. The committee is aware of the difficulty some members have, due to remoteness or inconvenient timing, in attending our meetings. We hope that the introduction of monthly meeting summaries is helping to keep all members better informed. We have noted a pleasing increase in new members during the course of this year.

Regular field activities have continued during the year. These include monthly lake censuses, biannual harbour censuses and also patrolling five west coast beaches. Currently fifty beach patrols have been completed. A few unusual beach wrecked specimens have been encountered, notably two Kerguelen Petrels and two White-faced Storm Petrels. Poignantly, on the last patrol, one wrecked juvenile Bar-tailed Godwit was found, having died so near to completing its epic journey!

Space does not permit an account of all of the meetings. We have had good reports of population growth of the Stitchbird on Maungatautari and a less promising picture regarding the situation of most of our shorebirds. Keith Woodley was the speaker, the occasion being the recent release of his latest book, *Shorebirds of New Zealand: Sharing the Margins*. We enjoyed a visiting speaker from Columbia, Carlos E. Lara Vasquez. We were honoured with his first presentation concerning his discovery of a new species of wren in his homeland. We later heard that it had been confirmed as a new species. Later still it also became known that its habitat was due to be converted into some hydropower facility! Bird Rescue, bird behaviour, Raoul Island and, of course, the *Rena* grounding and its aftermath have provided great topics for our evening meetings.

Sirocco, the Kakapo Ambassador, was the big hit in August. Chris Smuts Kennedy had talked to us on Kakapo conservation the month before so we were well prepared. Particularly intriguing was Sirocco's input as a designer of escape proof modifications for the Maungatautari fence line. Sirocco is a very crafty creature. Installation of this is a prerequisite before introducing Kakapo can be considered.

Two of our members presented papers at the OSNZ Conference and both were well received. We are about to undertake the second Hamilton Morepork Survey and this was the topic presented by Dai Morgan. Graham Saunders received accolades, both for his dress standard and the quality of his presentation, 'Superhydrophobicity of Feathers'.

September was a notable month. Two of our members, Laurie and Jan Hoverd, are well known for their rehabilitation and return to the wild of New Zealand Falcons. This was recognised by their being given The Wingspan Raptor Award 2012. They are a very effective couple.

This report ends on a sad note. Dr Ralph Skinner recently passed away. He was a very active past member and will be well remembered by his contemporaries. We extend our sympathies to Mary Skinner at this time of her great loss.

RAY BUCKMASTER

Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau

After the fallout of the 2012 OSNZ AGM and Field Trips, the BoP/Volcanic Plateau Region has resurfaced some distance downstream, and has been slowly returning to some semblance of normalcy. As regularly as the tide goes in and out, Tim Barnard is picking up vagrants at Little Waihi and Maketu, as per usual behaviour. The latest is a Pectoral Sandpiper at Maketu in October. This adds to the Sanderling he saw a month earlier, after a tip-off from Gordon Blackmore. He also notes the Pacific Golden Plovers have returned to the Little Waihi area.

In July, Tim also saw a New Zealand Falcon over Okere Falls, and about five or six New Zealand Robins seem to be resident on the walk from the Okere Falls car park off Trout Pool Road. At the local Okere Falls general store, a Kaka was present in September. He also spotted a giant petrel off the beach at

Thornton Beach. Rotorua area member Kerry Oates spotted a Cattle Egret in pasture/stream margin just south of Matata in July. On the edge of Rotorua, Duncan Watson heard robins whilst biking in the Whakarewarewa Forest in September, getting the multi-tasking award, although Tim is attempting a beer garden list at Okere...

Tim was told of a partial albino fantail sighted in Hamurana near the Springs Reserve on 7th July. Local Tauranga City arbourist Richard Conning observed a pair of Blue Ducks on the Whakatane River upstream of the Tawhiwhi Hut on the 2nd October. An unusual lone Bar-tailed Godwit was seen by John Groom at Otamaraekau, Matata Straight, in September. In Cheddar Valley, near Whakatane, residents have recently been planting roadside trees in an attempt to prevent Australasian Bitterns from becoming road kill by getting the birds to fly over the vegetation; the area is prime Bittern habitat. Igor Debski posted to Birding-NZ that two Glossy Ibises were seen at Whangapikopiko Reserve, Ohiwa, in October.

Stuart Murray, a local polytechnic student, is studying the relationship between Banded Rails and mangrove corridors. My own observations from five years contracted by a harbourcare group in the Waikaraka Estuary near Te Puna are that the birds harbour in the mangroves. Other polytechnic students are helping with the OSNZ Grey-faced Petrel project, and are currently busily crunching data after helping the ten nights required for the data to flow. The project will change next year to one of advocacy, and less data-gathering. We are about to band chicks in the artificial study burrows, and run an open day guided tour for new Forest and Bird members. There will be a Kiwi Conservation Club day time trip to observe the fluffy chicks in November.

Several members have been over the Kaimais to see Sirocco the Kakapo in all his glory. Memorable times for such a rare bird to be so easily seen. A recent Sunday out at Otanewainuku Mountain with Ian McLean learning bird song was most appreciated, and Ian's knowledge of local ornithology was received with much appreciation. Robins, Tomtits and Whiteheads were heard or seen.

Our harbour censuses are in early November, whilst our recent evening meeting provided a much-needed boost to shorebird awareness in the Bay of Plenty, with author and Miranda Shorebird Centre Manager Keith Woodley speaking. Keith has done a great service for shorebird conservation – he has published a highly-readable book for readers of generations to come. The evening was well-attended and Keith signed copies of his new book at the conclusion.

PAUL CUMING

Taranaki

Barry Hartley, man of mystery, finally appeared at our September meeting to reveal his whereabouts for the preceding two months. He had crossed the ditch and spent his time birding on Australia's Gold Coast. He found bird identification confusing due to the large number of species, but did manage to put names to 65 of them, and to photograph a few.

The rest of us had done our birding around Taranaki. As per every winter Tui where back in town, with members reporting them in their home gardens, and David Medway counted 30 at Lake Mangamahoe amongst flowering Kowhai. New Zealand Pigeons were also around. Ian Dudding had one in his Magnolia eating flower buds, as they were also doing in Pukekura Park. At the Messenger's home House Sparrows had attacked a Japonica, stripping most of the petals from the flowers, much to Rosemary's dismay.

Little Penguin footprints have been seen on a couple of sandy beaches around central New Plymouth and eight Royal Spoonbills had been on the Mokau River; a good number for Taranaki. The field trip to Lake Mangamahoe turned up seventeen species including two New Zealand Dabchicks.

September's outing/ramble around Pukekura Park and Brooklands, ably led by David Medway, turned up many Tui, and the Little Shag colony was underway with birds on the nest. It also turned into a botanical tour, with David taking those who turned up to the park's more notable trees. Beach patrols have turned up little of note for some months, only a Buller's Shearwater picked up at Waiongana being the first record of that species for me. On a different note four Humpback Whales were sighted off the Sugarloaf Island marine reserve and Ron Lambert saw five Orcas very close to shore, with two further out off the central New Plymouth coast.

David and Carole Medway just missed out on the first Shining Cuckoo record when Marie Mitchell and Helen Elder heard one around their home one hour and 45 minutes earlier. Both Ian Dudding and Bill Messenger had been in Egmont National Park at different times and found birds very sparse. Kay

Rodbard had returned from a rather indifferent English summer in time to see two pairs of Blackbirds around her home feeding young, and also managed to see five Bar-tailed Godwits at the Waiwhakaiho River Mouth. A flock of eleven Bar-tailed Godwits were at Waiongana and two Pacific Golden Plovers had a brief stopover. Other than that migratory waders along the coast have been notable by their absence.

A fine October Sunday had us roaming around Pukeiti Gardens looking for things avian and botanical; 16 bird species were recorded, but no Shining Cuckoo, and much botany was done along the way.

Nathan Hills was our guest speaker in November. He brought along his night vision camera and some photos and video he had taken. Nathan has been involved in a variety of conservation projects around Taranaki mainly involving Little Penguins, which he has found hard to photograph due to their aversion to night lights. He had also set it up in Pukekura Park to see what was roaming around during the wee small hours, with the predictable result of cats and hedgehogs, but the video clips of mice in his ceiling deftly removing cheese from traps caused much hilarity.

Shining Cuckoos are being heard around the province now and a pair of Paradise Shelducks with two ducklings on Pukekura Park lake are a first record for David Medway. Bill Messenger heard a Pheasant calling around their home, the first in many years and Carol Keight has a pair of Pukeko with three chicks around her garden. Barry Hartley received a report of a Chukor in a garden in eastern Taranaki.

Lake Rotokare, with its predator proof fence, must be the Fernbird capital of Taranaki, if not New Zealand. A wander around the lake was taken on a fine but cool November Sunday, and we gave up counting Fernbird calls and sightings as they became numerous, even if the birds were camera shy. Grey Warblers were also plentiful, New Zealand Scaup were on the lake and Shining Cuckoos were calling. Black Shags were nesting in the trees, with one nest having three well grown juvenile birds, and Spotless Crakes were purring in the Raupo; a great day.

To end on a sombre note we were saddened by the untimely passing of one of our members, Margaret Molloy.

PETER FRYER

Hawke's Bay

In August Jim Hamilton reported on his visit to the AGM, and updated us on the issues which were discussed by Council and the Regional Representatives. He then announced that he was stepping down as our RR as Bernie Kelly had indicated he was willing to take on this role. Jim was thanked for his work and we welcomed Bernie.

Following the business part of the meeting we had speakers from the Bittern Group reporting back on the previous year's activities and findings. A number of local members assisted with surveying habitat during the last breeding season. Emma Williams, a Massey University student outlined her research which she has carried out in Waikato and in Hawke's Bay. This involves using recording devices, alongside field work, to determine the presence or absence of Australasia Bitterns in a wetland. Emma's talk generated a lot of interest with a good attendance. John Cheyne, the leader of the Bittern group, and Helen Jonas from DOC Wairoa, presented a summary of findings from the surveys done last spring. Encouragingly more Bitterns were found than had been anticipated, and the focus now is to ensure their habitat is maintained/enhanced. Finally Han Rook from DOC in Napier talked about the project he has been working on doing some restoration work in the upper reaches of Ahuriri Estuary. This work has already delivered very encouraging results, including a booming Bittern.

A small group enjoyed a morning trip to Ball's Clearing at Puketitiri for our September field trip. Whiteheads were heard throughout the bush. The cold day may have been the reason there wasn't much birdsong. In October John Cheyne led a crake survey at the Pekapeka Wetland. Eight members took part, with one group managing a sighting of a Spotless Crake. The cold and showery weather wasn't ideal, and we may repeat the exercise in more favourable conditions sometime. The Pekapeka Wetland is undergoing restoration work by the Regional Council and this survey was intended as a comparison with one done a number of years ago.

MARGARET TWYDLE



Manawatu

At the time of writing this we have just completed our November wader counts with no major surprises at either the Ohau or Manawatu Estuaries, but the continued presence of both the Little Egret at the Ohau and the Gull-billed Terns at Foxton adds interest to the usual species reported at this time. Three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers had been recorded recently at the Manawatu Estuary, though only one was making itself known on the wader count as winds whipped through and the birds hunkered down on the spit, making counts difficult. The Pacific Golden Plovers, that have been present since the arrival of the other migrants, were also absent. Interestingly the Gull-billed Terns were observed displaying by Sav Saville recently; possible courtship behaviour. Could this be the beginnings of new breeding species for New Zealand? We can only watch and hope. The Manawatu Estuary is not a renowned breeding ground, but we are all open to some surprises of course!

Members of OSNZ have been regularly recording the arrival of godwits from their breeding grounds and as well as an Australian orange flagged godwit AHD. There was the return of the well-travelled 4YYRB which was seen on 2nd October by Adrian Riegen in the Manly, Morton Bay area, Australia only to be recorded back at Foxton later in the month by Jimmy Choi. This adds to the sightings of this individual in Yalu Jiang in 2010 and 2012, demonstrating the value of reported colour band records.

Moving beyond the Manawatu the local branch of OSNZ enjoyed an October trip to the Central Plateau in October to see two target species – Fernbird and Blue Duck. We had great success at Frethy Drive finding a number of Fernbird in a short space of time, some sitting out in the open giving the group fantastic views. Unfortunately, despite a number of stops along the river on the way to and the way home from Ruatiti Domain, the Blue Duck remained elusive. That said, we were rewarded with great views of a New Zealand Falcon at Ruatiti Domain and the obvious presence of Shining Cuckoo in the area added to the wonderful feeling of a great spring day. The only other recent observation of note for the region was the presence of a group of 10 Cattle Egrets just south of Palmerston North, by Longburn, many showing fantastic breeding plumage. As we head towards the end of the year the Manawatu region is in good health, with a number of new members coming to evening meetings and joining on the trips. Thanks to our speakers over the later part of this year: Ian Armitage, Sarah Jamieson and Phil Battley; all helping to keep things humming along for the branch.

CRAIG STEED



One of the Fernbirds seen at Frethy Drive, Lake Taupo.
Photo by Craig Steed

Wellington

Translocation of birds to protected environments is an essential tool for the conservation of endangered species. A number of Wellington OSNZ members have recently been involved in translocation projects, including the transfer of New Zealand Robins from Kapiti Island to Wainuiomata and Yellow-crowned Parakeets from Mana Island to Boundary Stream.

In September Colin Miskelly from Te Papa presented a summary of the translocations of burrow-nesting petrels in New Zealand. Some of the techniques for seabird transfers have been developed on Mana Island with the transfer of the common species - Fairy Prions, Common Diving Petrels and Fluttering Shearwaters. OSNZ members have also provided valuable assistance in these transfers. An important aspect of these transfers is the ongoing surveillance to evaluate their success. Lessons learnt from the transfer of common seabirds are now being applied to endangered species. A notable example is the recent transfers of Taiko chicks on the Chatham Islands to a predator-proof enclosure.

In October, Lara Shepherd who has recently joined the staff at Te Papa, gave a talk on her studies on the investigation of ancient DNA from kiwi. These studies have provided important insights into the taxonomy of kiwi and the distribution of the different species prior to the marked decline in kiwi numbers associated with human settlement.

The exhibition at Te Papa on Buller's Birds, the art of Keulmanns and Buchanan continues until February 2013. This exhibition is a good opportunity to see what arguably are the most famous illustrations of New Zealand birds.

GEOFF DE LISLE

Nelson

Pauline Samways reports that Motueka once again celebrated the return of the Bar-tailed Godwit's to their estuary on a sunny Sunday 23rd September. They had arrived five days earlier. Members of OSNZ Nelson set up seven telescopes on the old wharf overlooking the tidal flats where the birds were feeding. They stayed for most of the three hours before high tide pushed them onto the roost on the sandspit. The public turned up in their hundreds to see these famous birds and read about their life story on the information boards. They were also treated to Royal Spoonbills feeding in the channels along with the usual Pied and Variable Oystercatchers, Pied Stilts and gulls. Word spread that four Cattle Egrets were in a nearby paddock close to the waterfront, something new for many.

Later in the week Rob Schuckard gave a presentation on the results of the long term monitoring of Bar-tailed Godwits in the top of the South Island. He had lots of new information and the interested crowd had plenty of questions on the behaviour of these birds. This year's event was co-ordinated by the Motueka Arts Council. Dozens of artists set up stalls along the waterfront and children had a go at making and drawing birds from stands set up by DOC, Forest & Bird and the Little Picasso Art group. Families got together and created driftwood sculptures, some of which are still standing!

Peter Gaze co-ordinated a survey of Moreporks in the urban areas of Nelson and Richmond with the help from members of the public in the last two weeks of October.

Preliminary results from the forty plus observers indicated a few birds were heard, but for most their vigil was negative. Further analysis is required to define the status of the species in the area.

In the Waimea Estuary the sighting of a Grey-tailed Tattler aroused some interest, and in a subsequent visit to the site two were seen and photographed with a third bird in among Bar-tailed Godwits. The Caspian Tern colony suffered from a high tide washout of the earliest eggs which saw them desert the site for new ground. Although some distance away it is likely to suffer tidal damage later in the month when the highest tides occur.

Good news has been received from Golden Bay; that the pair of Dabchicks on Lake Killarney in Takaka have bred again, and at present have a single chick riding high and dry with a parent. In mid-October Murray Gavin reported seeing 12 Cattle Egrets at Ferntown.

Peter Field recorded a number of flagged birds on a recent visit to Nelson Haven and the Bar-tailed Godwit roost site, some from the 2005 and 2006 seasons. Out on the open sea were over 300 Fluttering Shearwaters, three Antipodean Albatrosses, three White-Capped Albatrosses, a juvenile Northern Giant Petrel, two Arctic Skuas, plus Australasian Gannets, White-fronted Terns and gull species, making it a memorable day. On the oxidation ponds five very young Black Swan cygnets were seen; the first breeding record by Peter on the Haven.

DON COOPER

Canterbury

Members attending the August meeting saw Scott Mouat's beautiful film *The Unnatural History of the Kakapo* which documents the difficulties and triumphs of the Kakapo Recovery Team's efforts to secure the population. The film includes great historical footage of the discovery and early efforts with Kakapo recovery by Don Merton and his team. Scott won four awards for this film in the Documentary Edge Festival in 2010 and we all found it a visual delight as well as an important and informative record. The DVD is available for \$25 from www.elwin.co.nz

In September Colin Miskelly spoke about his work in progress, a book he hopes to write "In the Footsteps of Edgar Stead." He described Stead as a high achiever, hunter, shooter, fisherman, horticulturalist and a man with a "nose for finding birds". Colin's work stems from Stead's photographs and the serendipitous finding of Stead's diaries which had been given to Canterbury Museum after the death of David McMillan, who had been going to write Stead's biography. These diaries record Stead's expeditions to remote islands from 1929 which Colin has been revisiting.

October's meeting started with a barbecue, ably organised by Bev Alexander, and was followed by a members' evening with talks on the birds of North Peru, Norfolk Island, North Queensland, the Scottish Islands and coasts, tagging Salvin's Albatross and Fulmar Prions on the Bounties and some portraits of Kaka and Kea.

Sightings of note over the past few months have included a Spotless Crake found in August in the road at Diamond Harbour which was taken into care with a broken leg and subsequently released at The Groyne Recreation Reserve on September 10th. This was a significant sighting of a bird seldom encountered locally. The southward expansion of Pied Cormorants was documented with the discovery of a small colony nesting at Normanby Lagoon south of Timaru. The August Royal Spoonbill Count was made difficult by stormy weather, and the birds were scarce, but they were back at Lake Ellesmere in the area where they bred last year by mid-September. An Australasian Crested Grebe which overshot Lake Ellesmere was spotted in Akaroa Harbour on 24th August.

The first returning banded Bar-tailed Godwit was seen on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary on 18th September, the number reaching 458 by the 23rd. The birds' return is a bit later than in the previous two years, possibly because of unfavourable weather. 24 Cattle Egrets, most in breeding plumage were still at Lake Road, Lake Ellesmere on 28th October, while Gull-billed Terns continue to be seen in two's and three's around the Lake. Maybe both these species will stay to breed.

The first reported Shining Cuckoo in Canterbury was on 1st October when a bird was seen feeding on the ground at Kaitorete Spit, possibly exhausted on migration after a storm on the previous night. Since then they have been reported from The Groyne, Travis Wetland, the Botanic Gardens, Halswell Quarry, Hart's Creek and the Waimakariri Riverbed.

A Shore Plover was found inland on the Ashley River in late September. It was hatched at Peacock Springs on January 4th 2012, banded, and then released on Mana Island on April 4th. A Greenshank was found on Kaitorete Spit on 5th October and was still there on 28th. A Sanderling was at the Spit on 23rd Oct and had moved to Jarvis Road by 28th. Caspian Terns look like nesting down Kaitorete Spit again.

ANN SHERLOCK

Otago

Recent Indoor Meetings have given us the latest information and inside stories on the New Zealand Storm Petrel, Kakapo hatching success, radio tracking of Robin, status of birds on Ulva Island, and research on Rock Wren.

During the year, Graeme Loh has organised regular pelagic trips on a chartered catamaran, which ventures forth from Otago to 5-6 km off the coast to the ocean mixing zone. Those intrepid enough have been rewarded with close-up views of Southern and Northern Royal, Buller's and White-capped Albatrosses, Hutton's, Fluttering and Sooty Shearwaters, prions, Cape and Giant Petrels, as well as feeding flocks of Spotted and Stewart Island Shags and Black-fronted Terns.

Around Otago, Australasian Gannets have been seen regularly in the harbour, but in small numbers. Australasian Crested Grebes were present during the winter again, and also turned up in The Catlins for the first time. New Zealand Falcons seem to be frequenting the Orokonui EcoSanctuary. Rarities seen recently in Otago have included White Heron, Reef Heron, Grey-tailed Tattler and Pied Shag.

The summer birding season is getting underway with some exciting new projects as well as the long-standing ones: the summer wader count, video-monitoring of New Zealand Falcon nests, using acoustic recorders to 'listen' for Bittern booms at Lake Tuakitoto near Balclutha, and a pilot Morepork survey of Dunedin city and environs.

MARY THOMPSON

Southland

Plans are under way for a Southland Birding Week to be held in mid-March 2013. We had one a number of years ago that was quite successful but we would like to make this much bigger and better. Lloyd Esler is the driving force behind it with help from several keen OSNZ members.

Several members visited Stewart Island at Labour weekend and spent a few hours on Ulva Island. We saw most species but Weka were notable by their absence especially from Boulder Beach and West End Beach. Whether this was due to the poison drop or just that we picked the wrong day and time I do not know. The highlight of the visit was five or six Yellowheads feeding above our heads, coming down to eye level, accompanied by Fantails and a Yellow-crowned Parakeet, which flew down a few feet from us and landed on the track where it posed for photographs.

There have been a number of interesting recent sightings in the region. White Herons have been seen at the Tip Lagoon (New River Estuary) and near Mossburn. Twelve New Zealand Scaup on the Tip Lagoon is one of the highest counts there so far. An Eastern Curlew was spotted at the Mokomoko Inlet by Lloyd Esler, and he also spotted five Cattle Egrets in a wet paddock near Otatara. Another three Cattle Egrets were reported from near Wallacetown. Both of these sightings were in late October. We also received a report of an Intermediate Egret from a stream near Waituna Lagoon. This sighting could not be verified.

OSNZ and Field Club members have been on a number of excursions in the past few months, including visits to the Rakatu Wetlands, Ocean Beach Track, Papatowai Tracks as well as a visit to Monkey Island and environs.

PHIL RHODES

