



Southern *Bird*

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The Magazine of the Ornithological
Society of New Zealand



Australian Odyssey
New Zealand Storm Petrel
Breeding Site Discovered
Extreme Birding

JOINING THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

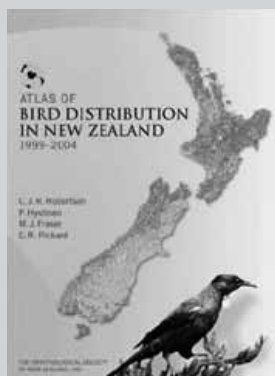
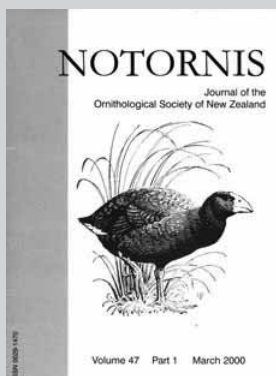
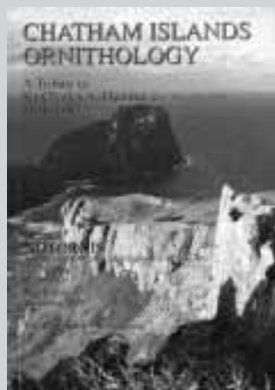
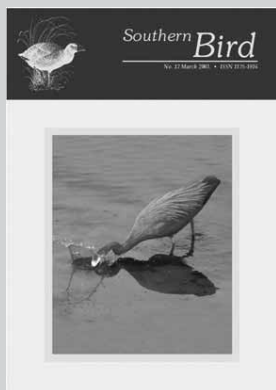
If you are reading this but are not a member of the Ornithological Society you would be very welcome to join us. Our membership consists of the whole spectrum of people interested in New Zealand/South Pacific birds from beginners with just an interest through keen birdwatchers and amateur ornithologists to professional ornithologists, so you should find others of a similar level to you, or find resources that are of interest to you.

For our very reasonable subscription fee of \$70 (students pay just \$35.00 and overseas/corporate rates etc are also available) you will receive a quarterly issue of this magazine *Southern Bird*, which is the Society's main mouthpiece to members, has articles of bird/ornithological interest and both national and local news; a quarterly issue of *Notornis*, the Society's scientific journal; an annual issue of *The State of New Zealand's Birds*, reporting on the status of a group of species or those species using a particular habitat type; and from time to time either free or discounted major Society publications – for example a copy of the latest *Atlas of Bird Distribution* is currently provided free to new members while stocks last. This atlas gives a thorough overview of the distribution of every bird on mainland New Zealand and some offshore islands in its 533 pages.

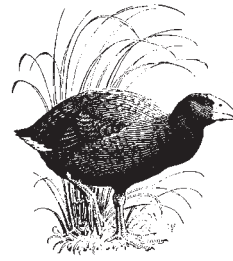
In addition to reading material and, with time, a useful collection of reference books, members have access to meetings, both indoor and in the field, on a national and regional basis providing opportunities to gain knowledge on birds/ornithology and learning practical skills whilst networking with knowledgeable people. Our extensive library of books and journals is open for members to borrow and view items. Members are also encouraged to provide data to the Society's schemes, and supply sightings to the annual New Zealand Bird Report and the eBird online reporting tool. These data provide information on which research may be conducted, often with conclusions relevant to decision-making processes on the conservation of birds.

For further details and/or a membership form you should take one of three actions:

- Visit the Society's website www.osnz.org.nz
- Contact the Society's membership secretary.
- Contact your nearest regional representative.



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QUOTATION

Nature's decorations glisten
Far above their usual trim;
Birds on box and laurels listen,
As so near the cherubs hymn.
Boreas now no longer winters
On the desolated coast;
Oaks no more are riv'n in splinters
By the whirlwind and his host.
Spinks and ouzels sing sublimely,
"We too have a Saviour born";
Whiter blossoms burst untimely
On the blest Mosaic thorn...
The Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
By Christopher Smart (1722-1771)

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COVER PHOTOS

Front Cover: Banded Dotterel on Boulder Bank, Nelson

Back Cover: Australasian Gannet in flight

Both photos by Rebecca Bowater FPSNZ

Publisher

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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 February, May and August, and 1st November. The views expressed by the contributors to this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

COUNCIL MEETINGS

As advised in my previous report Council met early in December in Nelson to not only deal with normal Society business but spend a day on the strategic review of the Society. While considerable progress was made at that meeting it was decided to programme a further day session in February and that has now been held.

During the Council meeting there were several issues of interest to members that I will briefly summarise.

DATABASE

There appear to still be some teething problems with the membership database. Council has contracted a web designer in Dunedin to undertake checks and to ensure that this operates correctly, and that Regional Representatives have access to the relevant data. We regret that these errors have crept into the database and I ask members who have access to computers to check their membership details, and advise the membership secretary if there are errors so that these can be corrected.

EO CONTRACT

Council also confirmed the extension of Ingrid Hutzler's contract for a further 12-month period. Council wishes to express its gratitude to Ingrid for the work that she completes during the 10 hours per week that she has available for Society work. We believe that this is adding value for members and Regional Representatives.

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

The financial accounts have now been adopted for the 2012 year and we thank the treasurer for his prompt work in completing those actions. These are currently with the auditor and will be presented at the annual meeting in June.

Council is grateful for the ongoing financial support of T-Gear Charitable Trust and we look forward to the potential expansion of the working relationship in the near future.

FIELD GUIDE

Council has been updated on the work of Hugh Robertson relating to the revision of the field guide and it is hoped that this can be reprinted in 2014. Council is currently investigating options to raise funding for the new colour plates that will be necessary for new species and any updating of previous versions.

PUBLICATIONS

Council is grateful to editor Jim Briskie in now having the Society's journal, *Notornis*, up to date with its publishing schedule. Jim believes that he now has sufficient material arriving to enable four issues to be produced on the agreed printing schedule through 2013.

This has been a major task completed by Jim and Council wishes to convey its deep appreciation of his efforts on behalf of the membership as a whole.

It is still necessary, however, for new articles to be submitted to ensure that the publishing schedule can be maintained into the future.

In the meantime Nick Allen has continued to produce *Southern Bird* close to the production schedule. Council has also received appreciative comments of the altered content in this journal

and in particular the effort Nick has undertaken to produce the notable sighting section and his guidance notes on identification.

However, Council encourages Regional Representatives to submit reports on regional projects to Nick for inclusion because of their value in providing guidance to members in other regions.

STRATEGIC REVIEW

Peter Frost has led Council through two days of strategic planning exercises as a follow up from the Annual General Meeting in Tauranga last year.

During the joint meeting between Council and Regional Representatives a SWOT analysis was begun, and that identified some key areas on which Council have further expanded.

This exercise did not start well for me, as one of the key weaknesses identified was the organisation potentially having a "slack president". I did inform the meeting that there was a simple solution to that weakness but there were no immediate volunteers to take up the reins.

However, on a more serious note as we worked through the SWOT analysis and the feedback obtained from the 2012 Annual General Meeting it was identified that the Society should look at operating under a simple brand name. It was therefore agreed that the Council would promote a notice of motion to the 2013 Annual Meeting requesting that the Society adopt the brand name of Birds New Zealand.

It should be noted that this would not require a change to the constitution, nor the charitable status of the Society, as the official name would still be retained as the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. It is believed that having the simpler brand name will enable much greater recognition by the public of the role that the Society plays in the community, and will also allow easier computer searching, which is relevant now that the Society has the upgraded website and all of the information that it contains.

It is believed that this is an ideal opportunity to initiate the new brand in association with the launch of the New Zealand Birds Online website that is partially sponsored by the Society. It is hoped that having these two major events in close proximity will enable ongoing publicity and hence raise the Society's profile.

Council also decided to promote to the annual meeting that *Southern Bird* change its banner name to *Birds New Zealand* to support the brand name being promoted. This will allow much greater recognition in associating the publication with the organisation.

The society's scientific journal, *Notornis* would still retain its name and the publication would remain under the Ornithological Society of New Zealand banner.

NATIONAL PROJECTS

Another key outcome of the strategic session was recognition that the organisation needs a better system of national projects that can provide focus for activities by individual members and regions. While the Society has commenced a number of national projects since the completion of the Atlas, these have not gained universal support, which has led to a low input by the membership as a whole.

Council decided that criteria for future projects will be:

- To engage the full range of members
- To promote ornithology amongst members and in the community
- To produce scientifically sound results

To achieve these outcomes, however, it was agreed that each project needs a champion with the full support of Council, including financial support if necessary. It would be necessary, however, for the champion to keep the membership informed of progress and to ensure that the outcomes are fully published in the appropriate publication.

Council suggests that Regional Representatives and members consider suitable projects and develop proposals that can be discussed at the Regional Representatives meeting at the AGM for formal adoption.

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Following my request in the last President's Report we had not one but two positive responses from members to take over the role of book review editor. I had accepted the first offer before I received the second.

The new book review editor is therefore Trish Wells from Oratia near Auckland, with her contact details being on the website.

The second offer was from Sandy Bartle, but I have arranged that he will provide support and backup for Trish.

I am heartened that members are prepared to put their names forward for this type of task, which gives me confidence for the future of the organisation.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WEEKEND

The Otago Region has the planning well under control for the Annual General Meeting and associated events over Queen's Birthday weekend.

I urge members to register early as this gives the organisers a better indication of the likely turn out and they can make appropriate arrangements at an earlier time than following a last minute rush. There is also a financial incentive to register early.

I look forward to seeing you all there and anticipate what is clearly going to be a lively debate over the brand name and the future direction of the Society.

DAVID LAWRIE, President

NOMINATIONS TO COUNCIL

Three Council vacancies were advertised as the terms of Colin Miskelly, Murray Williams and Peter Frost expire. Colin has been nominated for another term on Council, with Murray and Peter standing aside in the hope that nominees more representative of the current membership can be found. Sarah Jamieson has also been nominated. No election is necessary as both Colin and Sarah will be appointed to Council in June. This does now leave two vacant positions on Council, one being the position into which Sarah had previously been co-opted.



NOMINATIONS FOR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES 2014

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 834, Nelson 7040) on 31st July 2013.

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 for the 2014 year.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Subscriptions were due on 1st January. Those members with email should have received a membership renewal form via that medium. Those members who do not have email (or those where the Membership Secretary has not been informed of an email address) should have received a renewal form as an insert with the September issue of *Southern Bird*. 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.

If you have misplaced your renewal form, a blank version is now available online at www.osnz.org.nz/join.htm, or otherwise please contact the Membership Secretary at PO Box 35150, Naenae, Lower Hutt 5041.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Belinda Buchanan (Otago); David Bergum (United States); Hugh Barlow (Auckland); Rowena East (Otago); Bethany Gibbs (Auckland); Paul Helliwell (Auckland); Toni de Lautour (Wairarapa); Anne McCracken (Northland); Laura McIvor (Hawke's Bay); John Montgomery (Auckland); Robert Stone (Northland); Lisa Stone (Northland); Paul Sutton (Northland); Noel Ward (Auckland); Jennifer Waterhouse (Waikato); Lenore and Mark West (Auckland); Richard Wells (Nelson).

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

Neil Andrews; Sue Bell; Mike Bell; Jack Davidson; Geoffrey De Lisle; Enviro Research Ltd; Paul Fisher; Otto Gruebl; Jillian Hanna; Neil Hayes; Tony Henry; Jane Higham; Paddy Latham; Marion Macbeth; Alan Miller; Gwyneth Norman; Philip Palmer; Marianne Power; David Pye; C. John Ralph; Lorna Russell; Joy Sagar; Rob Schuckard; Heather Smithers; Graeme Taylor; Malcolm Waller.

2013 NEW ZEALAND BIRD CONFERENCE AND OSNZ AGM

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 New Zealand 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 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

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE 2013 ANNUAL MEETING

Notice has been received of the intention to present two motions to the annual general meeting:

Proposed by Colin Miskelly, seconded by Peter Frost.

That the society adopt the brand name of Birds New Zealand

Proposed by Colin Miskelly, seconded by Peter Gaze

That the society change the name of its publication *Southern Bird* to *Birds New Zealand*.

Both motions arose from the December meeting of Council, which spent considerable time reviewing the society's strategic plan and ways in which the society could brand itself in a way to provide improved public perception and relevancy. This was in direct response to suggestions from the membership at our last annual meeting. These motions, which were agreed to unanimously by Council, are the first step in addressing the strategic needs of the society and presenting a more acceptable image to the public. Further initiatives are proposed and membership will be advised of these as they develop.



WETLAND BIRD RECORDS SOUGHT FROM THE PUBLIC

Arawai Kākāriki (Green Waterway) is a national wetland restoration programme co-ordinated by the Department of Conservation. The programme aims to understand and restore three of New Zealand's most significant wetland/freshwater sites. The three nationally important wetland sites are Whangamarino Wetland in Waikato, Ō Tū Wharekai (Ashburton Lakes and the upper Rangitata River) in Canterbury and Awarua Wetland/Waituna



Upper Rangitata River by Nick Allen

Lagoon in Southland. Priority work aims to investigate how the wetlands work, what the major threats are and what species they contain. The Department requires records of Australasian Bittern, Banded Rail, Fernbird, Marsh Crake and Spotless Crake from throughout New Zealand. Records should include: species, location, NZMG/NZTM co-ordinates, date, observer, sex (if known), and habitat information (hydro system type, plant species). Please email records to Sabrina Luecht on sluecht@doc.govt.nz. Alternatively please post records to Sabrina Luecht, Science and Technical, Department of Conservation, PO Box 4715, Christchurch Mail Centre, Christchurch 8140. Thank you in advance for your contribution.

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS IN CANTERBURY

This is a very comprehensive guidebook by Nick Allen, Editor of Southern Bird.

Nick has put together 172 pages of text and maps, which will guide you to all the active and important sites from Kaikoura to the North, Arthurs Pass to the west and Timaru and the Mackenzie District to the South.

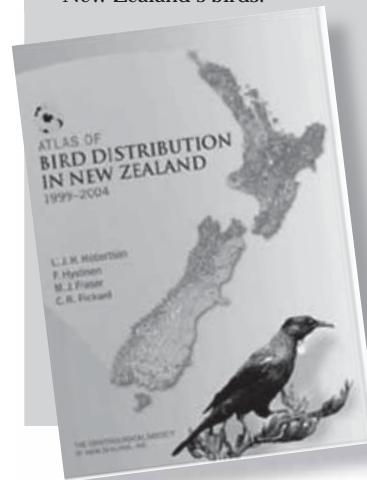
Don't waste your time and head directly to all the good sites.

Published in 2012. Available now from OSNZ Canterbury, c/- 11 Seagrave Place, Ilam, Christchurch 8041, or email osnzcanterbury@yahoo.co.nz.

Price \$29.99

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.

MEETING FOR NEW ZEALAND SEABIRD RESEARCHERS AND MANAGERS

Sunday 5th to Monday 6th May 2013

Te Papa curatorial site, 169 Tory Street (corner Tory and Buckle Streets), Wellington

The need for regular meetings of those people conducting research on seabirds in New Zealand and those responsible for management and policy development became apparent during the August 2012 workshop on New Zealand albatrosses and petrels. The May 2013 meeting will be conducted over two days. On 5th May we invite all those conducting research or undertaking management on seabirds to present a short talk summarising the main objectives, scope and key findings of their current or recently completed research/management.

The objective for the day is to provide the New Zealand seabird workers with a detailed overview of current research, monitoring and management of seabirds and to facilitate collaboration and data sharing between workers. Student participation is especially encouraged. Detailed presentation of research results is more appropriate at other conferences, such as OSNZ's New Zealand Bird Conference or the Australasian Ornithological Conference.

The second day will address priorities for work on seabirds and discuss policy issues.

There will be no registration fee; some funds may be available to assist students/unwaged participants with travel and accommodation.

For further information please contact Kerry-Jayne Wilson, kerryjayne1@hotmail.com, or Dr Susan Waugh, susan.waugh@tepapa.govt.nz.

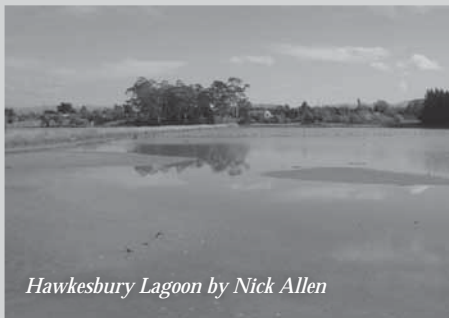
BIRDING IN THE **DUNEDIN** AREA

The New Zealand Bird Conference and OSNZ AGM is being held in Dunedin this Queen's Birthday weekend. Dunedin is proclaimed by many to be the wildlife capital of New Zealand, with the well-known attractions of the world's only mainland albatross colony, colonies of Yellow-eyed Penguins and populations of both New Zealand Fur Seal and New Zealand (Hooker's) Sea Lion on the city's doorstep. With such emphasis on this 'big four' the area's considerably diverse bird life is often missed. I suggest in the following paragraphs places to visit and birds to see that are off the main tourist itineraries, but that given a small amount of time (for example before or after the schedules of business of the bird conference) attendees over Queen's Birthday may partake of a wee dram of the city's more hidden natural heritage.

Those participants driving into Dunedin along SH1 from the north pass by a number of tidal wetlands along the way. Hidden from the road the Hawksbury Lagoon often holds large numbers of waterfowl and stilts, with over 100 Australasian Shovelers often being present, and even more Grey Teal. Easy access is provided by embankments through the lagoon, with these embankments holding back the waters of most of the area and generally preventing tidal influx. Access is easiest down Beach Street at the southern end of Waikouaiti, turning left after the railway into Scotia Street and walking from its end.

threads through the saltmarsh to an observation platform, and Harwood. On the water closer to Dunedin Australasian Crested Grebes have recently taken to wintering in sheltered spots, such as Broad Bay and Company Bay. At the tip of the northern shore of the harbour Aramoana Mole is a great place to view the gulls and terns which roost there and feed in the harbour mouth. Reasonable numbers of Black-fronted Terns are joined by a few Caspian Terns and plenty of White-fronteds. Across the mouth Royal Albatrosses can be seen very distantly on Tairaroa Head, and if it is windy enough flying to or from the colony. A few Stewart Island Shags may be on the colony below the Albatross Colony viewing observatory, or fishing or flying offshore.

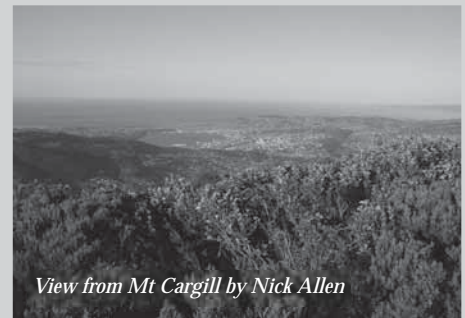
On the southern side of Otago Peninsula there are a couple of shallow lagoons; Hooper's and Papanui Inlets. These relatively sheltered estuaries hold the usual range of wildfowl and waders found elsewhere along this section of coast, with the main attraction being roads which closely skirt their margins allowing for good viewing. Roads cross the peninsula to them from Portobello and Lower Portobello. Almost at the end of the peninsula is Pilot's Beach, a small bay just before the Albatross Centre is reached. Here Fur Seals and sometimes Sealions can be seen, but the main attraction is a sizeable colony of Blue Penguins, which can be viewed on a tour, coming ashore after dark. Book via the Albatross Centre.



Hawksbury Lagoon by Nick Allen



Ross Creek Reservoir by Nick Allen



View from Mt Cargill by Nick Allen

Further south the Waikouaiti River reaches the sea at Karitane, with its tidal reaches and saltmarshes extending back from this seaside town to SH1. In winter the main interest will be in the native waders feeding mostly on exposed mud, waterfowl (especially Grey Teal and Black Swans) on the saltmarsh and a roost of gulls and terns at the mouth itself. Over the Kilmog Hill Blueskin Bay is a larger estuary, which can be viewed (carefully) from SH1 and other roads in places for the native waders, small numbers of overwintering Bar-tailed Godwits, and wildfowl. The main wader high tide roost is on the spit south of Warrington village, requiring a pleasant half-hour stroll to reach it.

Between Blueskin Bay and Dunedin SH1 climbs steeply over another range of hills through rather uninteresting farmland and scrub. By turning off at Waitati, however, onto the back road to Port Chalmers a more interesting birding experience can be had as the road passes the entrance to Orokonui EcoSanctuary. This predator-fenced reserve is being visited by a conference field trip, but for those not participating it is well worth a visit. Most of the area is regenerating bush, with taller trees lower down the valley away from the visitor centre, including New Zealand's tallest tree (unfortunately not native but an almost 70-metre-high Australian mountain ash). Lots of Bellbird song is a feature, as is good numbers of Rifleman and Brown Creeper. Fernbirds can be found near the ponds and Tomtits are also present. Robin, Saddleback, Takahe, Kaka and Haast Tokoeka have been re/introduced. The latter two species are best encountered on a night tour, which should be booked in advance.

The Otago Harbour mostly has a rocky shore beloved of shags that can be seen from the roads that skirt it both north and south. Places with extensive sand and mud flats have a more diverse birdlife with waterfowl (especially Black Swans and Grey Teal) and some waders (mostly oystercatchers in winter) featuring. These are best looked for at Aramoana, where a boardwalk

In the Leith Valley northern suburbs of the city the bush around the Ross Creek reservoir holds a small population of Rifleman and Tomtits right next to human habitation. A few Brown Creepers are also present, plus larger numbers of New Zealand Pigeon, Bellbird and Tui (these latter three are widespread in Dunedin suburbs). A network of tracks wanders through the bush. Unfortunately the reservoir tends to hold little of interest. Not far away to the north-east, on the top of Mount Cargill, the scrub holds a population of Fernbirds in the shadow of a large radio/TV aerial. In fine weather there are good views of Dunedin and part of Otago Harbour. Tomtits can be found in the nearby pine forest.

Just outside the Dunedin CBD the Botanic Gardens are a good place to see New Zealand Pigeon, Tui and Bellbird, plus the introduced Eastern Rosella. The area near the aviaries and visitor centre is the best for birds, entering off Lovelock Avenue. The aviaries hold a cacophony of mostly Australian and New Zealand parrots and doves.

A small remnant population of Robins lives in the back country between Dunedin and Mosgiel in the Whare Flat area, both in native bush and exotic plantations. An easy walk here follows an old water race (Racemans Track). There are also small numbers of Rifleman, but larger numbers of Brown Creeper, Bellbird and other bush birds here. Eastern Rosellas can sometimes be found in the gum trees near the tiny settlement of Whare Flat.

The southern suburb of Waldronville is next to the Kaikorai Lagoon and mouth of the Kaikorai Stream. Wildfowl often gather in large numbers, along with Pied Stilts. Green Island offshore has breeding Royal Spoonbills in the warmer months, but these will be further north in June.

Lastly, inland and not far from Dunedin Airport the Taieri Plains are a good place to search for Little Owls, especially after dark, there being a dense population of the species in the area, especially in the many shelterbelts.

NICK ALLEN

NEW ZEALAND ALBATROSS AND PETREL RESEARCH PRIORITIES WORKSHOP **A SUMMARY REPORT**

New Zealand is the country with the greatest number of breeding and globally threatened species of albatrosses and petrels. Despite this, New Zealand seabirds have received less attention than their terrestrial counterparts for both research and conservation. Currently there is no clear national strategy to guide the prioritisation of available resources for albatrosses, petrels or indeed any other New Zealand seabirds.

A one day workshop to assess and recommend research priorities for New Zealand breeding albatrosses and petrels was held at the National Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa, on 11th August 2012. The aim of this workshop was to help develop strategies for research and conservation of albatrosses and petrels breeding in New Zealand.

A number of taxonomic matters were raised with some participants suggesting there were more species or sub-species of Little Shearwaters, storm petrels and diving petrels than are currently recognised. Of greatest concern was the status of the Kermadec Storm Petrel and the Codfish Island population of South Georgian Diving Petrel. If, as some studies suggest, these comprise distinct species they would then become two of the world's rarest petrels, perhaps even as rare as the Chatham Island Taiko. Deep-water commercial fisheries kill large numbers of White-chinned Petrels each year and research suggests that those breeding in the New Zealand region are a different sub-species to those in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. We know so little about their numbers and population trends that research on New Zealand White-chinned Petrels is a high priority.

All albatrosses and a few petrels are covered by an international convention, the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and it was apparent there is much more research on New Zealand albatrosses than the ACAP working groups are aware of. Better lines of communication between researchers and ACAP were established following the workshop. Of the New Zealand breeding albatrosses, the species about which least is known is Salvin's Albatross. Paul Sagar and his co-workers are currently conducting research on this species. While the distribution and abundance of New Zealand breeding albatrosses is tolerably well known, the survival and breeding success of these species is poorly studied.

So little is known of the distribution, population status or trends for the burrow-breeding petrels that it was hard to decide where research priorities should lie. Seabird surveys are underway on islands along the north-eastern coast of the North Island but few other island surveys have been done during the last 20 years. Least is known about the numbers of seabirds breeding in Fiordland, the Ruapuke group and around Stewart Island. Counts of breeding seabirds anywhere in New Zealand would be of great value; something OSNZ members should keep in mind when planning birding excursions. Of the outlying islands, the Auckland Islands are the least well surveyed, but even for The Snares and Chatham Islands, the best known groups, most survey data are 10-20 years old. With climate change and sea-water warming, documentation



White-chinned petrel by Kerry-Jayne Wilson

Does this white-chinned petrel photographed off Kaikoura belong to an endemic New Zealand subspecies or are ours indistinguishable from those that breed in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans?

of the population size of seabird species breeding on the southern islands is of particular interest.

New Zealand has not yet undertaken research to predict which seabird species may be at risk from climate change and associated increases in sea water temperatures. There are so few long term colony counts available that it would be useful to resurvey any seabird colonies where colony counts have been made in the past. OSNZ members are encouraged to begin annual counts at any accessible seabird colonies. The longer the counts are continued, the more valuable the data become.

While seabird researchers are aware of the impact factory-scale commercial fisheries have on albatrosses and some smaller petrels, it appears we have greatly underestimated the impact recreational fishers have on seabirds. Autopsies of birds found dead following the sinking of the ship *MV Rena* found evidence of a recreational by-catch of Flesh-footed Shearwaters. Workshop participants had anecdotal evidence to suggest Buller's Shearwater, Black Petrel and probably other shearwaters are caught by recreational and inshore commercial fishers. We would appreciate any information readers may have on the capture of any seabirds by recreational and inshore fisheries.

The eradication of introduced mammals from islands has presumably greatly benefited petrels, but sadly there have been few pre- and post-eradication surveys to document benefits to seabirds. A list of islands where mammal eradication is desirable was drawn up with Pitt Island (Chatham Islands) (cats, pigs and mice) and Auckland Island (pigs and cats) topping the list.

The new generation of geolocator tracking devices has now been deployed on a number of the smaller petrels, in particular some of the *Pterodroma* species, providing entirely new insights into the ecology of these birds. For some species we now know more of their distribution at sea than on land.

With ever increasing financial constraints and staff redundancies the Department of Conservation is coming to rely more and more on community groups to undertake conservation related management and research. The contribution that community groups are making to seabird conservation is valuable, but only the high profile species are ever likely to receive community support. The petrels that most need research nest on remote islands and have low, if any public profile. There is concern that they are even less likely to receive attention than they were when the Department of Conservation was better funded.

A full report on the outcomes of the workshop is available on the ASG website <http://www.birdlife.org.au/images/uploads/branches/documents/ASG-NZ-workshop-Aug12.pdf>. There is a link to the report from the news section of the OSNZ website (click 'more news' at the bottom of the page).

There is an urgent need for information on the distribution, numbers and population trends for petrels and other New Zealand seabirds and OSNZ members can help obtain data that help us better manage our marine birds. We invite RRs and other interested members to read the full report of the workshop to see if there is a project that needs doing in their patch.

We thank the 25 participants for their input, the Australasian Seabird Group and the National Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa, who sponsored the workshop, and Nicholas Carlile for taking the minutes. The workshop was organised and facilitated by Kerry-Jayne Wilson and John Croxall.

KERRY-JAYNE WILSON¹ and JOHN CROXALL²

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DEAD DUCKS CAN STILL TELL TALES

When humans first reached New Zealand its avifauna included a fish-eating duck, a merganser. Why a member of an otherwise northern hemisphere group of ducks should occur on such a remote southern Pacific outpost still remains to be explained. Nevertheless, mergansers didn't just reach New Zealand and spread themselves across all three main islands, they also established populations at the Auckland and Chatham Islands.

Like so many of our emblematic birds, the New Zealand and Chatham merganser populations didn't survive early human settlement. However, Auckland Island was visited rather than settled and its small number of mergansers persisted, to be discovered by western science during D'Urville's voyage of 1840 and a specimen returned to the Paris Museum. Their novelty made them collectable items; their obvious rarity very valuable items to those willing to pay, among whom the British collector Walter Rothschild certainly was. But the British Museum, in competition with Rothschild, was desirous of its share too and one governor-general, Ranfurly of rugby shield fame, did their bidding. By commandeering government ships he deliberately hunted them over two summers, securing six, and had another three collected from a British naval ship. At his vice-regal command, mergansers at the Auckland Islands were collected to extinction, for they were never seen subsequently.

The story of this collecting, and of the locations at which 23 adult and four duckling specimens now reside, are documented in a paper I have just published in the British science journal *Wildfowl* (vol. 62:3-36). The paper is also a comprehensive review of all that I can find in diverse historical records about the ecology and natural history of mergansers at the Auckland Island.

Back in 1970, the British waterfowl biologist Janet Kear collaborated with Ron Scarlett (palaeontologist at Canterbury Museum) to produce a first review of the merganser. Published in *Wildfowl* (vol. 21:78-86) their paper has been the source for all subsequent accounts of the bird. However, with new anecdotes and new specimens subsequently coming to light, and with the assertion that the merganser was probably flightless having been published, a new review was warranted.

In conducting this review I was able to handle 18 of the specimen skins in New Zealand, UK and European museums. From many of these specimens I was allowed to extract a feather or remove a toenail and thus submit the tissues for stable isotope analysis. This confirmed that Auckland Island's mergansers fed in both streams and the sea. Comparable analyses of bones from Chatham Island mergansers indicated they fed only in salt water whereas those of bones from two New Zealand mergansers indicate a fresh water feeding environment. Merganser bones were among fossil bird bones extracted from Lake Poukawa in Hawkes Bay many years ago, so I suspect mergansers were once part of our fresh water avifauna. The results of this stable isotope study, undertaken with help from Richard Holdaway, have also been published in *Wildfowl* (vol. 62:190-203).

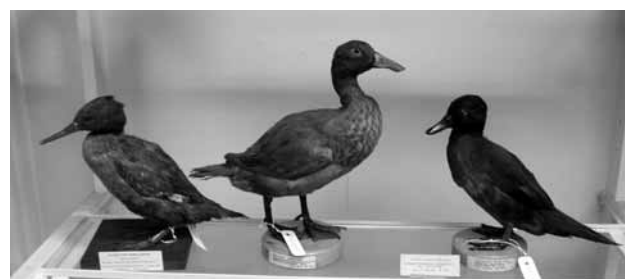
MURRAY WILLIAMS

WILDFOWL JOURNAL

Wildfowl is an annual science journal published by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (www.wwt.org.uk). The trust was established by British conservationist Sir Peter Scott in the late 1940s and is one of the largest wetland conservation organisations in the UK. It has had a long-time focus on waterbirds and their habitats and on the breeding of rare waterfowl for release. It pioneered the recovery of the Nene (Hawaiian Goose) on Hawaii from releases of birds bred at its Slimbridge wetland reserve.

The latest issue of the journal is able to be accessed free at http://www.wwt.org.uk/uploads/documents/1354572544_Wildfowl62.pdf

Later in 2013, copies of all articles in all of its 62 annual issues will be available free on the www.wwt.org.uk website. At least 15 papers on New Zealand waterfowl will be included in that collection: on Brown Teal, Auckland Island Teal, Campbell Island Teal, Paradise Shelduck, Blue Duck, Black Swan, and New Zealand wetland conservation.



Auckland Island Merganser specimen on display alongside a Blue Duck and Auckland Island Teal at the Natural History Museum in Dublin, Ireland. This specimen, a newly-fledged female was possibly one of the last three collected by Lord Ranfurly in 1902. If it looks small that is because it was; he calculated adult weights are 660g and 530g for male and female respectively.



In February researchers were elated to find the sparrow-sized New Zealand storm petrel, thought extinct until 2003, is breeding on Little Barrier Island Hauturu in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. The team of researchers is led by Chris Gaskin and Dr. Matt Rayner from the University of Auckland.

NEW ZEALAND STORM PETREL

FOUND BREEDING ON LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

The seabird is listed as critically endangered by the International Union of the Conservation of Nature and finding the breeding site is vital for their conservation. Since its rediscovery, there has been speculation as to where this seabird breeds.

The team camped on the Poor Knights Islands, Mokohinau Islands and Little Barrier Island using radio receivers to zero in on the breeding site. "It's like looking for a needle in the haystack," said Chris Gaskin. A critical breakthrough came last year when the project team found brood patches on birds caught at sea. This determined the timing of incubation and therefore the best time to find breeding birds on land.

This year, 24 birds were caught at sea using specially designed net guns and small 1 gram radio transmitters were fitted to each bird. Automated receivers narrowed down the search. Team members, based at a remote camp on the north coast of the Little Barrier Island, using handheld receivers and spotlights, confirmed that birds were coming ashore under the cover of darkness and moving inland. This prompted moving the search area. Then, when a signal was picked up of a bird stationary in forest at night, team members were able to get a clear fix on where that site was.

Dr. Rayner says: "The site being monitored is very fragile and with birds at a delicate stage in their breeding cycle. We are using automated equipment for the most part and maintaining a hands-off approach, although team members visiting the vicinity have also been keeping watch."

"On Friday morning a bird was discovered on the ground, possibly having just left its burrow. At the same time team members detected another bird, this one most probably on a nest," said Chris Gaskin. "It's an amazing result for our enthusiastic and dedicated team."

Members of the research team will remain on the island over the coming weeks. Aerial surveys are also being used to try and establish the distribution and size of the population.

The Hauraki Gulf Forum is about to publish a Hauraki Gulf seabird management strategy and research plan drawing on the work of Chris Gaskin and Dr. Rayner and New Zealand and international collaborators. Chair of the Hauraki Gulf Forum, John Tregidga, said locating the breeding ground was internationally significant and further highlighted the importance of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park as a globally significant biodiversity hotspot.

Dr Rayner, a Little Barrier Island trustee, said the discovery reiterated the importance of careful management of conservation jewels, such as Little Barrier Island and surrounding marine environments.

The project has been funded this year by grants from Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Birdlife International Community Conservation Fund, The Little Barrier Island Hauturu Supporters Trust and ASB Trust, Auckland Council, Forest & Bird Central Auckland Branch and Peter Harrison/Zegrahm Expeditions, with further support from the Department of Conservation, Hauraki Gulf Forum and Landcare Research.

Source: Auckland Council/Hauraki Gulf Marine Park press release.

1. Captures at sea, Neil Fitzgerald poised to fire, Chris Gaskin on oars - Photo Martin Berg

2. Matt Rayner and Chris Gaskin, getting ready - Photo Neil Fitzgerald

3. Bird in the hand, Dr Steffi Ismar with the first New Zealand Storm Petrel captured on land, 22 Feb 2013. - Photo Martin Berg

4. David, Martin, Todd and Chris at stream receiver site - Photo Karen Baird

5. Sweet success - Graeme Loh and Richard Walle (DOC LBI ranger) 2.40 am on 14th February after climbing out of a gorge on Little Barrier Island where they detected a signal from a bird in a burrow. Photo by Steffi Ismar.

Never would I have imagined that going to the OSNZ Conference and AGM in Tauranga last June would result in my winning a dream vacation! I and, presumably everyone else at the meeting, were extremely excited to hear that Heritage Expeditions had generously donated a spot on their upcoming Australian Bight Voyage, an eight day pelagic adventure on the *Spirit of Enderby* from Albany, Western Australia to Hobart, Tasmania.

I had to travel to Australia for work in mid-November. I was not due back in the office until mid-December so I decided to turn my trip into an 18-day birding odyssey. I spent my first day birding in the Australian National Botanical Gardens in Canberra. I was shown around by Dr. Kristal Cain, a visiting fellow at the Australian National University who is studying Superb Fairy-wren behaviour. I accompanied Dr. Cain while she collected data for her study on female song and aggression. She explained these fairy-wrens are atypical passerines; the females are

very aggressive and territorial and many of these behaviours are expressed by song. However, while poking around I discovered that males also get rather irritated if you accidentally get too close to their nests.

From Canberra I travelled to Albany (via Perth). Arriving two days before the ship was due to depart I rented a car and visited some key birding spots around town (I can highly recommend Lake Seppings), then hit the road. My destination was the Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre. The centre is a run by the people of the community Onegurup. They are dedicated to saving the endangered Malleefowl through education and habitat conservation. It was inspirational to see how much they have achieved.

From there I travelled to the Stirling Range Retreat. This place is a wonderful retreat, not just for travellers but for feathered friends as well. There are many trails in the area through a variety of habitats, and, what's more, the

owners of the retreat have set-up water baths at numerous sites, creating little bird oases. My final birding effort in Western Australia was an attempt to track down the Western Spinebill on the Mt. Trio trail in Stirling Range National Park. I was unsuccessful in my Spinebill hunt, but I was rewarded for my climbing efforts with a beautiful view of a Little Eagle nest.

On December 2nd, I boarded the *Spirit of Enderby* with 34 other guests. There was a lot of excited energy as we set sail, and we were all thrilled to see a pod of Common Dolphins playing at the bow of the ship. A wide range of people were on board; ages spanned from 32 to 82! There was also a wide range of 'birdiness', with quite a few hardcore birders (one of which was doing an Australia big year and already had over 700 species!) but also numerous non-birders who were there for the adventure of the journey.

The first couple of days offered limited birding opportunities. The weather was warm and there was very little wind, which made for lovely

AUSTRALIAN ODYSSEY



Me in my happy place

Tasmanian Native-hen

travel but meant that there were not very many birds on the wing. The main visitors were Great-winged Petrels and Flesh-footed Shearwaters. It was helpful that things started off as slowly as they did as it gave me a chance to learn the nuances of identifying southern seabirds from a distance. It was also nice to have some calm weather to allow my body to adjust to being on a boat without suffering from too many bouts of DIY chumming (sea sickness)!

Midway through our trip we had a day of beautiful sunshine with not a breath of wind. These were not great conditions for birding, but the resulting flat water meant that we could see any cetacean that broke the surface of the water, and break the surface they did! We saw a Blue Whale, Bottlenose Dolphins, a pod of over a hundred Southern Right Whale Dolphins swimming with Long-finned Pilot Whales, a Sperm Whale, and over a thousand Common Dolphins. At one point there were so many

dolphins riding the waves at the bow of the ship that I could actually hear their squeaks and clicks. It was amazing!

The final couple of days were a bit more windy and choppy, which allowed the crew to attempt some chumming. The smell of fish oil and fish meat brought in quite a few petrels and albatrosses. It was a particular treat for me to see Campbell Albatross, as my fiancée has been working down on Campbell Island. As we entered the waters surrounding Tasmania the number of birds steadily increased. When we laid anchor for our final night on board we were treated to ribbons of thousands of Short-tailed Shearwaters weaving past the ship. The final delight of the trip was not of the avian variety, but the culinary type. The two chefs on board outdid themselves when they created one of the best roast dinners on the planet.

After a sad farewell to my fellow passengers I headed out for the final leg of my birding

odyssey. Renting a campervan I split my time between three national parks: Bruny Island, Mt. Field, and Tasman. Bruny Island was by far my favourite. The camp grounds were gorgeous and I easily managed to see all 12 Tasmanian endemics, Tasmanian Native-hen being my favourite. They reminded me of their New Zealand relative, the Pukeko, especially when they darted in front of the van on country roads. What Bruny Island had in birds, Mt. Field had in monotremes (egg-laying mammals). I saw both a Platypus and an Echidna in less than 24 hours. My final bird species for the trip was seen on the way back to the car hire agency; a beautiful flock of Cape Barren Geese. It was the perfect bird to finish my trip list. I managed to see 169 species and about a third of them were lifers.

I would like to thank Heritage Expeditions and the staff and crew of the *Spirit of Enderby*. You made it a trip of a lifetime! I am also grateful to Sian Reynolds for helping me to get there.

SARAH JAMIESON

Researcher at San Diego Zoo Global and
Te Papa Tongarewa.

All photos by Sarah Jamieson



Campbell Albatross

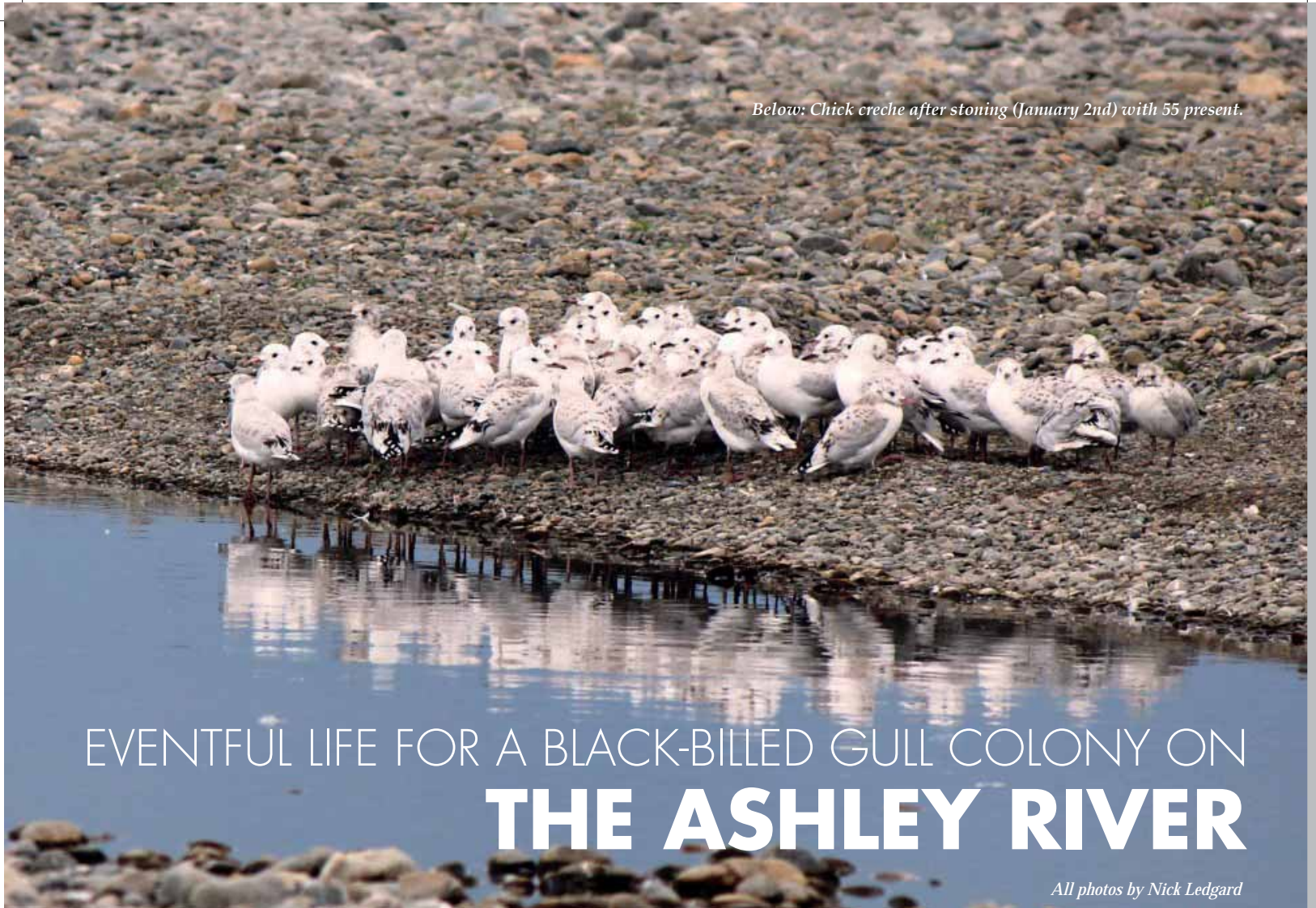


Common Dolphins



Cape Barren Goose

Below: Chick creche after stoning (January 2nd) with 55 present.



All photos by Nick Ledgard

EVENTFUL LIFE FOR A BLACK-BILLED GULL COLONY ON **THE ASHLEY RIVER**



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The Ashley-Rakahuri River is the northern-most waterway still to retain reasonable breeding numbers of all the main braided river endemic bird species. At a well-attended local community meeting back in 1999, the Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group was established to try to maintain this situation. Every breeding season (September – January), the Group sets traps for predators, promotes community awareness and monitors bird numbers and breeding success. One of the target birds is the Black-billed Gull, a braided-river specialist species, with a declining national population and a threat ranking of 'nationally critical' – which is the same status as the rarest kiwi species.

Only 30-40 years ago, an ornithological friend tells me, Black-billed Gulls used to regularly nest on the Ashley in colonies numbering thousands of birds. However, over recent years numbers have been significantly less. In fact, since 2000 there have only been four seasons where a colony of over 100 pairs has attempted to breed. Hence, when a colony of gulls does arrive, the Group goes out its way to protect it from predators and human disturbance. The following is the story of a Black-billed Gull colony during the 2012-2013 breeding season.

A major gathering of gulls was first seen in early October at what we call the Tulls site; I counted 220 birds, with some seen gathering nesting material. However, by mid-October the birds had disappeared, probably prompted by a 130 cumec flood on October 14th. On October 31st, a similar number of birds were observed at the Pylons site. It is common for gull colonies to shift sites early in the season, so this movement of around 6 km upriver was not unexpected. By November 9th, numbers had swelled to around 400, and nesting was obviously well underway on a mid-river shingle bank. In addition to the gulls, 48 White-fronted Terns had begun sitting on eggs nearby. The same two species nested alongside each other last year, as the terns appear to enjoy the extra protection they get from the more vociferous gulls.

The biggest 'natural' threat at this stage of breeding is a flood, and sure enough, heavy rains in the foothills on November 11-12th raised the river to around 110 cumecs. This is not a major flood by Ashley river standards, but it was sufficient to displace the lowest nests in the colony, and most of those on the highest parts of the shingle bank got a wetting. But as the birds have evolved to accommodate such natural events, the

brooding of eggs continued on most nests. Those that were flooded out (15-20 pairs) shifted to re-nest (unsuccessfully, it transpired) in three small groups elsewhere on the river, and the terns also moved out, never to return.

By November 21st, there were around 200 birds in the colony, although not all had nests, as a feature of such gull colonies is the number of non-breeding adults which gather at the same site. Later when the birds had departed from the nesting location, 180 nests were counted, but many of these may not have been used, plus others would have been abandoned during the November 12th flood. Black-billed Gull eggs hatch after three weeks, so it was not surprising to be able to count around 50 chicks on December 5th. All observations were carried out from some distance through binoculars and a spotting scope, so it was not possible to get a fully accurate count.

Right from when the colony first arrived at the Pylons site, a pair of Black-backed Gulls were always seen close by. This is another native species, but it is also a well-known predator of the eggs and young chicks of other birds. The breeding Black-billed Gulls very obviously resented the close proximity of their larger and more aggressive Black-backed relatives, and spent much effort swooping on them and trying to drive them away. However, the larger gulls were largely impervious to such attacks, and they almost certainly enjoyed regular meals of eggs and young chicks. There is little that the Group could do about this; to be sure it would not have been difficult to shoot the two birds, but shooting on the riverbed is not permitted.

Once gull chicks are around two weeks old, they gather together in loose mobs or crèches, usually alongside the water's edge. If approached by a ground predator, they can swim away in a tightly packed raft, while the adult birds try to drive the predator away. On December 16, the crèche of chicks numbered just over 100, and had moved upriver about 100 m, together with its protective entourage of parents. On the same day, I was watching the birds from the opposite bank, when I saw a 4WD vehicle approaching up the riverbed. The vehicle drove past the gulls and then did a U-turn back towards them. As all the adults took to the air, there was a yell from the front passenger window "I hate f..... birds!", after which the 4WD turned back to come to a stop by the river, some 100 m above the crèche. The three passengers, two girls with a young lad driving, climbed out to enjoy their drinks by the water in the sun. I crossed the river to talk to them, pointing out that I had photographed this disturbance and that this could be used as evidence of what they had done, with the possible end result of a considerable fine. However, the three passengers were genuinely unaware of what they had done - although they had driven right past two 'Rare Bird Breeding Area' signs ("I don't read bl.... signs" - driver comment). One girl had seen me observing the birds and asked "Why on earth are you watching them - they're useless, what good do they do?" Despite such opening comment, two of them were reasonably interested in what I had to say about the need to protect these birds. They assured me that they would drive on away from the colony and not return again, so after an interchange of Happy Christmas's, I continued on my way.

On December 20th, I visited the colony for the last time before heading south for Christmas with the family on December 22nd.



Above: Stoned birds a week after the event.



Above left: Colony on December 20th, before stoning (just over 100 chicks)

Every year, the Group contracts a professional ornithologist to audit the birds on the river (particularly the number of fledglings) in order to verify Group findings. As part of this work, Niall Mugaun of Keystone Ecology, returned to the river on December 24th. As he approached the Pylons site, he quickly noticed that the gulls were not in their usual location, and on closer inspection found the remains of around 50 chicks which had been stoned to death. The attack probably took place on December 22nd, as maggots were on some of the corpses by the time Niall visited. What we think happened was that someone came across the colony and, as to be expected, was subjected to an aerial 'attack' by the adult birds. This upset them sufficiently so that they retaliated by throwing stones at the chicks, which would have been in a dense mob. Fortunately, they were only a few metres from the main river channel, so once the chicks realised what was going on, they took to the water. Niall informed DOC and the police, but although 'investigations are underway' I doubt if the perpetrators will be caught.

The incident was not good news at all, but it could be argued that there were a couple of positive outcomes. Firstly, more chicks escaped than we imagined, and on December 29th were settled by the river about 200 m down from the nest site. A photo taken of the crèche shows just over 50 chicks - so around 50% of them survived the attack, and by then most were very close to flying. Secondly, the case for riverbed birds got considerable media attention, and most listeners would never before have heard of Black-billed Gulls and their endangered status.

On January 2nd-3rd there was another burst of rain in the foothills, and the river rose to almost 80 cumecs. By this time the gulls had moved 200 m



Above: Crèche split by the rapidly rising river on January 3rd.

upriver to be close to where they were hatched. The rapidly rising waters had divided them into two groups separated by a fast-flowing current. As I watched, two chicks moved into the current looking to head for the opposite shore, but were set upon by a couple of adults, as if to turn them back. And just as well too, as the current would have taken them a long way downriver. While I was there, three human adults appeared and started skipping flat stones across the water. I approached to caution them, but soon found out that there was no ill-intent in their actions, as they were most interested in what I had to say about the birds on the river. We observed the chicks through the spotting scope, with their intrigue being further heightened by the arrival of a male Wrybill, which started feeding right alongside the gulls. They had read about the stoning of the gull chicks - but I cannot pass on what they said should be done to the perpetrators.

Later that day, I returned with a *Northern Outlook* reporter, to find the two groups of chicks once again merged. The majority could fly, so we can be reasonably assured that at least 50 new black-billed gulls will be added to the national flock. To be sure it could have been more, but after the trials and tribulations they have experienced over the last three months, it could also have been a lot worse.

NICK LEDGARD

Chairman, Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group Inc and BRaid Inc

EXTREME BIRDING

For most of us birding is a pleasurable leisure activity. Something we find satisfying and enjoy sharing with like minded people. However, for others birding is a whole other thing. It can be an obsessive, individualistic and intensely competitive pursuit. Sometimes the rewards are purely personal but, often there can be some meaningful consequences beyond an entry in *The Guinness Book of Records*.

Stepping into the past we come across one of my favourite individuals. He had all of the above characteristics, more than a bit eccentric but capable of being incredibly single minded and task oriented. We were not contemporaneous. He died nearly a decade before my birth. He had lived a good bike ride away from my home and his was open to the public. It was a splendid trip to make when the relatives threatened to visit and show you all of their holiday snaps!

At his birth he could have been the wealthiest child in the UK. He was destined to become a banker and was for a while. The family had banked for centuries and formed a multinational consortium. The power of compound interest became increasingly obvious as decade followed decade. So powerful that it was within their grasp to change the course of history. "I am sorry, Napoleon old chap. No go on the loan I am afraid".

Given his background he could easily have turned into another Hooray Henry. Perhaps he did in some areas of his life. Certainly he was blackmailed by a female member of the peerage for nearly forty years. He was, first and foremost a naturalist from his very early years. He lived a privileged life in Tring Park and his indulgent parents permitted him to turn part of it into a zoo when he was still a teenager. Cassowaries were said to roam freely, people perhaps a little less so.

Eccentric in the extreme, he imported creatures from all over the world for his zoo. He attended university with a number of kiwis, the birds that is! Wishing to show the potential of previously undomesticated species led him to visit Buckingham Palace in a zebra drawn trap. Consumption of the flesh of undomesticated animals was also fashionable amongst the mega rich, a practice known as zoophagia. In fact one individual had a standing order with London Zoo for any deceased animal. If the elephant died it was his! Our character was known as Walter Rothschild and his zoophagia is probably not well documented, after all he did own his own zoo. He did comment that cassowary eggs present some difficulties if you like them boiled, great for baking however.

He had a more conventional side as a naturalist and researcher. He was only a few years old when Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859. For Walter it was a life changing event. Much of his life was spent elucidating the naturally occurring variations in animal species that was so fundamental a part of Darwin's hypothesis. In 1892 Walter added a museum to the existing zoo at Tring Park. He was twenty-four, six years from giving up a banking career and one year beyond introducing his first new bird species to science. This was the Parea, the Chatham Island Pigeon. There are a further fifty-seven bird species that he subsequently described.

Evolution was not an accepted fact for the early part of Walter's life. If you were to visit the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, London you would have found Darwin's bust at one end of the Great Hall. Eyeballing him from the other end was a bust of Adam. Evolution was very far from a done deal. We now know that there are around 10,000 bird species, but, in his collection, Walter had, at peak, some 280,000 study skins. There would have been many multiple copies to demonstrate sub-specific and other differences.

Such a large number of skins meant that Walter had people collecting for him all over the world. He may well have been the largest collector, but there were other individuals with more of a stamp collecting approach, and many national museums also accumulating specimens. One could imagine this having an impact on the populations of particularly rare species. Walter Lawry Buller supplied Walter with specimens, living and preserved, over a period of five years around the establishment of his museum. These included species now extinct. Today the extinctions are considered to be more likely due to rapid habitat destruction by pioneers and other related factors rather than



Walter Lawry Buller. Image courtesy Wikipedia Commons



Walter Rothschild. Image courtesy Wikipedia Commons

any activities on the part of Buller. Nowadays we do have a more informed, if not complete, view regarding the protection of native species, although our approach to habitat preservation is not so forward looking.

Collecting by gun and trapping was very much the norm, both before and after Walter's time. The consequences do, perhaps, excuse the methodology. Those collections still remain although poor documentation and preservation of some specimens reduces their value to the scientific community. These collections also served another purpose. They, and hand drawn sketches, were the basis for the illustrations of a number of epic books that brought avian biology and ecology to the attention of the wealthy classes. The production of these volumes required extreme dedication over a long period.

At the time that the Waitangi Treaty was being signed in New Zealand John Gould published the first volume of *Birds of Australia*. 681 species were described in total. Interestingly there are illustrations of New Zealand birds including the Huia and the Kakapo. Is this perhaps an early example of Australian geographic confusion?

In America Audubon's *Birds of America* was completed just a year earlier in 1839. Buller was much later on the scene. His *Book of Birds* first appeared in 1873. All of these books have much in common. They have good descriptive text, some unbelievably good illustration and they are all still in print!

Audubon's name lives on in the Society that bears his name. Mark Obmascik, author of *The Big Year* makes the point that, in 1900 it did its bit to change the way the world regards birds. The conventional male celebration of Christmas at that time was a competitive bird massacre. The Audubon Society introduced the alternative Christmas Bird Count. Given the circumstances it is no surprise that only 27 birders came 'out of the closet' to participate! Small though it was, it was the prototype for birding 'Big Days'. Today 50,000 Americans take part in the Christmas Bird Count and valuable census data is obtained. Such Big Days have become moveable feasts as other dates are added to the birding calendar. A move from killing to counting had been consolidated. What had been the norm was itself, now extreme. Audubon had, unwittingly, pointed the way to an alternative form of extreme birding.

Hammering home this change was the arrival of field guides. Unlike the earlier volumes these could be fitted into the pocket. They were cheap and a whole new and very large group of people had access to identification material.

Inevitably the Big Day gave way to the Big Year. This was more of a personal journey for individuals. The data collected had little scientific value and there was a potential for competition. How many species could you see in a year? Could you see more than anyone else? Could you afford it? Would your partner leave you? A considerable number of books have been produced on the subject and, surprisingly, the motive behind a Big Year is not always totally competitive. In the case of Sean Dooley it was provoked by the tragic loss of both parents over a very short time. There was a small inheritance and Sean needed to do something meaningful with the money. *The Big Twitch* is his account of an attempt to see 700 different bird species within Australia in one year.

Phoebe Snetsinger was diagnosed with cancer and given a year to live. A Big Year seemed just the answer. As it happens she lived for 18 years and died, not from ill health but in a bus accident. She accumulated a life list around 8,500 birds. Read her story in *A Woman's Quest for the Most Amazing Birds* by, Olivia Gentile.

The compulsion to become an extreme birder can be very powerful. One couple gave up their careers and sold all their property to finance a Big Year. Alan Davies and Ruth Mills recount this in *The Biggest Twitch, Around the World in 4,000 Birds*.

Charles Elder is perhaps my favourite. This is maybe because we have a common book in our past, *The Reader's Digest Book of British Birds*. It has illustrations that are unequalled in their beauty, product of that great New Zealand artist Raymond Ching. Tired of the mundane and humdrum Charles decided to see the top 40 UK Endangered Species on the Red List. The book has real value with insight into the ecology and conservation of many of these species. Charles also has an engaging sense of humour. Rare birds are on his list, but also some commoner species; House Sparrows and Yellowhammers, that have had significant population declines as a result of post-1970 changes in agricultural methodology. The book is titled *While Flocks Last* and has more than anecdotal value.

This account started in Tring Park and perhaps it is suitable to end it there. Walter sold the majority of his study skins, including those from Buller, to The American Museum of Natural History. This was in 1932 and he realised US \$225,000. It is suggested to have been to raise money to pay off his blackmailer.

His work does live on. When he died in 1937 he left his museum to the Natural History Museum in London. It is now the major centre for ornithological research in the UK and currently houses 600,000 study skins, probably the biggest collection in the world. J.G. Keuleman's water colour illustrations for Buller's book are also stored there. These were included in the latest revision of this book, released in October 2012. Given Walter's life time contribution and his enduring legacy he would have to be my choice for extreme birder, any year any century!

The Museum itself remains a treasure house of data and artefacts and a great temptation to some. Walter would probably have been horrified, and in turn amused, by some recent events. In the past few years there have been two significant burglaries. In one some of the most attractive skins, including those of the Resplendent Quetzal and other trogons were taken. Trying to sell the product on eBay proved not to be a good move. The Museum staff had the last laugh when the horn of a very large rhino was sawn off in another break-in and theft. The thieves got away with a huge and heavy horn of great potential value. Imagine their dismay when they found it to be made of fibreglass!

RAY BUCKMASTER

IDENTIFYING NEW ZEALAND'S FINCHES AND BUNTINGS BY SOUND

Most of the seed-eating passerine species introduced to New Zealand are a common sight and sound throughout the country. The following is a combination of how I have learnt to tell the species apart by sound along with other tips I have encountered through the years.

Chaffinch

One of the old names of this species is 'spink', an onomatopoeic name based on one of its most common calls. Spink is featured in Christopher Smart's poetry on the contents page of this issue of *Southern Bird*. The call sounds more like 'chip' to me and is a monosyllabic sharp call. Anxious birds string the call together in small series 'chip chip chip' and this multiple call can be heard in males that are soon to start singing for the year. The chip call is similar in pitch to the 'chirrup' of the House Sparrow, but that species at least hints at being disyllabic.

My favourite description of the song is that of a cricketer bowling a ball, with the first part of the song the bowler's accelerating run to the wicket, and the final flourish the over arm delivery of the ball. The song can be written like 'chip chip chip chip che che che cherry cheerio'.

Other calls include a slightly plaintive and quite penetrating 'hueet', often repeated over and over. Many call this the 'rain call', but others attribute it to other calls, and it isn't related to the possibility of precipitation, so it is a bit of a mysterious misnomer. In alarm the species gives 'buzz' and 'seep' calls.

Greenfinch

Most calls of the Greenfinch are fairly rapid trills based on chip and chup notes, that to me sound rounded and lush, like verdant rolling farmland, and a little like the appearance of the bird itself. The song is a varied collection of these trills strung together, sometimes given in a butterfly-like song flight, with the addition of dryer 'chay' notes and an insistent drawn out buzzing 'sheeer', that sounds quite a lot like 'greeeen' as if the bird is telling the listener its colour.

The species also gives an almost questioning 'dweee' or 'derwee' note, probably when anxious. Similar calls are given by all the country's cardueline finches (the Chaffinch is the odd one out - a fringillid). The flight call is a short string of chup notes, repeated

Goldfinch

As befits its name most of the calls of the Goldfinch are metallic tinklings, with the song being a varied string of tinkling phrases pleasant to the ear. The contact and flight call can be written 'tickle-it', with this being often repeated.

Bucking the tinkling trend other calls are an angry stuttering buzz when fighting or really annoyed (usually followed by tinkling calls giving the identity of the bird away), and a high-pitched 'tweeee' similar to the call given by the other cardueline finches in New Zealand.

Redpoll

The Redpoll is the colour of a dry baked biscuit, and most of its calls are dry too. The flight call is a dry 'chi chi chi churr'. This has been likened to the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, but maybe a bit fancifully, with the call being quite a bit more rapid and lacking the drama of the music (which may have been inspired by the song of a Yellowhammer). Calls when perched are often similar to the flight call, though can just be the initial 'chi's. The song is the same dry trills strung together, sometimes with 'dwee' or 'twee' notes interspersed among them. It is often given in quite a wide circular flight, so the bird will appear and disappear with regularity as it repeatedly passes overhead.

Like the other cardueline finches the species also produces a rising, high questioning/worried-sounding 'twereee'. This is a call I have heard from an anxious bird drawing attention to a threat.

Yellowhammer

Most people are familiar with the song of the Yellowhammer, often described as 'a little bit of

bread and no cheese'. Actually most of the time the number of syllables in the first part of the song is either more or less than a 'little bit' of bread, though always more than a few crumbs and never as much as a loaf. The 'cheese' flourish isn't always present either, especially early and late in the singing season. The rattle first part of the song usually builds in intensity and has a sibilant, silvery quality, something that sets it apart from the similar Cirl Bunting.

The calls of the Yellowhammer are quite dry, in contrast to its song, with the main flight call being a soft 'twurrrup', which can also be given perched. A buzzing 'chip' call and a high-pitched 'tseeee' call are given when anxious.

Cirl Bunting

The calls and songs of this species are a little like that of the Yellowhammer, but mostly dryer or sharper. The song is a rattle on one note, usually lacking the Yellowhammer's sibilance and of a dry quality like the drier countries in Europe and Africa where it lives. The intensity stays the same throughout but can accelerate slightly towards the end, and it can sound like the trill of a Greenfinch, though the latter is usually not so dry and the bird making it will usually make other noises that are characteristic of a Greenfinch. The song never has a cheesy flourish.

Cirl Bunting calls are quiet and easily missed. One call, used as the flight call, but also perched or on the ground is a short, sharp, high-pitched 'tsi'. Sometimes it has a buzzy quality, but other times it doesn't and sounds very similar to the contact/flight call of the Song Thrush. Another call made by the Cirl Bunting is a high-pitched 'seeee', similar to that of the Yellowhammer, or a call of the Dunnock (which I mistook a finally close-perched magnificent male for once - not even raising my bins for to start with). This call is given when the bird is anxious or alarmed, and can be disyllabic in nature 'seeehh'.

NICK ALLEN



Far North

We have had a long dry spell in the region and as indicated in our last roundup, some great opportunities to get out to sea from Whangaroa. A small group of us went out on 14th November. The day began with a group of seven Cape Barren Geese on a hilltop ridge on Stephenson Island, including a mating pair. Some seabirds more typical of winter were still around, such as four Northern Giant Petrels feeding beside the boat, a couple of Little Shearwaters and a few Diving Petrels. Conversely Black Petrels were absent, but good numbers of the commoner shearwaters, White-capped and Wandering Albatrosses, and White-faced Storm Petrels made for a worthwhile day.

Two more trips went out on 19th December and 20th January. On these trips albatrosses were few in number, perhaps owing to winds being too light (almost none on the December trip). Otherwise typical summer species were to be seen in good numbers. Particularly welcome were New Zealand Storm Petrels giving great views both times over long periods and also a few suspected Pycroft's Petrels.

A sprinkling of Long-tailed Cuckoos have been reported from the forested region south of Mangonui in February, their return migration being the only period when they are normally heard in the Far North.

Last year's Australian Pelican has been elusive lately, last reported in Kerikeri in October. This or another individual has recently been seen in Rangaunu Harbour, but usually requires a boat to find it.

Our region carried out a very popular Morepork census in October with at least 13 people taking part. This is a widespread species in the area but time will tell whether they are in fact in decline and we hope to repeat the survey later this year.

A popular indoor meeting in December featured one of the Far North's popular speakers - CJ Ralph on 'Bird Observatories in Europe'. Further meetings are in abeyance while the region looks for a new RR. I wish to stand down after nine years in the position and hope that a new enthusiastic person will come forward. I do, however, look forward to seeing many of you in Dunedin in June.

DETLEF DAVIES

Auckland

Australian visitors have featured in our region over the summer months. Three Australian Pelicans were reported in the Auckland suburb of Waterview in January, a most conspicuous species on the Waitemata Harbour! It is assumed that the three birds were from the 'squadron' of 15 that appeared on the Kaipara Harbour in August 2012, but they have since moved on as there have been no further Auckland sightings. The pelicans appear to have been quite mobile, with scattered reports from both coasts. The other Australian arrival was a Dollarbird, found dead on the Auckland west coast at Muriwai Beach in December.

The Muriwai Australasian Gannet colony (the 'other' mainland colony of this species) has been under observation following a poor 2010-11 breeding season. Since then, the Gannets have fared much better. The 2011-12 tally, obtained on 25 November 2011, was 1,145, most of which appeared to be incubating eggs or sheltering small chicks. The figure was similar for the 2012-13 season, the tally on 11th January 2013 being 1,155. This total was obtained by photographing the various parts of the colony and counting the birds with the aid of enlarged prints that revealed 140 Gannets on the rock stack, 555 on the higher cliff ledge and 400 on the lower ledge, plus a further 60 birds on the slope between these ledges where the colony is expanding. These numbers include some young birds close to fledging (about 150 downy chicks or feathered young were visible on the day of the inspection). This colony established on the mainland in 1982, and is now a significant draw card for local and international visitors.

MEL GALBRAITH

Bay of Plenty/Volcanic Plateau

So another summer is here in the Bay of Plenty and 30-degree-plus temperatures have sent the birdwatchers amongst us back indoors with an iced tea and a handheld fan. Never fear, Tim Barnard is near, and the roving regional rounder-upper of rogues of the avian type has been on form. Over the last few months Little Waihi and Maketu have trumped up Sharp-

tailed and Pectoral sandpipers, a Sanderling and Red-necked Stints. Only the Sanderling was spotted at the same sites during the November harbour census, which goes to show that the 'summer' counts don't always pick up the summer migrants. Tim's other Maketu/Little Waihi highlights have been up to 21 Pacific Golden Plovers and up to 480 Bar-tailed Godwits.

On his visit to Tauranga in January, Richard White saw an Eastern Curlew at the Rangiwaea Island roost, amongst oystercatchers. The day before Tim and Garry Hill saw an Asiatic Whimbrel at Opureora Spit, Rangiwaea Island, and with Cynthia Carter spotted a Chinese-flagged Bar-tailed Godwit at the same roost. Other Whimbrels in the region were two January birds at Ohiwa, spotted by Tim. A Greater Sand Plover was seen at Maketu in January by... you guessed it: Tim!

Other January rarities were: Black-fronted Tern and possible juvenile Black Kite at Tarawera River mouth seen by John Groom; another bird of prey, a New Zealand Falcon, was seen near Maketu by Tim; an Australasian Bittern and plenty of Fernbirds were found at Tuapiro Road, Katikati, by Tim; and Julian Ritter saw 15 Royal Spoonbills at Maketu just before January.

Our last field trip was to Tuhua/Mayor Island in late November where members managed to capture some great sightings of the island's recovering bird populations, including Robins and Saddlebacks.

Fourteen Grey-faced Petrel chicks were banded this season at Mauau, compared to two last season. Threats this coming season will be from rabbits and human-laid snares, in addition to the rats and stoats and re-invading possums.

Little Penguins have been having a little bit of a hard time, particularly with dogs, on Moturiki/Leisure Island. Many have been brought in with dog bites and lacerations - all part of the result of the summer teeming with humans and their pets. Last week at Newdick's Beach, Maketu, I saw a freshly plumaged adult from the surfboard, which was a first.

Marcus Richards reported, whilst out on Penguin Night Operations for the Rena Recovery Project, that Reef Herons are still nesting on Motuotau/Rabbit Island. This is good news for a nationally vulnerable species. Another nationally vulnerable species is the Wrybill, three of which were seen during the first week of February at Maketu by Tim, and a 'handful' at Ohiwa seen by Garry Hill in November. Riflemen were recently noted breeding during a bait check run at Aongatete Forest, near Katikati. The story made the local daily newspaper, as this is the first record for some time from the Kaimai Ranges.

Our speaker for February was Tim Barnard, who gave a refreshingly honest look at the perils and pitfalls of being a twitcher. Our next field trip will be to Omokoroa to inspect the new wildlife interpretation panels on the shoreline walk recently developed.

It was quite a jaunt that our RR Eila Lawton went on, when she flitted to the Marquesas late last year, leaving a remnant stand of rickers/members to battle towards the light. The region will be looking for a new Regional Representative as Eila has resigned after many years at the helm. Thank you Eila, everyone will be keenly missing the vim and vigour of your services.

PAUL CUMING

Taranaki

Migratory waders have become a rarity along the Taranaki coast. Other than a few Bar-tailed Godwits seen in September no other visiting waders of any species have been seen. Even Waiongana became an avian desert; Pacific Golden Plover and Turnstone, two of the more reliable visitors, have not made an appearance.

Our own shorebirds were having mixed success with breeding, Variable Oystercatchers have not done well, with only a few being successful, and Barry Hartley has yet to figure out what the New Zealand Dotterels along the south Taranaki coast are up to.

Members were invited to carry out a bird survey along the sides of the Herekawe Stream, which runs close to industrial and residential properties on the western side of New Plymouth. Much restoration work has been done to tidy up a once neglected area. Twenty-five species of bird were recorded, with nothing unexpected.

December's meeting concluded with the usual end of year supper. As I was unable to attend I shudder at the thought of what must have taken place. The now traditional Beach, Birds and Barbecue at Waiongana was held on a fine warm January day and was more decorous. It had an international flavour with a couple of visitors from Australia in attendance. An air show kept the attendees looking skyward, oh and we did manage to note twenty-eight species of bird. It was unanimously agreed to do it all again next year.

At February's indoor meeting members had a chance to report on their activities for the previous month. The possible Chukor seen on an eastern Taranaki property became a Red-legged Partridge when photos were produced. No-one is any the wiser as to how it got there. David Medway visited his neighbours to see three juvenile Moreporks, and found a live Shining Cuckoo in his garage. Pied Oystercatchers were migrating north during February, but not in the numbers of previous years. Barry Hartley saw a couple of flocks of 100 or so from his home in New Plymouth and I saw a few small flocks of 20-30 passing over Waiongana. Banded Dotterels are returning to the coast with thirty one at Sandy Bay and sixty at Waiongana, including a banded bird returning for the tenth year. Barry Hartley had some photos of a crested penguin found alive at the Oakura River Mouth west of New Plymouth. Whether it is a Fiordland or a Snares Crested is still in contention.

Taranaki has enjoyed a real summer for a change and a fine warm Sunday in February had a record turnout for the field trip to meander around East Egmont. A short but pleasant stroll into the Potaema Bog was very worthwhile, as at least five Rifleman were seen and heard by some. Tomtit, Silvereve and Fantail were also about. We then carried onto the picnic area beside the Stratford Mountain House for lunch and then to the plateau car park where as one member said "the whole expedition degenerated to botany". Tiring of staring at things without feathers or a central nervous system four of us returned to Potaema Bog for afternoon tea, which was rewarded with excellent views and calls from two Fernbirds.

PETER FRYER

Hawke's Bay

In November our activities were centred around the wader count and our ongoing five-minute bird counts at Blowhard bush. It was good to have some visitors join us for the morning at Blowhard Bush. Unfortunately conditions weren't ideal with cool drizzly weather resulting in fewer birds heard and seen than we would have expected.

We did have excellent conditions for the wader count though. Porangahau turned up 11 Red-necked Stints, which is possibly our highest count there, plus Knots, Turnstones, a Whimbrel, a Wrybill, a Golden Plover and two New Zealand Dotterels. We also located the breeding colony of Caspian Terns. The area they were in wasn't accessible, but Bernie was able to return a few days later with his kayak and get a more accurate count. The highlight was finding that the small breeding colony of Royal Spoonbills was thriving, and had expanded to 55 birds. We counted at least 10 active nests at stages varying from eggs to newly hatched chicks, and a few with well-grown chicks.

In early December a small group travelled up to Miranda. We had an excellent weekend enjoying the waders and the Shorebird Centre. Bernie Kelly hopes to make this a regular feature on our activities calendar. Our 2013 year started with a meeting hosted by Jim and Christine Hamilton at their Kereru Road property. Venues and times for future field outings were discussed. Following the meeting everyone enjoyed exploring the garden, which Jim and Christine planted to attract birds, and which is now well established. It was interesting to hear from them which trees attracted various species. A barbecue tea followed.

MARGARET TWYDLE

Manawatu



Marsh Sandpiper, Manawatu Estuary 15th January 2013.
Photo by Craig Steed.

The Manawatu has been the place to be this summer with plenty of surprises for the keen birder, lifers for some. A Greenshank was first reported mid-December by Duncan Watson and was around the estuary at least until 18th January. Further excitement occurred with the arrival of a Marsh Sandpiper in mid-January, stretching a few birders' wader-ID knowledge, with both birds being present at the same time, both being rare visitors and similarly coloured but obviously different in size. On a couple of occasions both birds were seen together to give a great comparison of them.

As a great Christmas present Paul Gibson reported a juvenile White-winged Black Tern on 27th December and sightings of two individuals of this species have been reported over the summer period. Add to that sightings of Common Tern and the estuary has been a hot spot for birders over the summer. The long-staying Gull-billed Terns seem to have departed, however, else Sav Saville may have managed six tern species in one binocular view. Other happenings, such as large numbers of Wrybills dropping in during their migration north, the colouring up of our arctic waders and the chaos caused when an Arctic Skua heads on in have all added to the interest of the summer's birding.

Locally we all enjoyed our first talk for 2013 when visiting researcher Gabor Lóvei spoke on Madagascar; a great way to kick-start the year.

CRAIG STEED

Wairarapa

The summer months have been a time of great birding experiences in the Wairarapa. During November and December Caspian Terns on Onoko Spit produced about 30 young chicks. On the east coast out from Masterton there have been a number of sightings of New Zealand Dotterels, with adults seen in the spring and latterly two young chicks accompanying them. Another exciting discovery was the nesting of Royal Spoonbills on Lake Wairarapa. It is thought that this is the first time they have nested in the Wairarapa Moana area. At this stage the outcome is not yet known, but we are hoping for positive outcomes. Late last year a White Heron was spotted down on Boggy Pond, an area adjacent to Lake Wairarapa. John Cheyne who is doing surveys of birds in selected areas surrounding Lake Wairarapa has reported that Spotless Crakes have been recorded, and a Marsh Crake was spotted. New Zealand Dabchicks are regularly seen too, but it appears that Paradise Shelducks are having an adverse affect on the variety of birdlife. New Zealand Falcons have been sighted in a number of locations throughout the region and many members have heard the booming of Australasian Bitterns.

During November, two of our members spoke on their bird watching trip to Southern California, which they highlighted with some great photos. In December, the annual Christmas party was well attended, with a light-hearted quiz on the identification of bird songs. Sad to say, but a person who was not a member was the person who identified the most.

PEGGY DUNCAN

Wellington

The final meeting for 2012 was celebrated with the customary wine and Christmas cake. Duncan Watson showed his 45 minute video of his and six other OSNZers' recent birding trip to North Peru, which was organised and led by Carol and Detlef Davies from Kerikeri. This was the first tour they had run to Peru, and having been on the tour I can confirm it was a wonderful introduction to South American birds. Duncan's video captured the large diversity of birds, the countryside of North Peru and some spectacular Indian ruins. North Peru has the major advantage of having some wonderful attractions yet not being over-run with tourists, unlike Machu Picchu.

The monthly counts of the Pauatahanui Inlet continue. One observation of note has been the sighting of Bellbirds on two occasions in the DOC reserve. This is the first time that Bellbirds have been sighted in any of the Pauatahanui counts spanning a period of more than 30 years. Bellbirds appear to be spreading in the Wellington region, and over the last few years have been observed in new areas of the region. This includes the forests west of Porirua and Tawa. Ironically, the transfer of Bellbirds to Zealandia has been a major challenge, especially achieving the goal of establishing a self-sustaining, viable population. While Bellbirds have bred very successfully in Zealandia, there has been limited recruitment of new females.

GEOFF DE LISLE



Nelson

As the year 2012 turned into 2013 it was disappointing to hear of disturbance to roosting birds on Golden Bay's coastal areas by holidaymakers, deliberate or otherwise. A pamphlet drop to local bach owners and visitor centres is being considered to highlight the needs of godwits for undisturbed time on our estuaries.

Caspian Terns nesting on Bell's Island shell banks in the Waimea Estuary were washed out from their initial site in October, shifted a few metres, were washed out again, then went back to their first choice. Success occurred this time, with nests just high enough to avoid the prevalence of 4.5 m tides this summer, and on 21st January 68 chicks were banded by Willie Cook and his team; the highest number for some years. Variable Oystercatchers weren't so lucky in the Waimea Estuary; they've had a bit of a grim season with very few successful nests.

Near Rabbit Island on 26th January Ingrid Hutzler recorded 77 Black-fronted Terns roosting, including juveniles, and the first sighting of White Heron for the year. Black-billed Gulls have again nested on a natural sandy island formed in recent years just off Nelson Airport. Thirty-five birds were counted on 10th February by Pam McConnell.

Along with the first report of breeding Black Swan at Nelson Sewerage Wetland area last October, Pauline Samways reported the first record of the species breeding in the Motueka Estuary this season.

The spring wader count was done in somewhat challenging weather conditions on the 16th, 17th and 18th November, but Rob Schuckard reported almost 30,000 shorebirds were recorded by about 19 counters. About 86% of the birds were migratory waders. Among roosting Bar-tailed Godwits and Knots a number of colour-flagged birds were noted from Victoria, Queensland, Shanghai and Alaska.

Three months on and the summer wader count was completed in stunning weather around the region on the 9th and 10th February. While on Farewell Spit, Willie Cook counted 21 Pacific Golden Plovers, a big number for that area. Also on Farewell Spit at the Gannet colony several OSNZ members are assisting Gabriel Capuska Machovsky with his PhD study on the feeding ecology of these top predators by catching adult Gannets and taking regurgitation samples.

A feature of this summer's coastal birding, as it has been in several recent years, is feeding melees of White-fronted Terns, and gulls, or shearwaters close to the shore with skuas in attendance. The skuas have shown a range of plumage types but both Arctic and Pomarine have been identified. Up to nine of these avian pirates have been counted at the same time and several very close observations have been made of successful and not so successful harrying.

In November Alec Milne and Richard Stocker went into the Henderson Basin (Kahurangi National Park) and reported nine Rock Wrens present, but tracking tunnels showed evidence of mice present; not the best situation. Gillian Pollock spotted an individual Rock Wren on the ridge to Mt Robert.

February is our first monthly start to evening meetings for the year and on 11th February, 14 people came to a 'meet and greet' evening, welcoming several newcomers, and shared photos and tales of their summer birding.

GAIL D QUAYLE

Marlborough

Over Labour and Marlborough Anniversary weekends, at the end of October, the region conducted a coastal survey of breeding birds along the Marlborough coast, covering about 100 km from Haumuri Bluffs, south of Oaro, in the south to Rarangi in the north. We based ourselves at Peketa campground near Kaikoura over Labour weekend, which allowed for some socialising in the evenings.

Our brief was to count the number of nests and mark on the map where Spotted Shag and Red-billed Gull colonies were located. We also marked the location of Variable Oystercatchers. Three colonies of Pied Shags were also counted. We counted any other coastal birds, especially Banded Dotterels, which we found tended to be more plentiful near human activity. We went out singly or in pairs and covered between eight and 12 km each day, depending on fitness, over four days in total.

Another recent activity was colour-banding Black-billed Gulls on local braided rivers. We succeeded in banding 340 chicks on the Wairau River near Rainbow Station and 125 on the Buller River, near Murchison. On December

22nd we headed for the Clarence River Mouth, and after an interesting river crossing using a dingy and two ropes, we banded 250 chicks. The Wairau chicks have white bands, whilst those from the Buller have red and the Clarence yellow.

On 1st December we were joined by a group of Kiwi Conservation Club children and parents for a morning of Black-backed Gull chick banding on the Wairau River. The children enjoyed the experience of running after the chicks and finding them in their hiding places. This was a good way to introduce the children to the concepts of banding and research whilst having fun. About 150 chicks were banded, and with the task completed we had a picnic lunch by the river.

We continue to have our monthly meetings at Marfells Beach after our Lake Grassmere counts on the third Sunday of each month.

DIANNE JOHN

Canterbury

Nick Allen's comprehensive guide *Where to Watch Birds in Canterbury* was published at the end of last year. The book covers a huge area of New Zealand from the Clarence River south to the Waitaki and Ahuriri Rivers, with the Main Divide forming the western boundary. The book will enable New Zealand birders and overseas visitors to make the most of their visit to Canterbury. It costs \$29.99 and anyone interested in obtaining a copy can telephone Jan Walker on 03 322 7187.

The year kicked off with a major bird survey of Lake Ellesmere. The Canterbury region of OSNZ has conducted surveys of waders using the Lake for many years, but this is a new initiative from DOC and WET (Waihora Ellesmere Trust) which includes ducks, geese, swans, herons, gulls and Harriers in addition to waders. It is hoped that this comprehensive survey will become an annual event to provide an accurate picture of all the birds using the lake and monitor the health of this important wetland. People from Environment Canterbury, DOC, WET, Christchurch City Council, Ngai Tahu and Selwyn District Council also took part. Over 55,000 birds were counted on the day, with rarities including Black Stilt and Gull-billed Tern among large numbers of Grey Teal, Black Swan and Pied Stilt.

Some important birds seen since November include two sightings of Weka at Bealey, east of Arthur's Pass. Two different Shore Plovers were seen at Lake Ellesmere and, in what Sheila Petch says must be "the record for the number of migratory species seen in one day at one place," old hands at the game found Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Knots, Pacific Golden Plovers, a Greenshank, a Sanderling, Red-necked Stints, Turnstones, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a Pectoral Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpipers and Wrybills at Jarvis Road, Lake Ellesmere. This provides further evidence, if it were needed, of the importance of this area. A Kookaburra was seen in the Port Hills, an extremely rare species in Canterbury. Finally, there was a nice description from a birder who observed a Crested Grebe pair, with a juvenile in attendance, building a new nest. The youngster did not contribute to the collection of nesting material but watched intently and seemed to mimic the parents' actions of pushing weed into place.

ANN SHERLOCK

Southland

Unfortunately our plans for a Southland Birding Week to be held in mid-March have had to be postponed and we hope maybe 2014 will be a better option. We are, however, continuing to collect material and photos for our own *Where to Find Birds in Southland* publication. Neil Robertson has already put together some impressive pages for the Fiordland area.

Neil also provided some interesting sightings from his work in Doubtful Sound and other Fiordland locations. Here is a selection of them: approximately 1,500 Sooty Shearwaters in the inner fiord of Doubtful Sound; Western Weka having a good breeding season on the Wilmot Pass Road between West Arm and Deep Cove; and lots of Long-tailed Cuckoos, also on the Wilmot Pass Road, with two or three birds seen flying across the road most days in January. Lloyd Esler also reports at least three of the latter species calling loudly and drowning out any other bird song on the Dart River.

Neil also reported two White-winged Black Terns from Doubtful Sound and three Yellowheads flying between Secretary and Bauza Islands on January 21st.

We completed our February wader count on the 9th and, with a good number of counters turning out, we managed to cover most of our main sites. There were totals of 2,600 Bar-tailed Godwits; 2,000 Pied Oystercatchers, 103

Lesser Knot, 74 Turnstones and singletons of Eastern Curlew and Grey-tailed Tattler. A complete lack of Pacific Golden Plovers was a bit strange.

A week earlier Rob Schuckard and Willie Cook came down band-spotting and managed to get about 10 band combinations from the head of Awarua Bay alone. Rob also spotted a black-flagged godwit, J9, which was banded and flagged at its nest site on the Nome Road in Alaska. It was seen in 2010 at Awarua Bay and not seen again until this year. Great spotting Rob!

Matt Jones was alerted to an Australian Coot at the airfield on Stewart Island back in December. We think this may be a first for Stewart Island. A Terek Sandpiper was spotted at the head of Awarua Bay, possibly the same one reported during the winter wader count.

We also had a field trip out to Tikore Island in Bluff harbour on December 19th. The island itself is dominated by breeding Black-backed Gulls and not much else except rabbits, but there is a small islet just off Tikore that we found covered in nesting Royal Spoonbills. We believe this could be Southland's largest colony. Stewart Island Shags were also nesting there in good numbers.

Finally Lloyd Esler was sent a photo of what he at first thought was an immature Pied Stilt, but on closer inspection turned out to be a Pectoral Sandpiper. The photo was taken at Otahu Flat, which is on the Clifden-Blackmount Road and is probably the furthest inland sighting in Southland.

PHIL RHODES



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REVIEW

Written in an easily-read style by award-winning Dunedin-based author Neville Peat this biography of one of New Zealand's great ornithologists is a must for anyone interested in seabirds or the history of banding. A foreword by C.J.R. Robertson explains the surprising almost 30-year gap between Lance Richdale's death and the publication of his biography. The text of the book is nicely broken up with useful illustrations, largely in black-and-white, unsurprisingly so given the era most of the photos were taken.

Lance Richdale taught or advised at Otago schools on natural science and agriculture for over thirty years, and for most of that period his pioneering work on seabirds was done in his spare time, most especially on weekends and in school holidays. Primarily he was interested in plants and bird study happened more by accident. The book details his work on the Royal Albatrosses at Taiaroa Head ascertaining details of the species' breeding biology, publishing his first paper in 1939, then on nearby colonies of Yellow-eyed Penguins. This work and that done in persuading local organisations and individuals that the birds were worth protecting has led to both their survival, and later growth to many times their size over succeeding decades.

Work on islands followed, demonstrating Lance's tenacity and doggedness to work all hours and live in sometimes terrible conditions, sometimes to the detriment of his health. The result was again pioneering work on the breeding biology of shearwaters and petrels. The

parallel story of the natural changes of his main study island, Whero, off the coast of Stewart Island, attests to the sometimes surprising turns that occur with ecosystems – in this case from one teeming with a diverse range of birds to just one species (Stewart Island Shag), and almost no plants, within short order.

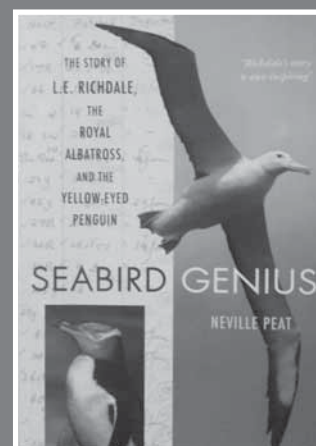
Monumental works on the breeding biology of albatrosses and penguins followed the long years in the field, these being published as substantial books. Scholarships led to visits and tours through the United States and Britain, before retirement, surprisingly away from Dunedin.

The chapter on the final years of his life in Auckland leads to my only criticism of this book, where the author dwells a little too much for my taste on mundane and maybe irrelevant things such as the price of fruit, medications taken and presents exchanged, no doubt from the diary of Lance's wife Agnes. Following this chapter is a summary of Lance's work in studying and conserving the seabirds of especially the Otago Peninsula, and what has happened there both in his lifetime and following his death, which fortunately contrasts in a positive sense to the chapter preceding it.

Rounding off the book, before references, notes and a comprehensive index, is a bibliography of Lance's written legacy compiled by C.J.R. Robertson, taking up almost five pages.

This book is a worthy tribute to a great ornithologist, and will hopefully encourage others to emulate his approaches to field study, conservation and scientific discussion.

NICK ALLEN



Seabird Genius: The story of L.E. Richdale, the Royal Albatross and the Yellow-eyed Penguin, by Neville Peat. Otago University Press (Dunedin) 2011. 288pp, softback. RRP \$45.

