

TŌREA PANGO



NELSON BRANCH BIRDS NZ. NEWSLETTER ISSUE 1 MARCH/APRIL 2022

Hi everyone. This is my first attempt to put together a newsletter for our group. On Paul G's suggestion I have given it a name- tōrea pango - the variable oystercatcher-a bird for which our region has considerable significance.

We are pretty diverse in our bird involvement, ranging from bird table watchers to serious research scientists. However, all of us share a fascination and passion for birds. It would be good if the newsletter reflects this and has something for everyone. Ideally the bulk of the content would come from you, and at the end of the letter, I have appended a list of possible ideas to get you started. I am also interested in feedback and if anyone is good at making stuff like this look pretty, I'd love some tuition. Clearly, I'm not. Cheers, Paul Bennett.

LOCAL NEWS

Summary of last meeting (March 7th)

Eight intrepid people donned their masks and braved the plague to attend the last meeting held in the Richmond Public Library on March 7th. I suspect that in the current situation numbers are, understandably, likely to be low for a while. Highlights were:

- Paul G gave us a fascinating tour through the bowels of the library to see the emergency exit. Best looking emergency exit I've seen in years.
- Potential new members Charlotte and Serge Crottaz were welcomed to the meeting
- Alison Ballance (who has joined our group recently – welcome!) showed photos of a fun but relatively unsuccessful canon netting expedition. See her report below.
- Steve Wood sent in a birding list for a recent trip to Motueka Sandspit including a Great Knot and a Whimbrel.
- Rebecca Bowater sent in some great photos of Godwits, Red Knots, Variable Oystercatchers etc. from Motueka Sandspit. Many of the migratory birds were in full breeding plumage, looking fat and plump ready for the big trip.
- Christine talked about a new predator fenced area in Waimate.
- I banged on about the newsletter!
- Paul G read a report from Paul Fisher giving an update on the Fernbird Project. 30 birds now banded! (See article below)
- Paul G also explained a little bit about atlasing and went through the atlas update sent out to members from Robin and Sandy Troy.
- Paul G is still working on a camera so we can conduct meetings on zoom.
- Cynthia McConville reports that she seems to be getting some traction with the TDC on shorebird protection. (Perhaps someone could send in some background and story of this important work??)

Snippets from the Bay (Alec Milne)

A couple of snippets from the Golden Bay outpost. We're recently back from Henderson Basin, our Rock Wren study area on the south side of Mt Cobb. This is the first breeding season in the 22 years we have monitored this site that no breeding pairs were located, the fallout from the big mast in 2019. 2 individuals have been sighted so all is not lost yet if pest control can be better applied.

Where we camp at Henderson Basin, a large tarn currently holds a family pair of, I think, Chestnut Teal, a rare Aussie vagrant. They have 5 chocolate-coloured, fluffy ducklings. I will try and get photos when we return in 2 weeks.

On the seabird scene, the first translocation of Fluttering Shearwaters to Cape Farewell Sanctuary has just been completed, with the last bird fledging yesterday. Watch this for an overview of the project; <https://vimeo.com/675284526>

Coastal Wetland Pearl Creek Project Update (Acknowledgement to TDC for this contribution)

The first stage of a wetland creation project designed to enhance the ecological value of Waimea Delta is about to begin. The multi-stage project will encompass the creation of freshwater wetland areas in a low-lying arm of the Waimea River, just east of Pearl Creek. The site is adjacent to salt marsh and downstream from the cycle bridge along Tasman's Great Taste Trail. Over the next three weeks, work will focus on creating small ponds alongside the existing channel to increase the area of open water. The work will be undertaken by experienced operators from both Downer and the Council. The Delta project is part of the Waimea Inlet Enhancement Project, funded by the Ministry for the Environment and Tasman District Council.

Project manager George Daly said the site has been selected for its huge potential for restoring habitat for marsh birds such as Matuku (Australasian Bittern). It will also provide a beneficial habitat for other species, including Inanga, Kōkopu, Eels and everything that feeds on them.

"There are limited freshwater wetland sites left that are adjacent to salt marsh, particularly in Tasman Bay. This makes this site an important opportunity for building ecological linkages. River delta systems are known worldwide to have some of the richest biodiversity," George says.

Terrestrial planting around the area is planned over winter, followed by further wetland planting in spring. Phase two will take place in early 2023. The broader work plan includes widening channels and creating new swamps and marsh to create diverse wildlife habitats and enhance habitat connectivity.



Wetlands Creation
Area near Pearl
Creek (Photo courtesy
TDC)

Birds New Zealand Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa mātātā/fernbird project

The Mātātā/Fernbird has a conservation status of at risk/ declining. Historic and ongoing habitat loss through wetland destruction is a major threat to our Mātātā/ Fernbird populations. As Fernbirds are poor flyers and inhabit low-growing vegetation and are easy prey for rats, stoats and cats, they have disappeared from large areas of Aotearoa, New Zealand. However, Mātātā are still present at Wakapuaka Sandflats Reserve, and this vital population has seen BirdsNZ initiate a Fernbird-banding project to help increase our understanding of the population and assist Nelson Council in monitoring the success of the predator-trapping programme.



Photo Courtesy Paul Griffiths

BirdsNZ are capturing and applying colour bands to the legs of Fernbirds in the Wakapuaka Sandflats Reserve to understand more about the movements, distribution and breeding patterns of these birds. The colour bands allow each bird to be individually identified in the field. This project was recently given a boost when BirdsNZ secured a Nelson City Council Environmental Grant of just over \$2000 to purchase equipment to support this programme.

To further ensure that this threatened bird species is protected, the Council has initiated a Wakapuaka Sandflats restoration and predator-control programme which will help to reduce numbers of mammalian predators such as rats and weasels, allowing Fernbirds and other native wildlife to recover and hopefully expand into new areas. Increased Fernbird numbers will help these populations become more resilient in the face of further loss of coastal habitat and changing climatic conditions.

Paul Fisher (along with several other members) is heavily involved with this project and gave an excellent report on what has been happening at the February meeting.

South Island Kokako joins the global top 25 most wanted lost species list.

Re:wild is a global organisation which aims to protect and restore the diversity of life on Earth through innovative collaborations among individuals, communities, Indigenous peoples, governments, scientists, and businesses. Re: wild has just added the South Island Kokako *Callaeas cinereus* to its top 25 list of most wanted 'lost' species. The press release says it was 'last seen in 2007' --Apparently near Reefton and the sighting was 'officially accepted'. The South Island Kokako is also one of the top 10 most wanted birds by the Search for Lost Birds, a Lost Species partnership with Re:wild, American Bird Conservancy and Bird Life International. So, get out there with those bins. It's probably about as likely as finding a black tern.



South Island kokako. Image 2006-0010-1/10 from the series 'Extinct birds of New Zealand'. Masterton. Image © Purchased 2006. © Te Papa by Paul Martinson See Te Papa website: <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/objectdetails.aspx?irn=711024&term=south+island+kokako> Courtesy NZ birds on line

Banding Oystercatchers - Report by Alison Ballance

A keen team headed out to the east end of Rabbit Island on 16 February 2022 to catch and band South Island Pied Oystercatchers. Under the expert eyes of David Melville and Rob Schuckard we deployed two cannon nets and waited as hundreds of birds began to arrive on the beach. Unfortunately, things did not go according to plan. First, that day's tide was quite a bit higher than the previous night's tide, so one net got swamped. Then the birds were spooked and took off. After a protracted period of twinkling and rearranging the flock into the right place the two cannons were fired - the photo shows the puff of sand kicked up by the one cannon that fired (the other failed) and the flock just lifting off. Net result (see what I did there): 1 SIPO caught.



RARE SIGHTINGS

Local sightings

- Great Knot and Whimbrel still on Mot sandspit in early March
- Possible breeding Chestnut teal at Henderson basin (see Alec Milne's report above)

Other sightings of national interest

Here are some of the amazing birds that have been reported across our country over the past few weeks. For a full list and details of sightings follow this

link. <https://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewforum.php?f=9&sid=453ad19d33caf81a2ee7068739a57b05>

- Brown Booby, Muriwai Gannet Colony
- Western Sandpiper- Clifton beach, Whitford
- 2 Grey-tailed Tattlers, Manawatu Estuary spit
- Possible Ruff, Miranda
- Erect-crested Penguin, Dunedin
- Sanderling, Mangawhai
- Eastern Rockhopper Penguin, South Canterbury
- Glossy Ibis - Te Waihora Lake Ellesmere
- Royal Penguin, Stewart Island

I am NOT going to entitle this 'One good tern deserves another'!

Wow! Just think that if you could afford the petrol and had the patience you could theoretically have seen the following 15 tern species in Aotearoa in February /March. Black Noddy, Bridled Tern, Black-naped Tern, Whiskered Tern, Sooty Tern, Black Tern, Grey Ternlet, White fronted Tern, Caspian Tern, Gull-billed (Australian) Tern, Little Tern, Fairy Tern, Black fronted Tern, Common Tern. And as of March 11th, a possible Grey backed tern. Plus maybe Arctic /Antarctic?



Black tern, a NZ first sighting, found and photographed by Roger Smith

SCIENCE NOTES

Splits and Lumps

If you follow I.O.C. classifications, the following species splits may be of interest and for those who keep checklists could give you a couple of armchair ticks! In particular the split of Australian Tern from Gull-billed Tern and proposed Australian Egret from Intermediate Egret will likely be of interest to many.

Tibetan Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons* is a proposed split from Siberian Sand Plover *C. mongolus*

Kermadec Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma albiclunis* is a proposed split from White-faced Storm Petrel

Australasian Egret *Ardea plumifera* is a proposed split from Asian Intermediate Egret *A. intermedia*

Australian Tern *Gelochelidon macrotarsa* is now split from the Gull-billed Tern (*G nilotica*)



Gull Billed tern? (*G nilotica*) Australian gull billed tern? (*G macrotarsa*) Good luck separating them in the field! The Ozzie /NZ version is reputedly paler and larger. (Image Courtesy NZ Birds on line)

Bald Haast's Eagle Feasted on Moa Guts (Courtesy Canterbury Museum)

New Zealand's extinct Haast's Eagle (*Hieraetus moorei*), the largest known eagle, gulped down viscera like a vulture and may even have been bald, new research suggests.



Artist's impression of Haast's Eagle. (Image: Katrina Kenny)

An international team of researchers including Canterbury Museum Senior Curator Natural History Dr Paul Scofield, compared the skull, beak and talons of Haast's Eagle held in Canterbury Museum with those of five living meat-eating birds to learn about the extinct raptor's feeding habits.

Dr Paul Scofield says the new research, published today in the peer-reviewed journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B, has given us a much clearer picture of how Haast's Eagle fed.

"Most eagles hunt prey that is smaller than them, but Haast's Eagle was going after moa that could weigh up to 200 kg – more than 13 times their own body weight. Condors also often eat animals that are much larger than them, so it makes sense that they'd have similar feeding habits.

As a result of this research, when we picture a Haast's Eagle feeding we can imagine them swooping down on a moa, grabbing on with those huge talons and using its powerful beak to deliver the killing blow. Once the moa was down, the eagle would go straight for the back of the skull and for the guts and other soft organs."

The study found that the beak and talons of Haast's Eagle were eagle-like. However, the shape of its neurocranium – the section of skull that encloses the brain, and a key indicator of feeding behaviour in birds – was most like that of the Andean Condor, a South American vulture. The Condor is a gulper, a bird that feeds on the soft internal organs of a carcass. Its similarities to the Haast's Eagle suggest the giant eagle probably also feasted on the guts and other internal organs of its prey.



Haast's Eagle compared to the size of an average man. Image: Steve Wroe

If Haast's Eagle ate like a Condor, its head and neck might also have been featherless like that of the Condor and most other vultures.

This theory is supported by a Māori drawing thought to depict a Pouākai or Haast's Eagle in the Cave of the Eagle at Craigmore Station in South Canterbury. In the drawing, the eagle's body is coloured black but its head and neck are uncoloured.

Since Haast's Eagle was formally described by Julius von Haast in 1872, scientists have debated whether it was a predator that killed other animals for food or a scavenger that ate animals that had already died.

In recent years consensus has shifted towards the eagle being a predator – one that evolved to hunt the large flightless moa that roamed Aotearoa New Zealand before humans arrived.

This new research supports the predator theory. Haast's Eagle talons were similar to those of today's eagles, in particular Australia's Wedge-tailed Eagle, although they were much larger and more powerful. These similarities suggest that, like other eagles, Haast's Eagle used its talons to hunt.

Note: The moa became extinct between 1400 and 1500 AD

(Researchers van Heteren AH, Wroe S, Tsang LR, Mitchell DR, Ross P, Ledogar JA, Attard MRG, Sustaita D, Clausen P, Scofield RP, and Sansalone G (2021) New Zealand's extinct giant raptor (*Hieraetus moorei*) killed like an eagle, ate like a condor. Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2021.1913>)

SOCIAL/EVENTS

Want a birding mate?

We're a pretty solitary lot us birders and one of the pleasures of birdwatching is the absorption and quiet contemplation without someone bending your ear. Still sometimes it's nice to have a companion or show another birder around your favourite patch. If you are willing to take another member out for a spot of birding send details to me (Paul) and I'll share them here.

Next Meeting

Meetings are on the first Monday of the month at 7.15pm in the Richmond Library. April 4th is the next meeting date.

Reminder

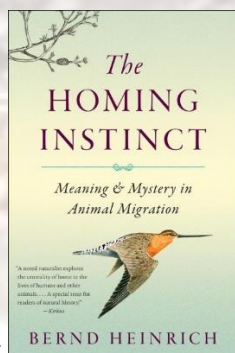
A polite reminder to all current members, if you haven't already done so, to renew your memberships and pay your subs to Birds NZ <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/>

BOOKS, PODCASTS etc.

Read any good bird books lately? Send me a review. Here's one for starters

The Homing Instinct Meaning & Mystery in Animal Migration Heinrich, Bernd, 1940

Acclaimed scientist and author Bernd Heinrich has returned every year since boyhood to a beloved patch of western Maine woods. What is the biology in humans of this deep-in-the-bones pull toward a particular place, and how is it related to animal homing? Heinrich explores the fascinating science chipping away at the mysteries of animal migration: how geese imprint true visual landscape memory; how scent trails are used by many creatures, from fish to insects to amphibians, to pinpoint their home if they are displaced from it; and how the tiniest of songbirds are equipped for solar and magnetic orienteering over vast



distances. Most movingly, Heinrich chronicles the spring return of a pair of sandhill cranes to their home pond in the Alaska tundra. With his trademark "marvellous, mind-altering" prose (Los Angeles Times), he portrays the unmistakable signs of deep psychological emotion in the newly arrived birds--and reminds us that to discount our own emotions toward home is to ignore biology itself.

Bird related books new to Tasman Libraries 2020-2022

Isolating with 'Rona'? Tasman libraries have acquired these bird related books in the last couple of years. Read any of them? --Send us a quick review

A bird a day
Couzens, Dominic author

A most remarkable creature : the hidden life and epic journey of the world's smartest birds of prey

Meiburg, Jonathan author

Greenery : journeys in springtime

Dee, Tim, 1961- author

Lost gold : ornithology of the subantarctic Auckland Islands

Miskelly, Colin editor

Mātātā : New Zealand Fernbird

Coburn, Peter, 1951- author

New Zealand seabirds : a natural history

Wilson, Kerry-Jayne author

Owls of the eastern ice : the quest to find and save the world's largest owl

Slaght, Jonathan C. author

Shearwater : a bird, an ocean, and a long way home

Morgan-Grenville, Roger author.

The bird way : a new look at how birds talk, work, play, parent, and think

Ackerman, Jennifer, 1959- author

The country camera

Ferens, Christina G. (Christina Gillian), 1953- author photographer

The glitter in the green : in search of hummingbirds

Dunn, Jon (Conservationist) author

The nightingale

Lee, Sam, 1980- author

The seafarers : a journey among birds

Rutt, Stephen author

Weka : opportunist and battler

Powlesland, Ralph author

NATIONAL NEWS

Garden Bird Survey 2021

The summary of key findings below comes from the [New Zealand Garden Bird survey](#) by Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research, which is the country's longest running citizen science project. I'm not sure if the data is scaled for the number of participants but still it could be good news for some of our more common natives.

- **Silvereye (tauhou)** The data shows a moderate increase in numbers since 2016.
- **Kererū** counts show a 102% increase over 10 years, increasing rapidly over the last 5 years (57%).
- **Pīwakawaka** (fantail) counts were up 47% over 10 years
- **Tūī** (kōkō) continue to increase nationally (30% over 10 years), and increasingly in Canterbury, Marlborough, Otago, and the West Coast.
- **Myna** There has been little change to counts nationally, but in Wellington they have shown a rapid increase – 202% over the past 10 years. compared to last year. korimako
- **Goldfinch** shows a shallow increase over 10 years that was first detected for goldfinch last year, which has increased (from 18% to 30%)
- **Starling** (tāringi) shows numbers continue to decline over both the five- and 10-year period, although their rate of decline has slowed
- **Others** Number of song thrush, house sparrows, dunnoek, chaffinch, and korimako (bellbirds) show little change over the past five years.

This year the survey runs from 25 June - 3 July. Information about bird identification can be found on the [NZ Garden Bird Survey website](#).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Have you got a bird related question? Ask it here and throw it out to the expertise amongst our 70+ members to come up with answers, some or all of which will be in the next newsletter.

I'll start us off –**Where have all the weka gone?** Yes, I know they're dead, but why? A couple of years back I couldn't walk out the door without tripping over a weka. I haven't seen a weka on our property now for 6 months. I know that these decade long fluctuations in weka population are well recorded but I haven't been able to find out the basic cause. Answers Please!

IDEAS FOR CONTRIBUTION

This is your newsletter. What's your News? Here are some starter ideas of things others might like to hear about;

Birding reports

Banding

Local hotspots

Reports from the Brook

Photos

Questions

Rarities and sightings

Welcome to new members and profiles of existing members

Bird table news

Equipment reviews

Book and App reviews

Upcoming events

Breeding successes

Scientific snippets

Atlas and e-bird information

Project reports

Plus ++++++++??????

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the following;

- Rebecca Bowater for the wonderful Kuaka photo that watermarks these pages and the Tōrea Pango photo.
- TDC Library for their list of recent bird books.
- TDC for coastal wetlands update.

- Alison and Steve for their contributions.
- NZ birds online for permission to use photos from their website.
- Canterbury Museum for permission to use parts of the article on Haast eagle.
- Roger Brent Smith for his fantastic black tern photo

CONTACTS

- Please send any items for, contributions to or feedback on this newsletter to me; Paul Bennett txt 021454520 email: thebraveryofbeingoutofrange@gmail.com
- Also <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/word/8465#audio-10198> to pronounce the name of this newsletter correctly!
- Instructions to install fernbird app. [Instructions for Installing Survey123 App and Fernbird Reporting Software.docx](#)

Cheers. Paul B.