

# BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

*Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa*

No.33 March 2022



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



■ Black Tern, Waikanae sandspit: Oscar Thomas.

## First NZ record of Black Tern

The first NZ record of a Black Tern was found with a flock of White-fronted Terns at Waikanae sandspit on 14 January by Elizabeth Taylor. She recognised it was a smaller different species, but did not know which it was so she posted a 'back of the camera' image of the bird to Facebook a few days later asking if anyone knew what it was. The next day Oscar Thomas found the bird again at the same site and suggested that it was a Black Tern. Others viewed his high resolution photos online and concurred with his suggested identification. The same bird in non-breeding plumage was later found on rocks by Plimmerton fire station and on rocks in Pukerua Bay into early February. The appearance of the bird suggested it was the Eurasian nominate subspecies *niger* rather than the American subspecies *surinamensis*.

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## COVER IMAGE

Sooty Tern at Plimmerton, 7th February. Photo by Michael Szabo.



## First NZ record of a Black-naped Tern and of a live Bridled Tern

The first NZ record of a Black-naped Tern was found at the Muriwai gannet colony on 13/2 by Hayden Pye, but unfortunately the bird succumbed overnight (top photo/Hayden Pye). The same day the first NZ live record of a Bridled Tern was found at Manganui Bluff Reserve on 90 Mile Beach by Dave Howes and Scott Brooks (lower photo/David Howes). The only previous NZ record of a Bridled Tern was a dead bird found at New Brighton Beach by Peter Langlands in November 1987.





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# From the President's Desk

I've had a full summer of birding. Although it was good to catch up with the godwits at Omaha and get some good views of NI Brown Kiwi at Tawharanui Regional Park, I think my highlight was watching multiple broods of Australian Coot in among the reeds at Tomahawk Lagoon just over the hill from home.

## Council Meeting

Council met in December by video and discussed how to ensure that the Society is organised and proactively implementing the Government regulations and notices as NZ responds to Covid. We have updated the Conference Registration form to explicitly state the Society's expectations of registrants. Council also agreed on the need for a Code of Conduct for the Society to set out our expectations as a Society in providing a safe inclusive and harassment free environment at all our events and activities. This has been signed off and has been added to the Society Manual on our website (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Code-of-Conduct.pdf>)

## Regional Representative Meeting

I wish to acknowledge the leadership of Ian McLean in setting up a video meeting with Regional Representatives to follow on from the Thames Conference. This is important to ensure that matters arising from the annual Regional Representative (RR) meeting held at the Conference are addressed and not left to languish for a year. In an hour and a half in late January the RRs had a very good conversation and addressed the following matters (and more): updating the Regional Recorder role descriptor and how to get more consistency out of this role around the country; the usefulness of video conferencing for Society business and reaching out to remote members; and the impacts of vehicles on beaches and beach-using birds.

Most RRs present had one or more anecdote of people disregarding the welfare of birds while out on beaches. Hawke's Bay RR Bernie Kelly agreed to receive reports from around the county and compile them into a list as a first step in developing a Society response. All in all it was an enjoyable meeting.

## Australasian Ornithological Conference 2022

This was held online in the second week of February under the very capable leadership of Brendan Dunphy and his team out of Auckland University. There were some 220 registrations from as far away as Perth! The conference was made up of four concurrent streams with a strong focus on seabird ecology, diseases, and evolution of song. Being online means that if you had a clash, the recorded talks remain online for a month so they can be reviewed, which is an excellent way to catch up on missed talks and to review the discussion. Birds New Zealand offered student prizes for best presentation and runner up for both oral and poster categories. Natalie Forsdick, Ian Armitage, Brendan Dunphy, Colin Miskelly, Mel Galbraith and I completed the judging. We found it a difficult exercise because of the quality of the presentations. We were pleased to award the following:

- \* Winner for Oral presentation: Jacinta Humphrey: Avoid, adapt or exploit: Modelling avian species responses to housing and canopy tree cover.
- \* Winner for Poster presentation: Rosie Gerollemou: Does backyard rat trapping improve bird nesting success?
- \* Runner-up for poster presentation: Laura Duntsch: Inbreeding and inbreeding depression in the threatened Aotearoa New Zealand Hihi.
- \* Runner-up for oral presentation: Wednesday Davis: Multi-species foraging associations: Investigating the fine scale behaviours of marine megafauna

I would like to thank very much the local organising committee: Ian McLean, Trina Smith, Mel Galbraith, Natalie Forsdick and Brendan Dunphy who, along with the University of Auckland

production team of Amanda Wallace and Leanne Olsen, presented a relaxed, professional and very entertaining Conference. The next AOC was announced to be in Brisbane in 2023.

## NZ Bird Atlas

As we move into the fourth year of the NZ Bird Atlas the focus is shifting towards remote squares that are more difficult to reach. The recent contribution of DOC Tier One Environmental Monitoring data is a significant contribution to this and more recently the Society has entered into an agreement with Marlborough Wines Ltd who trade as Toi toi Wines. Toi Toi Wines will support travel to remote squares and promote the NZ Bird Atlas to their customers. This is welcome support to make this part of the Atlas project a success. The details of how and where to target this resource will be discussed between the Wildlife Management International staff and RRs to get the best coverage.

## Goodness Kitchen

For the last five years we have enjoyed a sponsorship relationship with Goodness Kitchen which has supported the work of the NZ Bird Atlas, particularly the development of the Atlas methodology in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, government agencies and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. It has also enabled updating the NZ Bird Atlas eBird portal with content and material. Last year I was advised that as a result of internal changes, Goodness Kitchen would not renew their sponsorship. While this news was disappointing, Goodness Kitchen's support over the last five years has enabled a lot of very good work to be done by the Society and I'm grateful for their support and commitment.

## Website updated

The Society's website is our face to the world. It provides access to our journals and national projects as well as our philosophies and practices. It is important that it is as up-to-date and user-friendly as we can make it. Over the past six months Ian Armitage, Roger Sharp, and Ingrid Hutzler have led the work transferring our *Notornis* archive, the Unusual Bird Report, and the NZ Beach Patrol data base to an up-to-date platform. This involved a lot of user testing and liaison with our contractors, Xequals of Wellington. Early in the New Year the databases and associated pages were transferred over and went live. At the same time, we have updated the front page by adding more prominent 'Join' and 'Donate' buttons. As an additional project to make the site more complete, Ian is also taking the whole *Notornis* files published between 1950 and 1989 and has commenced a process of splitting all the papers and short notes into individual, sortable files (from the whole volumes). Once complete, individual papers and short notes will be incorporated into the new *Notornis* database. This will make the pre-1989 papers and short notes more accessible as scientific references than they are presently.

## 2022 Annual Conference

Organising of the 2022 NZ Bird Conference and the Annual General Meeting of the Society continues to be planned for Queens Birthday weekend. As in previous years we seek to make this the premier event for the communication of research findings about birds in New Zealand. We remain committed to holding a safe conference and so will be watching events to ensure that we can do this. I encourage all members to register so we can plan to make this Conference a success.

Finally, the next edition of *Birds New Zealand* will have four more pages than previous editions. This is made possible because of the regular advertising placed by Heritage Expeditions and Swarovski Optics, which means there will be more space to bring you more stories about birds and birding in New Zealand.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT

## New Zealand Bird Conference and Birds NZ AGM 2022

The 2022 Conference and AGM will be held in Christchurch on Queen's Birthday weekend (4-5 June). All events and meals to be at Haere Roa, University of Canterbury Students' Association building, 90 Ilam Road. Online registration is now open here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/2022-conference-details/>

3 June 2022 (Friday)

1800-1930 Registration

4 June 2022 (Saturday)

0800-0900 Registration

0900-1700 Scientific Day One

1900 Informal Dinner

6 June 2022 (Sunday)

0800-0900 Registration

0900-1530 Scientific Day Two

1530-1700 Awards and AGM

1900 Conference Dinner

1 June 2022 (Monday) Planned field trips:

Christchurch earthquake sites - impact on habitat and birdlife (all day).

Canterbury Museum bird collection - "behind the scenes" tour (morning).

Banding near Christchurch or Banks Peninsula.

Atlassing - covering a square, or a few in small teams.

Ashley & Pegasus Bay wetlands - birding the coast/local projects (all day).

## 2022 Membership Renewals

Any members who have not yet paid their 2022 membership are asked to do so as soon as possible. This year there has been a modest increase from \$70 to \$80 for ordinary members, from \$35 to \$40 for students, and it is \$20 for a family membership (for someone living in a household with an ordinary, life, or fellow member - family members do not receive separate copies of publications). You can renew via the website, either by direct debit payment or credit card: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount>

Please pay promptly as we depend on your subscription to continue our work supporting and encouraging the study and enjoyment of New Zealand's birds. New members can join on any date with the next annual renewal due as close as possible to one calendar year after that date. If we do not have your current email address please notify the Membership Secretary what it is ([membership@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:membership@birdsnz.org.nz)).

## Nominations for Regional Representatives 2023

Each Regional Representative (RR) serves for a one year term, starting 1st January, although incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms. Nominations for each region close with the secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040 or [secretary@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@birdsnz.org.nz)) on 31st July 2022. 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 financial member of the Society. If the secretary receives more than one valid nomination from a given region, a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of that region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2023 year. As per the Constitution, where practicable each region shall hold an annual meeting before 31st March where an annual report of the region's activities and a financial statement for the previous year are presented to the members. Lynne Anderson, Secretary, P.O. Box 834, Nelson: [secretary@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@birdsnz.org.nz)

## Call for applications to the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Applications open on 1st April 2022 and must be received by 15th June 2022. Applications will be accepted from individuals, students, researchers within universities, or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of NZ birds or their environment. The applicant must be a current member of Birds New Zealand, living in NZ, and the project carried out in NZ or its outlying islands (e.g. Subantarctic Islands). Funding ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 may be awarded. This fund provides financial assistance for logistics and purchase of equipment and consumables. It does not fund salaries or wages. For smaller projects refer to the Society's Projects Assistance Fund. Payments will be funded retrospective (either after submission of the interim or final project report) and are for a 12-month period only. In the event of financial hardship, exemptions may be made after prior consultation.

Preference will be given to applications that will: involve research into native species; involve research with a measurable outcome and a commitment to have results published; involve people learning as well as being involved; demonstrate intent to publish at least part of the funded work in the Society's journal, *Notornis*; lead to results that will clearly be of benefit to the conservation of NZ birds; involve research on "Preferred Student Research Topics" (for student research projects). Applications must be received by 15th June 2022 on the official application form on the Society's website (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/>) and submitted as a single PDF file. For queries, please contact Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: [eo@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@birdsnz.org.nz)

## eBird name changes

In August each year, *eBird* updates its global bird taxonomy (new species, splits, lumps, name changes etc). Birds New Zealand has been invited to suggest potential name changes for NZ birds and so would like to canvass opinion among members about your suggestions for changing the NZ names in *eBird* to something more familiar, or less confusing. Proposals so far include Southern Black-backed Gull rather than South Black-backed Gull, Australasian Shoveler rather than Australian Shoveler, and Silver Gull (Red-billed) reverting to Red-billed Gull. Please note some/ most requests so far will align with those in common usage, and hence with the Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, a revised version of which is due out in the next few months. Please send your comments to: [recorder.ot@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:recorder.ot@birdsnz.org.nz)

## 2022 Garden Bird Survey

Birds New Zealand members are once again asked to contribute to the annual Garden Bird Survey. Just choose any day between 25th June and 3rd July 2022 and spend an hour watching the birds in your garden. For each species, record the highest number you see or hear at any one time. The survey is led by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research and the instructions are here: <https://gardenbirdssurvey.landcareresearch.co.nz/>

## New NZ Big Year record

David Howes, Harry Boorman, and Scott Brooks set out to see as many different bird species as possible in New Zealand during 2021. David Howes ended his 'Big Year' with a total of 250 bird species, a handful more than Harry Boorman's final tally of 245 species. By doing so, David set a new 'NZ Big Year' record. Scott Brooks ended his 2021 'Big Year' on 220 species, which was the same total number as the previous record holder, Brent Stephenson, who saw 220 species in 2014. All three of them submitted their sightings as part of their *eBird* checklists to the NZ Bird Atlas project, and where appropriate, submitted Unusual Bird Reports to the RAC.



■ Jacques de Satge with Banded Rail.

## Banded Rail mangrove forest use

The removal of large areas of mangroves has sparked public debate, not least because of the ecological uncertainties surrounding this management approach. Of particular concern is understanding the role that mangrove forests play as habitats, including their importance to native birds. Thus, elucidating mangrove-avifauna relationships is key to more holistic mangrove management strategies.

An estimated 80-90% of Aotearoa New Zealand's Moho Pererū or Banded Rail population is found within estuaries in the upper North Island, primarily in and around saltmarsh-mangrove habitats. Limited evidence suggests that mangrove habitats are important foraging grounds for Banded Rails, but this ecological relationship is poorly understood.

To address Aotearoa's mangrove-avifauna knowledge gap, our research project made use of multiple techniques over several field seasons to shed light on the habits and habitat use of Moho Pererū in estuarine environments. As Banded Rails are ground foragers, they leave distinguishable footprints in their wake in muddy substrates. These footprints represent valuable data points, providing insight into their habitat use and selection patterns.

Over the course of our study, we gathered footprint and micro-scale environment data from almost 450 quadrats over more than 400,000 square-metres of mangrove forest in two estuaries. While we are still analysing these data, initial results indicate that Banded Rails footprints are found with significantly higher frequency within mangroves stands than along their seaward edges or in adjacent unvegetated habitats (such as mudflats).

Ongoing analyses seek to answer questions around mangrove selection at highly localised scales, to determine whether Banded Rails show preferences for mangrove patches based on their density, structure, size, or prey availability.

While footprint surveys are highly practical, they are limited to certain substrates, habitats, tidal cycles, and times of day. To address these shortcomings, we teamed up with DOC to capture, GPS-tag, and track six Banded Rails in Mangawhai Estuary in 2020 and 2021. We designed custom-built double-door cage traps and an adjustable GPS backpack system weighing less than six grams. Despite Covid 19 interruptions, we collected thousands of GPS locations over two two-week periods, showing Banded Rail movement in 20-minute intervals. Initial analyses indicate that Banded Rails spend their diurnal hours foraging within mangrove stands, returning to saltmarsh to roost for the night or at high tide peaks.

However, several birds were observed to roost in mangrove stands overnight on occasion. Preliminary analyses indicate home range sizes of circa 1.6 hectares, although this varies by location and individual. Upcoming analyses include modelling individual habitat selection and the interactions of individuals using the same mangrove stands at the same time.

JACQUES DE SATGE, PhD STUDENT, MASSEY UNIVERSITY



■ Kākāpō: Lara Shepherd.

## Leveraging genomics for distribution and fitness monitoring of Kākāpō and Takahē

Given that the current habitat of both Kākāpō and Takahē is limited to managed predator-free territories that have nearly reached capacity, expansion to their original habitat will require detailed monitoring of their population development, reproduction success, and resilience to thus far circumvent threats such as predation and anthropogenic impacts. Together with the Kākāpō/Takahē Recovery Teams, we leveraged environmental DNA (eDNA) research as a cost-efficient, non-invasive and scalable monitoring approach to obtain insights into both, distribution and genetic diversity, of the two species.

eDNA monitoring is a powerful approach to determine the presence of a species due to detection of its DNA in environmental samples such as water, soil, or faeces. To benchmark the sensitivity of this approach for Kākāpō detection, we collected soil samples at various distances from Kākāpō hotspots on Whenua Hou in 2019. By examining a tiny DNA region, we were able to determine the island's biodiversity just from these soil samples. We detected various bird species, including Kākāriki, Ruru, Kākā, Pīwakawaka and Tuī, and a native mammal species (Lesser Short-tailed Bat). At many locations, we also found Kākāpō DNA, showing us that a soil-based eDNA approach is feasible for monitoring this iconic parrot species.

We then used soil samples that contained Kākāpō DNA to extract as much species-specific DNA as possible – more than just a tiny DNA region, but ideally the entire genome of the species! To do so, we used a revolutionary technique by combining selective real-time nanopore sequencing with the Kākāpō high-quality reference genome to enrich for Kākāpō DNA – and not sequence the DNA of all the dominant bacteria, fungi and other species in the soil. This approach and targeted bioinformatic analyses allowed us to identify the presence of Kākāpō individuals.

Thanks to the Recovery Team's extensive metadata, we were then able to confirm that we had indeed correctly predicted the presence of an individual Kākāpō. For example, we could determine just based on soil samples that one of the Kākāpō mating structures we had sampled belonged to Merv, one of our male Kākāpō on the island. This is an exciting finding since it shows that we are able to retrieve more information than just species presence from environmental samples; in the long term, we will develop this approach further to assess the genetic diversity and fitness of any species at risk from environmental samples.

We also sampled Takahē faeces in the remote Murchison Mountains in 2020. We firstly confirmed that we could detect Takahē DNA in the faeces and then repeated the approach of extracting species-specific DNA. Please stay tuned for these results by following Lara's research (<https://www.lara-urban.com/>). We thank Birds New Zealand for providing us with a generous research grant that has allowed us to initiate non-invasive and efficient eDNA monitoring of both Kākāpō and Takahē.

LARA URBAN & THE KAKAPO/TAKAHE RECOVERY TEAMS





## Lost Gold wins Whitley Award

*Lost Gold*, the first book to examine the ornithology of the subantarctic Auckland Islands, won the Science and Conservation category of the prestigious Whitley Awards for zoological literature in November 2021. Presented annually by the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, the Whitley Awards recognise the best publications that profile the unique wildlife of the Australasian region. Covid prevented the awards from being presented in-person and so the announcement was made via the Birds New Zealand website and social media.

*Lost Gold: Ornithology of the subantarctic Auckland Islands*, published in 2020 by Te Papa Press in collaboration with Birds New Zealand, is a special book-format issue of Birds New Zealand's journal *Notornis*. Edited by *Notornis* editor Craig Symes and Birds New Zealand Council Member and Curator Vertebrates at Te Papa, Colin Miskelly, the book is devoted to the birds of Maukahuka/Motu Maha the Auckland Islands, the largest and biologically most diverse island group in the NZ subantarctic region.

The book's 19 chapters were written by leading ornithologists, covering the history of ornithological discovery; biogeography; impacts of introduced mammals and people; and population, ecological and genetic studies of various endemic or otherwise notable birds there including Auckland Island Snipe, White-headed Petrel, and several albatross species.

Birds New Zealand President Bruce McKinlay said the Society was proud to commission *Lost Gold* as a part of its quarterly scientific journal *Notornis*. "It is a core role of the Society to produce quality ornithological science – the Whitley Award to *Lost Gold* is an acknowledgement of that commitment and is greatly appreciated by the Society."

Tumu Whakarae Chief Executive of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Courtney Johnston, congratulated editors Colin Miskelly and Craig Symes, as well as all the ornithologists who contributed: "This unique book and research output is a great example of the work our curators do every day in partnership with other experts outside the museum."

Co-editor Colin Miskelly said it was an enormous honour to have their work recognised by their many peers in the field of zoological study and literature across Australasia. "This was completely unexpected. The large team involved in researching and producing the book are thrilled to have their mahi honoured in this way."

All Birds New Zealand members received a free copy of *Lost Gold* in 2020. It is also on sale for \$55 at: <https://tepapastore.co.nz/collections/nz-books/products/lost-gold>



## NZ Fairy Tern breeding success

NZ Fairy Tern/Tara Iti have had a successful 2021- 2022 breeding season. The Department of Conservation reports that 15 chicks hatched of which eight fledged at Mangawhai and Papakanui. Three captive-bred juveniles were released from a specially built aviary into the wild at Te Ārai, following on from work last season where one juvenile was reared and released. The total adult population is fewer than 40 individuals.

A new genetic study comparing the NZ Fairy Tern (*S. n. davisae*) population to the larger breeding populations in Australia (*S. n. nereis*) and New Caledonia (*S. n. exsul*) has found they are genetically distinct with a different fixed haplotype restricted to NZ and New Caledonia, and that the estimated gene flow was low to zero, indicating no interbreeding between the populations. The study, by Marlene Baling and Dianne Brunton of University of Auckland and Unitec Institute of Technology, was published in the journal *Ibis* in January.

## Ailsa and Ted McGilvary-Howard QSMs

Birds New Zealand members Ailsa and Ted McGilvary-Howard, and William Eccles Fleury (Bill), received Queen's Service Medals in the 2022 New Year's honours list. Minister of Conservation Hon. Kiri Allan said, "There were some incredible conservation s/heroes honoured through this year's New Year's honours – a special one for me was seeing Ted and Ailsa from Kaikoura who hosted me earlier this year acknowledged for their conservation efforts to save Banded Dotterel!"

## Fisheries bycatch – there's an app for that!

Ever wondered which birds are most susceptible to recreational fishing bycatch? The FALCON Bird Banding Database holds 295 records of 28 species that indicate fisher interactions – of course, these are limited to banded birds. The Department of Conservation has launched an app to both view and enter accidental bycatch of any marine protected species. Download the 'Protected Species Catch' app on your mobile phone from either Google Play or the Apple Store. No login required, no personal information is collected, and it is simple to use. The app can be used by anyone and allows anonymous reporting of bycatch, or, for example, if you find a bird with a hook in its mouth or entangled in fishing line. You can explore the data using graphs and maps here: <https://docnewzealand.shinyapps.io/protectedspeciescatch/>  
Please direct any queries to: [csp@doc.govt.nz](mailto:csp@doc.govt.nz)

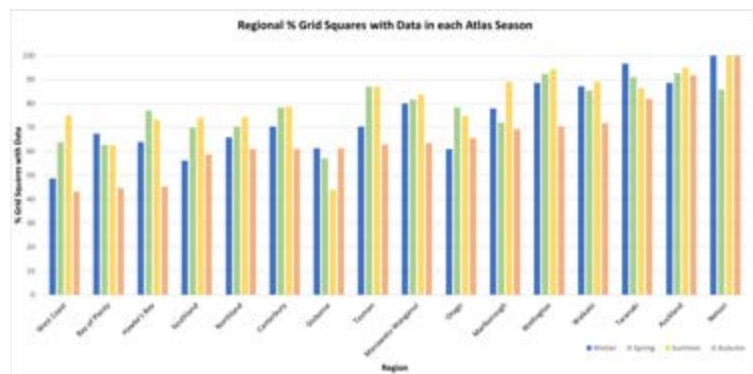
## New Director-General of the DOC

Penny Nelson has been appointed as the new Director-General of the Department of Conservation (DOC). She previously held the roles of Deputy Director-General Biosecurity NZ at the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), Deputy Director-General Policy and Trade (MPI), and Deputy Secretary, Environmental Performance, Innovation and Climate at the Ministry for the Environment.

She was also previously Executive Director of the Sustainable Business Council, Regional Policy Manager DairyNZ, and Landcare Research Manaaki Whenua Science Leader. She has a Master of Science in Resource Management (Honours) from Lincoln University and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from the University of Otago. She is the first woman appointed to the role of Director-General of DOC, taking over from Lou Sanson in November.



▲ Birders flocked to see a female Northern Pintail at Tip Lagoon in Invercargill, October 2020.



▲ Figure 1: Percentage of Atlas grid squares with data in each season.

# Filling gaps in the NZ Bird Atlas

We are approaching the end of the third year of data collection for the NZ Bird Atlas project in early June. As always, we are over the moon with how the project continues to progress across Aotearoa. Over 71,000 effort hours have gone into the project so far (nearly 3,000 days' worth!), comprising over 215,000 checklists submitted by over 1,100 Atlasers. Only 246 grid squares (7.6% of 3,232) don't yet have any data in them, so that is priority. We continue to be heartened by how all of these numbers continue to grow, particularly through the ever-changing Covid situation. Entering data across the entire Atlas grid, to fill in all of the Atlas squares, remains one of the highest priorities for us all and continues to be a challenge that excites us. Thank you as always for putting in your time and effort to help us work towards gathering one of the most impressive national Atlas datasets. We can't do it without your help!

## Grid Square Coverage

To reach total grid square coverage, we will all need to increase our focus as an Atlasing community. For that we will need to continue to engage and support each other across regions, to reach the target of – not only 100% Atlas grid squares with data – but also in our attempts to document all of the possible species within each square, across all four seasons. Figure 1 shows that some regions are in need of effort into a number of their grid squares, sometimes across all four seasons.

And as we enter our third Autumn season, Figure 2 shows the key areas that need greater spatial coverage of data input over the entire country, with the West Coast, Hawke's Bay, and Bay of Plenty all below 50% grid squares with data. This is due to the previous two Autumn seasons being most affected by historic lockdowns, and so we'll need to push out further this Autumn to make up for that, while of course adhering to Covid regulations. With that in mind, we're not only going to need cross regional communication and support, but also the effective use of the specialised tools available both within the Atlas *eBird* portal itself, as well as a few additional tools the Atlas team have generated.

By far the most powerful interactive tool is the *Atlas Effort Map*, which helps to provide near up-to-the-hour information on effort hours, both diurnal and nocturnal, as well as the volume of checklists, and the species tally for each individual square, through each of the four seasons. Looking at all four of the categories available in the dropdown menu can render a very different picture when looking at the same spot, helping to tease out areas, or times (think nocturnal surveys), that need more focus in certain squares.

The *Interactive Species Maps* also help with targeted Atlasing,

particularly for conspicuous and widespread species, helping to tease out habitats and areas that may not have been surveyed yet, within certain grid squares. You can use whichever species you like for whatever habitat you wish to discern effort for!

*Grid Square Summary* pages give key details on the number of checklists, effort hours (both diurnal and nocturnal) for each season, as well as the project as a whole within the square. Each summary page records the species list for that grid square, detailing all the species detected in that square so far.

The *KML Mapping Files* specifically show the individual location of every checklist entered so far in the Atlas project. They can be opened up in mapping programmes such as Google Earth, Maps.Me, MapToaster, and/or QGIS. They are available for download from the portal, under the 'Supporting Materials' section. While we will caution that as soon as these are produced, they can quickly become 'out-of-date' as they are not updated until the end of that current season, they can be used as a useful guide to tailor your more focused Atlasing, particularly when used alongside the other tools described here.

## Rarities and Unusual Birds

There have been some fantastic rare birds documented across Aotearoa already this year. Well done to all those who have not only put in the hard yards to find a rarity, but also for documenting them as part of a complete checklist, with accurate abundances for all species seen, via *eBird* into the NZ Bird Atlas *eBird* portal. This goes a long way to continue gathering valuable long-term, multi-generational datasets to help document not only resident, but also vagrant species.

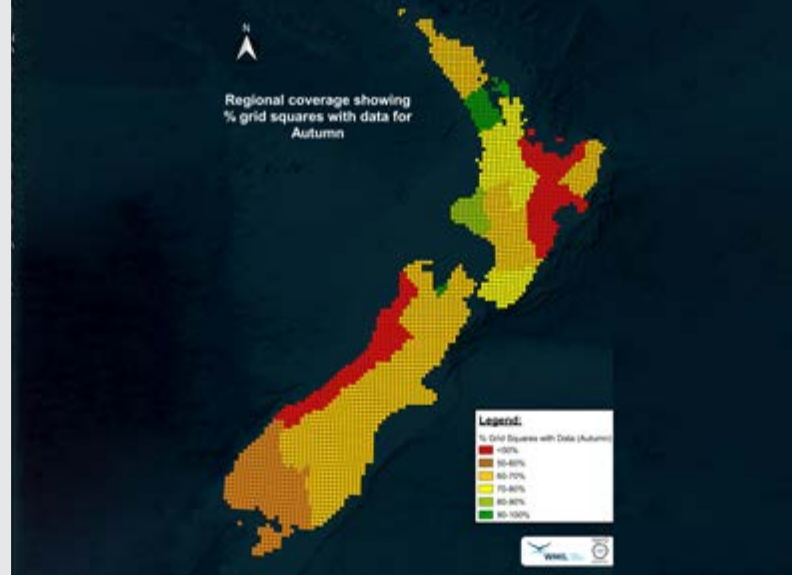
It's worth remembering what constitutes a rarity and what the best practices are for documenting rarities in New Zealand. A species is considered to be rare in New Zealand if it is seen beyond its known range, or is known to have a very small population, often fragmented and isolated in managed reserves or certain habitats. Rare species, particularly seabirds, can also be found washed-up onshore around the NZ coast. Over the years Birds New Zealand (Ornithological Society of New Zealand) has amassed an ever-changing list of rare and reportable species. This list is based on the 1999-2004 NZ Bird Atlas (2007) as well as the Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand (2010) and is under constant review by the Records Appraisal Committee. Reportable species are always being added, and all rare reported birds can be seen on the Unusual Bird Report database.

One of the key parts of finding a rare bird is documenting it. This not only allows that unique bird report to be appreciated and possibly found by others, but also to help gather good quality data for the Atlas. These rare birds may only visit once or twice,





▲ Figure 3: Nocturnal Atlas effort.



▲ Figure 2: Autumn grid square percentage effort.

but your record could be the first of what then turns out to be a new coloniser. Species we are now well-accustomed to that were once rare bird sightings, such as the first record of Black-fronted Dotterel in 1955 (Brathwaite 1955), and the first record of a Welcome Swallow from Stewart Island in 1954 (Sansom 1954). When documenting a rarity or a large group of birds, you may well 'trigger' the regional filter in *eBird*. This means it is unexpected for that region, or indeed the time of year. In these instances, we encourage you to provide as much detail as you can when you trigger the filter either when submitting via the app or online. Additionally, we encourage submitting an Unusual Bird Report (UBR) to the Society's Records Appraisal Committee (RAC) where relevant; you can see the list of reportable species on the Birds New Zealand website.

### Nocturnal Effort

While the majority of birding is biased towards daylight hours, as we start to approach the Autumn months we'd encourage the community to start going out after dark in grid squares in search of nocturnal species. Remember that negative data is still good data. If you go out Atlasing at night in the hope of detecting nocturnal species such as owls, and even after half an hour don't detect any species at all, please still submit those lists with a checklist comment of 'No species detected'. While it may be a bit disheartening remember that you are helping show where species are not as abundant or present at all. This is valuable data and as you can see from the Figure 3, we need to really increase nocturnal effort across the country.

### Atlas Challenges

Monthly Atlas challenges have continued, and we've been blown away by the efforts some of you are going to each month. We thank the amazing folks at Metalbird NZ, Potton and Burton publishing, and Birds of the World who have kindly donated prizes recently. We hope you continue to enjoy trying to qualify for them each month and of course congratulations again to Phil Battley, David Howes, and Jim Norris for your incredible Atlasing efforts! Notably, we should also congratulate Dawn Palmer for winning the November 2021 Global *eBird* challenge. Dawn certainly put Aotearoa on the birding map again, this being the second time an Atlaser here has won the global challenge with Cathy Mitchell winning it back in September 2020. This serves to illustrate the wider value of Atlasing and submitting to *eBird* on a global scale. We are all gathering immensely valuable data through local to global scales that is vital to furthering ornithological conservation and research efforts.

### Research Value

There are a growing number of scientific researchers and organisations that are seeing the value of *eBird* data and are increasingly incorporating it into their research publications globally. Each year the number of scientific journals across the world that utilise *eBird* data is growing, and this is something that we are seeing in Aotearoa too. With that in mind, we of course are excited to see how many different avenues the Atlas dataset will be used to inform conservation research, policy and management now and many years in the future.

However, we would also like to remind members who are involved with bird research that there is immense value in you submitting your data to the Atlas dataset via *eBird*, or indeed submitting data while you are undertaking your research. This is particularly true when undertaking research in harder to reach spots, ie, backcountry areas or remote islands. Even submitting 5-minute counts while having your meal or a cup of tea, or starting a checklist to gather bird observations as you walk to your study site can help gather some immensely valuable data. This will not only help us in our goal to fill all 3,232 grid squares with data, but also to provide long-term data in these remote areas and beyond, that we know is of huge value to avoid shifting baseline syndrome. If you have large bird count datasets, or other datasets sitting in a notebook, or on a hard drive gathering dust, and don't know how to get it together to enter to the Atlas portal via *eBird*, please just sing out to the Atlas team. We are more than happy to help you, having supported the DOC Tier 1 team in uploading their national bird counts.

### Atlas Tools

Overall, we encourage using all of the tools and tips discussed above in tandem, to help tease out those gaps in your local and regional squares or even squares further afield. If you are struggling to master these tools, want further information, or want us to talk at your regional meetings, please don't hesitate to send the Atlas team an email ([nzbirdatlas@wmail.co.nz](mailto:nzbirdatlas@wmail.co.nz)). We'd be happy to talk you through them and answer any questions or deliver a presentation on your region's Atlasing progress.

Again, we wish to say how appreciative we are of the unbelievable amount of time and effort the community have put in since the Atlas began nearly three years ago. We hope to ensure that all of you continue to enjoy the final stages of the Atlas project and we are driven to support all of you as we all work to achieve total coverage and gathering data that is as scientifically valuable as possible, while enjoying watching birds in the wild!

THE NZ BIRD ATLAS TEAM



▲ Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguin: Mike Ashbee.



▲ Mohua/Yellowhead: Mike Ashbee.

# Beyond Fiordland

Article by Richard Schofield

Despite a 6am start, drizzle, and low cloud, the discomforts of the previous day were forgotten as we left the shelter of North East Harbour and hit the open sea. We'd spent 36 rocky hours steaming down from Bluff to Campbell Island on board *MV Spirit of Enderby*, and it was a welcome relief to be out of the swell. Apparently, it rains on 325 days a year on Campbell Island, so the weather was not a surprise, but it failed to dampen the enthusiasm as the Zodiacs bounced to the harbour mouth and out into the Southern Ocean before we hit the lee of the cliffs, and calmer water.

Soon Campbell Albatross started to appear, with smaller groups at first (the suburbs), scattered around the cliffs with numerous well-grown young on their upturned bucket nests, then increasing in density as we approached the city centre, and thousands of birds, sitting, courting, chattering, coming and going – a hive of activity. But it was not just the albatross; there was a constant accompaniment of Antarctic Terns, and numerous Campbell Island Shags, including a couple of large rafts, found only on this island; a school of porpoising Eastern Rockhopper Penguins heading to where Cape Petrels, terns and shags had already found breakfast; and overhead a few Light-mantled Sooty Albatross – surely the most elegant members of the family – and a handful of Grey-headed Albatross.

I had previously visited Campbell Island in 2008, just two years after it was declared pest-free. Both Campbell Island Snipe and Teal were present on the island then, but I failed to see either; this time the snipe were heard calling from practically the whole length of the Col-Lyall Boardwalk, and I was fortunate to see one which flew up from alongside the boardwalk at close range. While not exactly numerous, the teal were fairly easy to see, as the less energetic of us spent the latter half of the morning cruising the upper end of the harbour.

Our first day at the Auckland Islands was spent in Carnley Harbour, with a visit to the Grafton wreck site, 158 years to the day since the ship foundered. Here there were few birds at first, apart from a persistent Bellbird, sounding considerably different from the mainland birds; but as we explored, inquisitive Tui and NZ Tomtit arrived to check us out. Later in the day, there was again a choice of activity – a Zodiac cruise through Victoria Passage and out to the west coast, or a stiff climb to view the White-capped Albatross colony at South West Cape.

It was not as dense as the Campbell Albatross colony, due to the presence of pigs, but on an almost windless and sunny afternoon we were surrounded by the chattering of the White-caps, interspersed by the mournful wailing of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross. Sailing up the east coast in the evening was





▲ Campbell Island Subantarctic Snipe: Mary-Ann Lea/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Grey-headed and Campbell Albatross group: John Kyngdon.



▲ Campbell Island Shag pair: John Kyngdon.



▲ Light-mantled Sooty Albatross: Michael Szabo.

almost surreal as flocks of Antarctic Prions flew across the bow in the orange mist.

Enderby Island, at the northern end of the Auckland Islands group, is renowned for its wildlife, being pest-free. I noticed changes here also, with more vegetation than on my previous visit – particularly relevant to those on the coastal walk. Hoiho/ Yellow-eyed Penguins, declining on the mainland, are obviously thriving here with over 50 seen and heard along the coastline, to-ing and fro-ing throughout the day. The NZ Sea Lion is apparently in decline here, but there were still hundreds of them greeting our arrival at Sandy Bay.

We were instructed not to approach wildlife closer than ten metres, but the wildlife does not necessarily reciprocate; the numerous sea lions around most of the island were potentially aggressive, while the Auckland Island Shags walking to within a couple of metres at our lunch stop were merely inquisitive. We were treated to more Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, performing their duet flights along the clifftops, Southern Royal Albatross nesting just metres from the boardwalk, and the larger local exilis subspecies of Banded Dotterel at Derrycastle Reef and in the centre of the island.

The next day we arrived at The Snares by 8am after another overnight sailing. The long daylight hours at this latitude still

allowed for sea-watching on the move – Mottled Petrels and diving-petrels, along with numerous albatross. It was looking good for a Zodiac cruise – cloudless skies and negligible wind. The scheduled two hour trip turned into three hours as the birdlife continued to wow: regiments of Snares Crested Penguins commuting to the sea down a rock slope worn smooth over the years, timing their entry to and exit from the sea to coincide with the swell; swarms of Fairy Prions and Cape Petrels at the aptly named Daption Rocks; more penguins in the water, washing after their duties on land, eyeing us with curiosity; and the surprisingly obvious black NZ Tomtits, popping up in the coastal vegetation.

I think everyone got to see the endemic Snares Fernbird, and at least one Snares Island Subantarctic Snipe was heard, and possibly seen. A circumnavigation of North East and Broughton Islands was memorable for the vast rafts of Cape Petrels (at least 2,500), and smaller, but no less impressive, numbers of Sooty Shearwaters and Fairy Prions.

And then on to Stewart Island, and the jewel in its crown, Ulva Island. Small groups of us were guided on walks of various lengths, learning that there have never been any possums, that there is an average of one rat per year, and that Yellow-crowned Parakeets associate with Mohua/Yellowhead. Naturally we saw





▲ Antarctic Tern pair: Paul Sagar/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Auckland Island Banded Dotterel: Ian Armitage/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Auckland Island Shag: John Kyngdon.



▲ Campbell Island Shag flock: Richard Schofield.

no possums or rats, but there were Red- and Yellow-crowned Parakeets, South Island Robins, SI Saddlebacks/Tieke, Rifleman, Kaka, an obliging flock of Mohua, a welcome party of Weka at Boulder Beach, and a pair of Morepork playing bookends right by the path.

Afterwards there was a choice of walks on “mainland” Stewart Island – the birds were fairly quiet in the early afternoon, but there were regular kakariki, NZ Tomtits and Tui, with Kaka evident around Oban. It was a bit of a shock to the system to encounter people and cars – though nobody seemed averse to the hotel!

The expedition name was ‘Beyond Fiordland’, but it was eight days after leaving Bluff before we set eyes on the mainland again. We awoke to clear skies and the calm waters of Dusky Sound, and the sounds of SI Robin and kakariki from nearby islands – great conditions to get out in the boats again. We meandered along the coast of Anchor Island, pest-free and home of Kakapo, among others; a brief trip ashore at Luncheon Cove to hear about the history of the island (the first European house and shipbuilding) accompanied by Mohua, kakariki, SI Tieke and Kaka. Then while most of the passengers took to the skies on a heli-sightseeing trip, the remainder of us ambled around Cascade Cove and Pickersgill Harbour, seeing the only Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguins of the voyage (most were at sea fattening up in preparation for moulting) and frequent Kaka.

First up the following morning was Pigeon Island, home of Richard Henry while he tried to save Kakapo and kiwi, among others; those in the Zodiacs were serenaded by a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins, while on land there were SI Tieke, SI Robins, kakariki and Mohua. Then after a lunch, a tour of the

natural harbour of The Basin, and more Kaka and kakariki, before heading up Acheron Passage to the open sea, where a Black-winged Petrel photobombed an attempted shot of a Buller’s Shearwater.

Another moody morning for our final full day, in Doubtful Sound; a Long-tailed Cuckoo call penetrated the mist, Weka and Kaka called from the steep slopes of Secretary Island, and on Bauza Island a party of Mohua showed well – not normally the sort of bird you’d expect to see on a boat trip. Onwards up Thompson Sound, between Secretary Island and the mainland, where we made our final shore landing at Deas Cove. A major landslide in 2003 destroyed a large area of trees on the isthmus, and the cleared area has subsequently been colonised by a number of introduced songbirds, despite its remote location.

And so we began our return journey to Bluff. Good numbers of seabirds were seen on the open ocean sections of the trip, mainly Sooty Shearwaters with smaller numbers of Buller’s Shearwaters, and several Mottled Petrels.

While on board *MV Spirit of Enderby* I had the opportunity to give a couple of talks to fellow expeditioners about Birds New Zealand, *eBird*, and the NZ Atlas project. Perhaps surprisingly, there were no other birders on board, apart from Niall, the on-board bird guide, but there was a genuine interest in proceedings, and there is a significantly greater awareness now than there was at the start.

*Richard Schofield is the Otago Branch Regional Recorder. He travelled Beyond Fiordland as a guest of Heritage Expeditions.*

Trip list: <https://ebird.org/newzealand/tripreport/31110>





▲ Adelie Penguin at Magnet Bay (Banks Peninsula) – Allanah Purdey/DOC.



▲ Masked Booby near New Plymouth – supplied by Grame Taylor.



▲ Brown Booby at Muriwai – Ron Chew.



▲ Red-footed Booby at Muriwai – Denise Poyner.

## Bird News

*Some sightings have not received official acceptance by Birds New Zealand's Records Appraisal Committee (1st May 2021–1st February 2022).*

**NZ Dabchick/Weweia** bred again in the South Island with a pair reported with a chick at Taylor Dam (Marlborough) on 6/12 and a pair with 3 chicks at Lake Killarney in January. There were also reports of up to 4 at Wakapuaka WTP (Nelson) between 27/3 and 25/10; 5 at Pinot Lake in Waihopi Valley (Marlborough) on 9/8; 2–4 at Lake Elterwater (Marlborough) on 11/12; and 1 on Marisco Vineyard main pond (Marlborough) on 23 and 31/12. Two **Australasian Grebes** were reported at Takaka (Tasman) on 24/7, and 1 at Kelling Road pond (Upper Moutere) on 25/11 stayed to at least 21/1. Up to 5 **Hoary-headed Grebes** were at Lake Elterwater (Marlborough) from 15/9 to 23/1, including a pair with 2 chicks.

A **Chestnut-breasted Shelduck** was at Tip Lagoon (Invercargill) 18–20/10, and another was at Riverlands near Blenheim WTP on 30/10. A **Northern Shoveler** was at Bromley Oxidation Ponds (Christchurch) on 1/5; another was at Pegasus Wetlands (Canterbury) on 8/5 and 28–29/5; and another at Lake Elterwater on 15/9 and 4/12. This summer 17 **Australian Wood Duck** were seen at Hoddy Estuary Park near Mapua on 4/1, and 16 on 27/1. There were also reports of 4 at the Playhouse Café ponds near Mapua on 5/12, 3 on 5/1, and 7 on 27/1. A sharp-eyed find by Sean Jacques among a large flock of Australasian Shovelers was a female **Northern Pintail** at Tip Lagoon by New River Estuary (Invercargill) on 16/10. This well-watched duck stayed until 31/10. A possible **Chestnut Teal** was seen at Little Waihi (BOP) on 12/12.

A very rare find was an **Adelie Penguin** ashore at Birdlings Flat (Canterbury) on 10/11 that was taken into care after it was seen eating small stones over a 4-hour period. After being given fluids and a blood test it was assessed as healthy and released at Magnet Bay on Banks Peninsula at 7am on 13/11. This is the second NZ record of this species.

Then another Adelie Penguin was photographed at Scotts Landing north of the Rangitikei River mouth later on 13/11. It was not taken into care because it was not reportedly in distress. Given that Scotts Landing is some 600km north of Magnet Bay, it seems highly unlikely to have been the same individual bird released there at 7am the same day. If accepted, this will be the third NZ record of this species.

A notable find was a damaged deceased penguin on Mason Bay (Rakiura, 31/12) that was either a **Chinstrap Penguin** or an Adelie Penguin. An **Erect Crested Penguin** was seen ashore near Taieri Mouth (Otago) on 19/7, and a juvenile was at Onuku (Banks Peninsula) on 30/1.

In late May, shortly before a major winter storm event hit the Canterbury coast, there were sightings of a possible **Antarctic Prion** off New Brighton Beach (Christchurch) and a **Soft-plumaged Petrel** at Brooklands Spit (Christchurch) on 20/5, and an **Antarctic Fulmar** at Long Point (Catlins) on 30/5. The storm then brought a dozen dazzling southern seabird species to Birdlings Flat (Canterbury) on 31/5, comprising 1 **Grey-headed Albatross**, 1 **Light-mantled Sooty Albatross**, 1 white morph **Sth Giant Petrel**, 2 Antarctic Fulmars, 1 **Antarctic Petrel**, c2–20 **White-headed Petrels**, c30–100 **Soft-plumaged Petrels**, 1 **Grey-backed Storm Petrel**, 2 **Black-bellied Storm Petrels**, 1 **Pomarine Skua**, and 1 **Brown Skua**. The storm also grounded a Grey-headed Albatross at Westerfield near Ashburton (Canterbury), a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross at Cooptown (Canterbury), and a Soft-plumaged at Leeston (Canterbury) the next day.

Further north, a Cape Palliser seawatch on 1/6 recorded 2 Grey-headed Albatross, 23 Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, 1 Antarctic Fulmar, 8 White-headed Petrel, 118 Soft-plumaged Petrel, 1 Mottled Petrel, 1 Grey-backed Storm Petrel, and 6 Brown Skua. Even further north, a post-conference sea-watch from Whiritoa (Coromandel) on 6/6 recorded 1 Grey-headed Albatross, 1 Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, 3 Brown Skua, 1 White-headed Petrel, 1 Mottled Petrel, and 18 Soft-plumaged Petrel.





▲ Western Sandpiper at Whangateau (Northland) – Marie-Louise Ward.



▲ Oriental Cuckoo at Lake Mapourika (West Coast) – Warwick Allen.



▲ Little Whimbrel at Awarua Lagoon (Southland) – John Kyngdon.



▲ Northern Pintail at Tip Lagoon (Southland) – Glenda Rees.

Two Moeraki pelagic trips out to the Otago Canyons on 3 & 4/7 recorded 2 **Grey Petrels**, 2 Antarctic Fulmars, 1 Grey-backed Storm Petrel, 1 **Short-tailed Shearwater**, and 1 white morph Sth Giant Petrel. A white morph Sth Giant Petrel was also seen off Kaikoura on 20/7. A rare find was a **Pink-footed Shearwater** seen along with a Grey-backed Storm Petrel and a Brown Skua during a Tutukaka pelagic trip out past the Poor Knights Islands on 24/7. A **White-headed Petrel** was found ashore on Muriwai beach on 20/7, and an Antarctic Fulmar rescued from an Invercargill garden was released at Bluff on 25/7. A **Blue Petrel** was seen swimming at Orakei Basin (Auckland) on 27/8. Another was found exhausted on Ohau Estuary (Horowhenua) on 12/9, and another was seen at Brooklands lagoon (Christchurch) on 12/12. An **Indian Ocean Yellow-nosed Albatross** found alive at 90 Mile Beach on 19/9 was taken to Whangarei Bird Rescue on 20/9 but succumbed there.

Another Moeraki pelagic trip on 16/10 recorded 1 **Campbell Albatross**, 1 **Wilson's Storm-Petrel**, 1 Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, 1 Grey-backed Storm-Petrel, 1 **Broad-billed Prion**, and 1 Short-tailed Shearwater.

A Tutukaka pelagic trip on 25/10 recorded 1 Grey Petrel, 2 **South Polar Skuas** (incl. a dark morph), a **White-chinned Petrel**, c.45 NZ Storm Petrels, a Wilson's Storm Petrel, and 2 Short-tailed Shearwaters, and a **Hutton's Shearwater**. Another Tutukaka pelagic trip on 30/10 recorded 1 **Long-tailed Skua**, 1 **Chatham Albatross**, 2 Campbell Albatross, 3 Mottled Petrels, 2 **Pycroft's Petrels**, c.50 NZ Storm Petrels, and 1 Wilson's Storm Petrel. A Broad-billed Prion was seen at sea off Kaikoura on 13/12 and another flew over Waikanae beach on 19/12.

The long hot summer saw a run tropical seabirds reach the North Island. A brown morph **Red-footed Booby** was a popular visitor to Muriwai gannet colony from 26-30/12. It was joined by a **Brown Booby** on 27/12 that returned repeatedly until 20/2. An immature **Masked Booby** grounded near New Plymouth on 20/7 was taken into care but succumbed a few days later. There was also one reported at Waipatiki in Hawke's Bay on 9/12. A juvenile

**White-tailed Tropicbird** found ashore at Whangarei Heads was taken into care on 8/2 but died a few days later. Another was found ashore in Dargaville on 12/2 which also died while being taken into care. A **Lesser Frigatebird** was reported off Whitianga in early February, then a **Great Frigatebird** was seen flying off Rangiputa (Far North) on 13/2, and a Lesser Frigatebird photographed off Sandy Bay near Tutukaka (Northland) on 14/2.

2021 saw an influx of **Cattle Egrets** to NZ at many sites between Southland and the Far North between May and December, with the largest count being 51 along Horahora Rd near Rangiriri in Waikato (20/6). A **Little Egret** was seen at Papakura Channel (Manukau) on 16/5, 2 at nearby Keith Park on 24/5 (1 of which stayed to 6/8), and another at Saltwater Creek (Timaru) on 5/9. A **Glossy Ibis** was found near Fortrose (Southland) on 16/9 and 17/12. Then 15 were reported at Blenheim WTP on 28/9, rising to 26 on 16/10 and dropping down to 9 on 30/10. One was at Ki-Wainono (Canterbury) on 25/11, and then 1 at Manawatu Estuary on 15/2. A possible **Australian White Ibis** was reported flying over the road between Dunsandel and Southbridge (Canterbury) on 17/11, and an unexpected find was an immature **Nankeen Night-Heron** in a suburban park in Dannevirke on 25/9.

A **Little Whimbrel** was seen at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 12/12. A **Great Knot** was present at Big Sand Island (Kaipara) from 22-25/12, and another was at Motueka Sandspit (Nelson) from 31/1 to 7/2. A **Terek Sandpiper** first seen at Awarua Bay (Southland) in February 2021 was seen again there on 27/6, 14/8, and 21/9. Another was at Big Sand Island (Kaipara) on 7/8. A possible **American Golden Plover** was at the Manawatu Estuary in Foxton on 23/11 and 3/12.

Two **Grey-tailed Tattlers** were at Ashburton River mouth (22/10) and then 1 on 19/12, another at Miranda on 8/10, and 1 at Riverton Estuary (Southland) from 22/11 to 10/12. A **Wandering Tattler** was at Miranda on 8/10, and then 1 was at Proctor's Beach (Whangarei Heads) on 22/1 that stayed to 4/2. A **Lesser Sand Plover** was at Miranda on 20/5 and 8/1, and a **Greater**





▲ Indian Ocean Yellow-nosed Albatross, 90 Mile Beach – Richard Bresgi.



▲ Blue Petrel in Orakei Basin (Auckland) – William Abbott.



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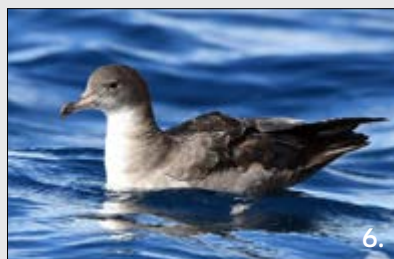
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- ▲ 1. White-winged Black Tern at Knobs Flat (Southland) – Bradley Shields; 2. White-winged Black Tern at Waitangi wetlands (Hawke's Bay) – John Kyngdon; 3. Whiskered Tern at Waituna Lagoon (Southland) – Bradley Shields; 4. Antarctic Tern at Awarua Lagoon (Southland) – Glenda Rees; 5. Antarctic Petrel at Birdlings Flat – Andrew Crossland; 6. Pink-footed Shearwater at sea off Poor Knights Islands – Scott Brooks; 7. Long-tailed Skua off Poor Knights – Scott Brooks; 8. South Polar Skua off Poor Knights Islands – Scott Brooks.

**Sand Plover** at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 5/10. Even better was an **Oriental Plover** found at Miranda on 4/2 that was seen repeatedly until 21/2. A **Black-tailed Godwit** was seen near Bluff on 13/6, then 1 at New River Estuary (Southland) on 31/10, and 1 at Motueka Sandspit (Nelson) on 10/10. A possible **Snipe spp** was reported in the Greenpark area of Lake Ellesmere on 30/4. A **Hudsonian Godwit** was at Greenhills (Southland) on 13/6, and then 1 was found in breeding plumage at Ambury Park (South Auckland) from 29/5 to 10/6. A **Sanderling** was at Mangawhai Estuary on 8/10, with another at Ashley River estuary from 25/11 to 26/12, and a **NZ Shore Plover** was at Clive River mouth (Hawke's Bay) on 23/10. A very unusual record was a **Western Sandpiper** found at Whangateau near Leigh on 15/2, which was also seen at Clifton Beach, Whitford (Auckland) from 15-21/2. A possible female Ruff was seen at Miranda on 21/2.

Two **South Polar Skuas** were seen on a Tutukaka pelagic trip on 24/10. A Pomarine Skua was seen near Taranga Island (Northland) on 2/6, and another at Waikawa Beach (Manawatu) in mid-January 2022.

Summer brought various tropical terns and noddies to the North Island. A **Sooty Tern** was seen at Black Reef, Cape Kidnappers on 4/1. Another was at Waikanae Sandspit on 30/1, then at Pukerua Bay on 4-5/2, then at Plimmerton from 6-15/2, and back at Waikanae Sandspit on 18/2. One was also seen at Rangiputa (Far North) on 13/2. The same day, a **Bridled Tern** was found at Maunganui Bluff Reserve on 90 Mile Beach (1st NZ live record) with a **Black Noddy** by Dave Howes and Scott Brooks, and a **Brown Noddy** was seen at Muriwai gannet colony. Another Brown Noddy was seen near Whangarei Harbour entrance on 23/2.

A **Black Tern** in non-breeding plumage was found at Waikanae Estuary sandspit on 14/1 by Elizabeth Taylor with a

flock of White-fronted Terns, that was seen again on 21-22/1. If accepted, this will be the first confirmed record of this species in NZ. It was next seen at the Plimmerton fire station point from 31/1 to 9/2, also with a flock of White-fronted Terns, and then at Pukerua Bay on 15/2.

A **White-winged Black Tern** in non-breeding plumage first seen on 26/4 at Bromley WTP (Christchurch) stayed until 28/5. Another was at Tip Lagoon (Invercargill) on 3/11, 1 at Hokitika River mouth on 7/12, 1 (in breeding plumage) at Knobs Flat on 11/1, 1 at Waitangi wetlands near Clive (Hawke's Bay) between 4/12 and 27/1, and 1 at Waituna Lagoon (Southland) from 1-4/2. A possible **Whiskered Tern** was seen at Pharazyn wetlands (Waikanae) on 13-14/10, and 1 was photographed at Waituna Lagoon (Southland), that stayed from 31/1 to 4/2.

A **Black-naped Tern** found at the Muriwai gannet colony on 13/2 by Hayden Pye was another first NZ record, but unfortunately it succumbed overnight. There was a **Common Tern** at Bluff on 11/11. Another was at Foxton on 8/1 and from 21-22/1, then 1 at Waikanae Sandspit on 23/1, 1 at Plimmerton from 2-11/2, and 1 at Pukerua Bay on 19/2. There was an **Antarctic Tern** at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 4/7, and an **Arctic Tern** at Stirling Point (Bluff) on 18/12, plus another at Kereta Bay Boat Ramp (Coromandel) on 18/1.

An **Oriental Cuckoo** found at Lake Mapourika (West Coast) 17-19/11 proved popular until it flew into a window and was not seen again. Birders searching for the cuckoo were rewarded with a sighting of 3 **White-throated Needletails** at Paringa River Bridge (West Coast) on 21/11.

Sources: eBird NZ, Unusual Bird Reports, BirdingNZ, Regional Roundup, New Zealand Birders Facebook group, iNaturalist NZ.



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

### FAR NORTH

We had a very enjoyable 90 Mile Beach outing before Christmas where we saw 101 White-fronted Terns. Kevin Matthews saw 7 Little Terns with White-fronted Terns feeding on the upper Rangaunu Harbour and on Walker Island he saw 15 Whimbrels with 2,500 Bar-tailed Godwits, 400 Red Knots, and 187 Ruddy Turnstones. There was a first live NZ record of a Bridled Tern, which was seen with a Black Noddy in a flock of White-fronted Terns at Manganui Bluff Reserve on 90 Mile Beach, submitted by Dave Howes and Scott Brooks on 13/2, as well as sightings of a Great Frigatebird and a Sooty Tern on the coast at Rangiputa off the east side of Karikari Peninsula, first found there by Mathieu Poot on 13/2.

– ISABELLA GODBERT

### NORTHLAND

We held our November meeting online with guest speaker Emma Williams (DOC Science Adviser), who gave a very interesting presentation via Zoom on the movement of Australasian Bitterns. Studies undertaken in the BOP, Waikato, and Canterbury have shown that they often move very long distances, as much as 300 kilometres, which generated much discussion! In December we had our annual Christmas get together. Thank you Bev Chitty for hosting us at your place.

Hilton Ward reports the Grey-faced Petrels/Oi at Taurawhata have increased in numbers again. This is most likely to be juveniles returning as a result of increased predator control by the Tawapou Conservation Trust on their QEII Trust land. Throughout the season burrows were monitored with 2 trail cameras. In late December, Hilton determined that 15 Oi chicks would fledge after checking the burrows.

Scott Brooks' regular pelagic trips from Tutukaka out to the 'Petrel Station' past the Poor knights Islands are going strong with some exciting trips in recent months. On the 30/10 trip highlights were 5 species of albatross including 1 Chatham Albatross and 2 Campbell Albatross, 1 Long-tailed Skua, 3 Mottled Petrels, and 50 NZ Storm Petrels off the back of the boat at once! The latest February trip recorded over 80 NZ Storm Petrels off the back of the boat at once! This is the most recorded at this site to date, and probably the most recorded together at sea by anyone ever! Two more exciting reports were of a Wandering Tattler found by Cathy Mitchell at Procter's Beach near Whangarei Heads on 22/1 and a Lesser Frigatebird seen by Crispin Middleton off Sandy Bay near Tutukaka on 14/2.

– ILSE CORKERY

### AUCKLAND

Our Ambury Park guided walk on 5/12 was very successful with more than 60 participants. We had good views of a nesting colony of c.600 Black-billed Gulls at the Shell Island hide plus 1,700 Bar-tailed Godwit, 1,500 Red Knots and a Whimbrel. We had our Annual summer picnic at Tahuna Torea Reserve in Glendowie on 22/1 with 15 members recording 36 species, including a Banded Rail.

The joint Birds New Zealand/BirdLife Australia 'Australasian Ornithological Conference' (AOC) was held online 8-10/2. It

highlighted a rich abundance of current bird research. The next one will be in Brisbane in 2023. Thanks to Brendon Dunphy (University of Auckland) for leading the organisation and the contributions of the many Birds New Zealand members on the organising committee.

Our Muriwai Beach Patrol on 11/12 was the first in months. Species found included 1 Sooty Shearwater, 1 Buller's Shearwater, 1 Common Diving Petrel and 5 Australasian Gannets. Perhaps due to increased vehicle traffic on the beach, we found many dismembered birds that could not be identified to species level, including 1 albatross spp, 3 shearwater spp and 1 shag spp.

A Bellbird seen at Waiatarua Reserve in Remuera on 16/10 was likely a visitor from a local predator free island such as Motutapu. A sighting of 2 Pacific Golden Plovers at Orangihina in Te Atatu by Dion Pou on 8/12 was a first record for the site. A Great Knot was seen on Big Sand Island on 22/12. There was a report of 2 possible Dollarbirds by Suzi Phillips in the upper Waiwera Valley on 24/12. A brown morph Red-footed Booby was seen by numerous observers at Muriwai gannet colony from 26/12 that remained for a week. A Brown Booby arrived there a day later, first seen by Phil Hammond on 27/12. There were 2 reports of possible Australian Tree Martins: 1 at Beresford Square in Auckland CBD on 21/11 and 1 at Huapai in north-west Auckland on 21/1.

– IAN McLEAN

### SOUTH AUCKLAND

For our November meeting via Zoom, Tony Crocker spoke about Birds of the South Pacific. He pointed out that avian families, genera and species thin out as one heads east across the Pacific. Serious challenges to bird movement across the Pacific include distance, trade winds that generally blow east to west, and sea currents that flow in a similar direction. There was no meeting in December, but some members gathered for a BBQ at the Hatch's nursery, and a local bush walk where we counted 23 species for the Atlas.

Our late November beach patrol at Karioitahi found 1 Aus. Gannet, 5 Sooty Shearwaters, 1 Prion spp, and a White-chinned Petrel. A report of recent shorebird breeding on Awhitu Peninsula noted 1 NZ Dotterel chick on Cake Island, 2 fledged chicks at Wattle Bay, and 2 at Big Bay. Also at Big Bay were 2 pairs of VOCs with 3 chicks each. Southern Black-backed Gull colonies had about a third fewer chicks this year. Parry Farm at Aka Aka hosted a pair of White-faced Herons that raised 3 young in December.

Sightings of cryptic species include a Banded Rail and 4 chicks seen at Pahurehure, 2 Banded Rail at Drury on 12/11, a Spotless Crake near Pine Harbour on 23/12, and a Marsh Crake at Mangemangeroa Reserve, Howick. 2 Aus. Bitterns were heard calling at Ryburn Swamp, Mercer on 31/10. Other notable sightings include 2 Brown Teal at Wattle Downs ponds on 5/12, and 2 at Ayrilies Wetland, Whitford on 1/1. 68 Royal Spoonbill, most in breeding plumage, were seen in the Port Waikato area on 31/10, and 7 Cattle Egrets, most in breeding plumage, were seen roosting in a pine at Rangiwhaea Creek, Waiuku on 9/1. Tony H reported some

unusual Kereru flocking activity at Mauku on 25/1.

– SUE FROSTICK

### WAIKATO

Early Spring and Summer saw high water levels on the stilt pools at Miranda. A Grey-tailed Tattler and Curlew Sandpiper were seen on the shellbanks. A Far Eastern Curlew showed up around Christmas and has continued through the Summer, as have 2 Little Terns. Over 30 Pacific Golden Plovers are present this Summer, and a likely Lesser Sand Plover has been seen infrequently. After hot weather in the New Year, the ponds dried up and the birds began roosting close into the stilt hides which has made for great viewing. A Pectoral Sandpiper was a treat in early January but even better was a breeding plumage Oriental Plover found by Caiden Binzegger in early February.

Michael Burton-Smith and George Hobson found an Arctic Tern and a Common Tern roosting with White-fronted Terns on the Thames-Coromandel coast near Wilson's Bay early in the New Year. The NZ Dotterels at Onemana had a bad year with 31 nests and 62 eggs all lost by various ways and means. An unknown nest hatched 1 egg as the chick was seen by the public, but whether it fledged is uncertain as none of our team saw it.

– RUSSELL CANNINGS & KEN WEDGWOOD

### TARANAKI

Despite October's inclement weather, 8 members visited Pukeiti Gardens and recorded 17 species including NI Robin, Bellbird, NZ Tomtit, and Dunnock. Steve Purdon gave us an Atlas update on the last 3 Spring seasons; 81 of 89 squares have some data, 94 species have been recorded, 73 squares have Australian Magpies, 72 have Blackbird, 3 have 60+ species, and 1 has a grand total of 9 species. As per usual, the green desert of South Taranaki needs more effort.

There have been more reports of NZ Falcon around Taranaki with 1 seen on the Tarata Saddle east of New Plymouth dust-bathing by the road, and the Cockerams tucked-up under Mt Taranaki had 1 sitting on their fence. Tony Green doing NI Robin monitoring on the lower northern slopes of the Mountain also recorded 1 along with Whitehead, Rifleman, species Cuckoos, and plenty of NI Robin. We also had a reliable report of a pair of Kaka at Oakura, south-west of New Plymouth, that we suspect may be nesting.

We visited the Mahood-Lowe reserve between New Plymouth and Mt Taranaki in November where we all had a good look at NZ Falcon in flight, Rifleman, Whitehead, both cuckoos, and an adult Whio with 2 fledglings, with 27 species recorded in all. At our final indoor meeting our long standing/suffering Branch Secretary Ron Lambert announced his retirement. Ron has held the position for many years and done an excellent job, for which we thank him very much. Steve Purdon was voted in as his replacement.

The New Year kicked-off with a resumption of our Beach, Birds, and BBQ day at Waiongana. The tide was a bit high for the beach walkers to see 5 summer-visiting Pacific Golden Plovers but we managed a good checklist. The BBQ was excellent as ever and a great day was enjoyed by all. In mid-January a





friend and I had the rare privilege of watching a pair of adult NZ Falcons encouraging their 2 fledglings to leave the nest in the east Taranaki hill country. The calling from the adult and wheedling from the juvenile was amazing, a sight we will never forget. – PETER FRYER

### HAWKE'S BAY

Our last 2021 field trip was an overnighter to Boundary Stream Scenic Reserve/Mainland Island. Twelve members walked the main tracks on a Saturday afternoon, seeing the usual Tūi, Bellbirds/Korimako, Kererū, NI Robins/Toutouwai, NZ Tomtits/Miromiro, and Kākā. The highlight of the trip was our night visit to the seabird nesting site on the Maungaharuru Range, where Cook's Petrels/Titi and Mottled Petrels/Korure have been reintroduced. On the Sunday we all walked the main tracks in the hope of seeing NI Kōkako, which sadly eluded us. The trip was rounded off with a stop at Lake Opouahi, where we saw NZ Dabchick/Weweia and NZ Scaup/Pāpango.

Interesting sightings reported through November into January included Fluttering, Sooty, and Buller's Shearwaters (Pakahā, Titi, Rako), and White-capped and Salvin's Mollmawks (Torora), all seen from Ocean's Beach. Good numbers of birds continued to be seen in the Ahuriri Estuary/Te Whanganui-a-Orotū, including circa 300 Bar-tailed Godwits/Kuaka (including 93 juveniles), up to 400 nesting Black-billed Gulls/Tarāpuka (with the first chicks seen in December), 3 Wrybills/Ngutuparore, 4 Red Knots/Huahou, a Red-necked Stint, a Ruddy Turnstone, 16 Pacific Golden Plovers, 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers/Kohutapu, 5 NZ Dotterels/Tūturiwhatu, and a Whimbrel.

The Tukituki Rivermouth/Haumoana coast was also an exciting place, with c.100 White-fronted Terns/Tara, up to 8 Brown Teal/Pāteke, and an Arctic Skua. A non-breeding plumage White-winged Black Tern was noted spending time in various locations, and a Reef Heron/Matuku Moana was reported from Black Reef at Cape Kidnappers. On our first field trip of 2022 in late January, 8 members went to Waitangi Regional Park and surrounds to try to find the White-winged Black Tern. Sadly, it was nowhere in evidence. However, we did see >90 Royal Spoonbills/Kōtuku Ngutupapa, 2 Bar-tailed Godwits, and 2 White-fronted Terns.

– THALIA SACHTLEBEN

### WHANGANUI

Our last regional roundup had news of 'our' itinerant Bar-tailed Godwit, flagged 'AJD', that had just returned for his 14th summer on the Whanganui Estuary. Rather unusually, he flew direct to Whanganui first instead of to Manawatū Estuary. AJD is now the focus of a richly illustrated book on godwits by Paul Gibson, *Feats Beyond Amazing. The Life Story of a Bar-tailed Godwit*. It is available direct from the author ([info@upics.co.nz](mailto:info@upics.co.nz)), some bookstores, and the Miranda Shorebird Centre shop. Paul and Jim Norris continue to monitor AJD's presence and behaviour, and a younger male, YRM, recently banded as a two-year-old on the Manawatū Estuary. Recording the activities of known individual birds adds considerably to our understanding of their lives.

Other species recorded recently on the estuary include up to 22 Royal Spoonbill, 47 Pied Stilt, and small but variable numbers of Wrybill, SIPO, and Caspian Tern. Jim Norris photographed a Cattle Egret in breeding plumage in mid-December, an exceptionally late record. Pied Shags are breeding once again. Up to 500 White-fronted Terns, including some recently fledged birds, spent a couple of weeks here towards the end of January.

Paul and Jim also surveyed our region's 4 main estuaries as part of the Spring National Wader Count. Migrant waders recorded included 28 Bar-tailed Godwits (Whanganui Estuary) and 2 Ruddy Turnstone (Koitiata Lagoon). The latter is increasingly rare almost everywhere these days. Maria Sainsbury found and photographed an Australasian Bittern nearby in late December, further confirming this species' presence at Koitiata. The lagoon is one of the sites where both Black-fronted and Banded Dotterels can almost always be seen. Bird-watching here has been made easier by the construction of a hide by volunteers from the Koitiata Wetlands Restoration Project.

At the end of January, Paul Gibson, Jim Norris and I went to Waitahinga Reserve to look for Long-tailed Cuckoo. In previous years around this time, up to 10 Long-tailed Cuckoos have been seen and heard calling loudly and persistently from this native forest, where their Whitehead hosts are common. This year was no exception, with 7-9 birds noted. Soon after, Francois Rawlinson reported at least 5 birds behaving similarly in the Moeawatea, on the Whenuakura-Waitōtara watershed. It is unclear if these reflect the Long-tailed Cuckoo's populations locally (including any juveniles), or if they represent wider gatherings of birds ahead of their departure for south-west Pacific Islands.

– PETER FROST

### MANAWATU

At our final meeting of 2021, I gave an overview of 15 years of shorebird research at the Manawatū Estuary. We are putting our meetings on hold for now but hope to resume them later this year. Local highlights have included NZ Falcons breeding again at a golf course on the edge of Palmerston North, often seen from the walkway by the Manawatū River, or overhead in town. A Whitehead was seen in bush on the Massey University side of town, kilometres from the nearest population in the Tararua Range, and Royal Spoonbills were confirmed nesting in Pohangina Valley.

The Manawatū Estuary has been fairly over summer. A juvenile Golden Plover caused a bit of interest about whether it was Pacific or American, but the plovers have only been rarely seen since December. Hopefully they will be more evident in March, before migration. A Common Tern has been seen a couple of times, and in mid-February a Glossy Ibis made an appearance, first on the south side of the river, then landing on the sandspit with the waders. A Pomarine Skua was seen at Waikawa Beach in mid-January.

The most remarkable record was an Adelie Penguin spotted by a member of the public on the beach at Scotts Landing on 13/11. Amazingly, this bird was seen later on the

same day that another Adelie Penguin had been released back into the wild on Banks Peninsula in Canterbury, but a bit of quick maths ruled out the possibility it was the same individual bird. – PHIL BATTLE

### WELLINGTON

Whanganui-a-tara/Wellington was treated to several rare terns in early 2022. Most exciting was the first record of a Black Tern for New Zealand, seen at Waikanae sandspit on 14/1, which was enjoyed by many birders who visited the Kāpiti coast from near and far as it moved to Plimmerton and then Pukerua Bay. Remarkably, this Black Tern belongs to the Eurasian niger subspecies, whose closest breeding grounds are in western China and eastern Kazakhstan! As if this 'mega' was not enough, we were also treated to a Sooty Tern and several Common Terns at a few locations along the Kāpiti coast from Plimmerton to Waikanae! What a start to the year!

These sightings were discussed during our annual members' night in early February. In addition, a wide variety of topics were covered by various members, reflective of our diverse region. Most notably, Ian Armitage provided an overview of the 4 previous Pūatahanui Inlet surveys and called for people to join him on the 5th decade of this fantastic survey. Please consider joining Ian on this great initiative and contact him for more information via [ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz)

I provided a short talk on Titi/Sooty Shearwater breeding success on Kāpiti and Mana Islands, Geoff de Lisle shared some entertaining videos of his Ruru/Morepork nest box, Annemieke Hendriks provided insights on Kaki/Black Stilt gained during a recent visit to the South Island, and Stuart Nicholson closed the meeting with a moving poem on Kuaka/Bar-tailed Godwits. Truly a very enjoyable members night and another highlight of the first quarter of 2022.

– JOHANNES FISCHER

### NELSON

Twenty-five Fernbirds have been banded since August, including juvenile and adult birds. The aim of the study is to monitor their population in response to an extensive predator trapping programme starting at the Wakapuaka Flats this year, coordinated by Nelson City Council ecologist Scott Butcher, and members of the Nelson Branch banding team led by Paul Fisher. Local members are encouraged to contribute to this project by reporting sightings of Fernbirds in the Nelson-Tasman region via the web app <https://arcgis/1qjuy1> or the eBird NZ Atlas portal, and the DOC FALCON database (for banded birds).

Circa 4,000 SIPOs were seen on Rabbit Island recently and cannon-netting expeditions targeting oystercatchers are planned to take place soon. In Golden Bay a presentation to the Community Board is planned to highlight the destruction of shorebird nests at Onehau Spit in Golden Bay by 4WD vehicles, motorbikes, and quad bikes. 4 VOC nests were abandoned there. It is a similar problem at many Golden Bay beaches where vehicles regularly flout the by-laws and cause threatened waders to abandon nests. Dog attacks are also common with 29 Little Penguins killed in Golden Bay between 2014



and 2020 despite new by-laws introduced in 2014.

A submission was made to Tasman District Council for the Moutere-Waimea Ward Reserve management plan highlighting the status of threatened bird species needing special protection such as Banded Rail, Banded Dotterel, and VOC.

NZ Dabchicks at Lake Killarney in Takaka were observed with 3 chicks. This is the first record this century of them breeding there. An Australasian Little Grebe has been seen at Kelling Rd Pond in Moutere and a Great Knot was found by Steve Wood at Motueka Spit. A big haul of 60+ Caspian Tern chicks were caught and banded at the Shellbank near Best Island led by Willie Cook. An old VOC 'K12225' was spotted in Monaco near Stoke by David Melville. It was first banded in 2001 at age 3. Many thanks to Christine Grove who accompanied a party of 30+ children and teachers on a visit from Tapawera School to Motueka Spit in December 2021 organised by 'Whenua Iti'.

- PAUL GRIFFITHS

## MARLBOROUGH

Out of the 136 Atlas grid squares within the Marlborough region, only 5 have not received data across the entire year. As we finish the summer season, the community has entered data into 121 of those 136 grid squares, with 120 species recorded. There have been some recent sightings of NZ Dabchick and Hoary-headed Grebe at Lake Elterwater. The latter raised 2 young this year and the lake now supports 3 grebe species (Great Crested, Hoary-headed, NZ Dabchick).

Dan and Simon (WML) entered a large amount of Atlas data on Titi Island during a recent trip there for Flesh-footed Shearwater research. The aim was to undertake a population estimate of the breeding shearwaters. While on the island a resident breeding pair of Karearea/NZ Falcon was detected each day, as well as regular close sightings of Yellow-crowned Parakeets. This Atlas data has helped to increase the coverage in that outermost square, particularly nocturnal counts of the seabirds heard and seen at night, including Sooty-Shearwaters, Little Penguins and Fairy Prions. Closer to land, a pair of Banded Rail was seen in Shakespeare Bay. Glossy Ibis have not been detected at the lagoons for a while now, supposedly having finished breeding and moved on, but to where is as yet to be discovered!

A family of 3 Banded Rail chicks was raised in a small wetland at Ngakuta Bay this summer. The presence of a Banded Rail here had been known for at least a year. The wetland has restoration planting and trapping done by local volunteers and seeing the Banded Rail has been an inspiration. There has also been a possible sighting of Fernbird in the area. There has been much interesting activity along the coast from Cape Campbell to the Waimea/Ure River mouth including Ruddy Turnstones, Pacific Golden Plovers, VOCs and Banded Dotterel. Some 80 dotterel were seen in a single flock. Their nests have been recorded with some reaching the fledging stage. Red Knots have also been feeding in large numbers at Marfell's Beach.

- KRISTIN RUWHIUI

## CANTERBURY

We ended 2021 with a nice in-person meeting after several had to be held via Zoom or cancelled in previous months. It was a great chance to catch up, and we had some fun quizzes on topics ranging from bird identification to bird song.

Our summer wader count in December recorded a Sanderling at the Ashley Estuary. At Lake Ellesmere, 11 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and a Pectoral Sandpiper were seen at the Birdlings Flat A site, and 42 Red-necked Stints were at Embankment Road. A Grey-tailed Tattler and a Little Tern were spotted at Ashburton River mouth. Further south, a Glossy Ibis and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were seen at Ki-Wainono Lagoon, and Fernbirds continued to be reported there.

A few noteworthy penguins were seen in Canterbury recently. In November, an Adelie Penguin was reported at Birdlings Flat. The bird was recovered from the site, before being released a few days later. In late January, a juvenile Erect-crested Penguin was seen near Akaroa. Cape Barren Geese continue to be seen at St. Anne's Lagoon and Travis Wetlands. And down in Timaru at the Milford Lagoon/Opihi River mouth, a Little Egret was seen in early January.

- ELEANOR GUNBY

## OTAGO

It has been a busy summer with our monthly Atlas trips continuing through December to visit Middlemarch and Motatapu Station (Wanaka), and our 2022 trips are once more underway. Thanks our Regional Recorder to Richard Scofield for organising these. Otago's Atlas Spring coverage increased by the end of the second Spring to 78.4% of squares having some coverage, and 111 species recorded. Now, most of the way through the second summer of the current Atlas, 79.3% of Otago squares have some summer coverage with 129 species recorded so far.

Interesting bird sightings have included: large flocks (50-229) of SIPO at sites in Central Otago and Balclutha, and thousands of Black-billed Gulls on the coast just north of Dunedin, with 7,000 at Warrington in late January. Higher than previous numbers of Kereru were observed in a harbour-side garden. Little Black Shags were recorded at Pounawea (Catlins) and at Lake Dunstan (Central Otago). Brown Skua were observed from Taiaroa Head and Awamoa. A Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was at Aramoana for a month from late December.

A Marsh Crake was seen at a new site north of the Clutha River mouths. There was a Cattle Egret in breeding plumage at Hinahina (Catlins) and an Australasian Bittern heard near Queenstown. A Ruru with young was observed for several days on the edge of the town belt in Central Dunedin, close to where a pair had nested in 2017, and Karearea frequented north Dunedin. Parrots were out and about, with two Red-crowned Kakariki at Waipori Gorge, a Kākā at Papatowai, and Eastern Rosella at Tahakopa.

The late December Moeraki pelagic trip, organised by Oscar Thomas, was a success. The postponed summer wader count took place on 12/12 for the first time after years of being rained-off. Otago members took part in the 30/1 godwit count with 1,775 birds

recorded around Dunedin, the second highest count over the past 5 years. The Mopanui SI Robin project, organised by George Pickerell, finished its 6th season. Although it got off to a late start due to lockdown in August, it turned out to be the most successful yet with 24 territories and at least 12 pairs identified. Our end of year meeting was an in-person celebration complete with a somewhat challenging bird quiz.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

## SOUTHLAND

There has been quite a bit of activity at Waituna Lagoon recently with a Whiskered Tern in breeding plumage spotted by Bradley Shields, soon followed by a non-breeding White-winged Black Tern. No sooner had word got around about these rare marsh terns when Pete McClelland found a Red-necked Phalarope on the adjacent Little Waituna on 4/2. Unfortunately this bird, unlike the terns, disappeared on the same day that it was reported.

It was nice to see so many birders visiting Waituna. This area once boasted many rare species but changes to the opening up of the lagoon to the sea has seen it become one of the less interesting areas that birders visit. Another uncommon visitor to Southland has been Little Tern, with up to 3 first found at Bluff by Sean Jacques. They now seemed to have moved to Jacobs River Estuary in Riverton. They were most recently spotted by Pete McClelland and I as we did an Atlas bird count by boat on 11/2. Also at Riverton is the long-staying Grey-tailed Tattler, which must be the most photographed tattler in New Zealand.

The Little Whimbrel photographed at the head of Awarua Bay on 11/12 by visiting birders was not seen again despite a number of searches, unfortunately. As we embark on our latest summer wader count we are noticing low numbers of Pacific Golden Plover and Red Knots, with the latter seeming to have been declining for a number of years. Back in the 1980s numbers of them reached over 100 on the New River Estuary.

We continue to target our Atlas squares that have low counts during specific seasons and there are still some remote squares that have never had a count.

In other news Neil Robertson had an amazing 'garden list' tick when a White-winged Black Tern in breeding plumage flew over his property on 3/1. Neil has a property between Te Anau and Manapouri. Another was seen in the Eglinton Valley a few days later. Lloyd Esler advised he had seen at least 1 Royal Spoonbill chick raised successfully from the small colony in Haldane Estuary. This colony is based in some scrub not far from the road and quite low to the ground. Issues with predators and human disturbance play a big part in their breeding success.

Finally, the long-staying Terek Sandpiper seems to have moved from the head of Awarua Bay to another part of the bay called Cow Island. This means having to get wet now if you want to see the bird. Let's hope it decides to move back in the near future.

- PHIL RHODES





❑ Fledgling Westland Petrel at Punakaiki/Bruce Stuart-Menteath & Imogen Warren.

❑ Swarovski STX 30-70 x 95 Spotting Scope with adapter.

## Good news for Westland Petrels

A proposed new mine at Barrytown near the only Westland Petrel colony in the world was rejected by West Coast Regional Council/Grey District Council hearing commissioners in February. The proposed mine threatened to become a significant fallout problem for the endangered petrels, according to Bruce Stuart-Menteath of the Westland Petrel Conservation Trust: "The fledgling birds would crash-land if they became disorientated from lights from the [mine] processing plant, which would be operating all night. The birds nest in the hills only three kilometres from the proposed mining site," he told RNZ.

In their decision the hearing commissioners stated that, "The applicant has provided inadequate information on the actual and potential adverse ecological, hydrological and water quality effects associated with the proposed activities..." and that, "There was clearly a lack of recognition of the potential effects of the proposed activities on the aquifer, surrounding natural wetlands and springs in the application, and this resulted in an inadequate assessment of effects being put in front of us. ... We strongly disagree that it is a 'well-planned and comprehensively assessed' proposal."

They also expressed concerns that the adverse effects of night time vehicle movements " ... will result in unacceptable effects on the noise environment/amenity for residents who live beside SH6 and could result in unacceptable cumulative effects on [the Westland Petrel]."

Westland Petrels, which are listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List, are confined to a single breeding location in forest south of Punakaiki, where an estimated 4,000 pairs breed annually. Their numbers are considered to be stable, although there is a long history of mortality caused by fisheries and collision with artificial lights.

Bruce Stuart-Menteath's family bought property adjacent to the breeding grounds in 1985 and since discovering a sub-colony on their land have been working to protect the birds, founding the Westland Petrel Conservation Trust in 2016. Petrels are slow breeders, raising only one chick a year, but every year many fledglings die on their first flight out to sea when they can become disorientated by artificial lights and crash land, which is known as fallout.

In 2019 NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) began upgrading the Punakaiki streetlights to LEDs, which posed a greater danger to the birds due to their higher intensity. It is likely that over the decades before the LEDs were installed, fallout had caused the deaths of hundreds of Westland Petrel fledglings. Bruce advocated to NZTA for two years to modify the streetlights and install shields. The problem was solved late last year when NZTA agreed to turn the streetlights off during the Nov-Dec fledging period. This is the first time they have agreed to do this anywhere and Bruce hopes it will give these incredible birds the best chance possible. He also runs tours to see the petrels:

<https://www.facebook.com/westlandpetrel> and  
<http://www.petrelcolonytours.co.nz/>

IMOGEN WARREN & BRUCE STUART-MENTEATH

## Swarovski STX 30-70 x 95 Spotting Scope RRP \$5,890

To review this large Swarovski scope it was mounted on their PCT professional carbon tripod legs (\$1,390) and PTH tripod head (\$990) with their BR balance rail (\$349). I also field tested its digiscoping capabilities with their VPA phone adapter (\$259) with the AR-S adapter ring (\$59), and their TLS APO 43 mm DSLR adapter (\$790) with the T2 adapter ring (\$69). I used my own Canon camera body and android phone.

This proved to be an exceptional scope with excellent image clarity, light gathering at distance, and sharpness out to the edge of the field of view. The focus mechanism on the main body took a little getting used to as I'm more familiar with a focus wheel mounted on top of the scope. As I was going to be digiscoping with it, I opted for the straight rather than angled version, which also took a little getting used to being more familiar with angled scopes.

Using the scope at the Tongariro River in Turangi I was able to locate a Blue Duck standing between a few grey rocks about 100 metres away one evening in fading light that I hadn't noticed when checking the river first with my binoculars. At Vinegar Lake in Tikipunga I was able to see a NZ Dabchick very clearly about 70 metres away, including all the details of the striped juvenile riding on its back.

At Waipu Estuary I was able to locate an adult NZ Fairy Tern resting on a mudflat about 600 metres away, which saved me a lot of walking around to look for one. Sea-watching in Island Bay, I had very clear views of shearwaters, terns, and albatrosses passing between 100 and 500 metres offshore, including a smart Black-fronted Tern.

The combined weight of the scope (2.2kg), the tripod set up (3.3kg) and adapter (570g) came to about 6kg. Swarovski's modular system of scopes and adapters means you can opt for a smaller scope with a lighter tripod set up to save weight and money. Once I was set up for digiscoping I found that I had to focus the scope with my left hand and then manually press the camera shutter button with my right hand, which caused the scope to wobble slightly, so a release cable with a remote button is advisable. The quality of the photos with the mobile phone adaptor was very good, especially the NZ Dabchicks at Vinegar Lake.

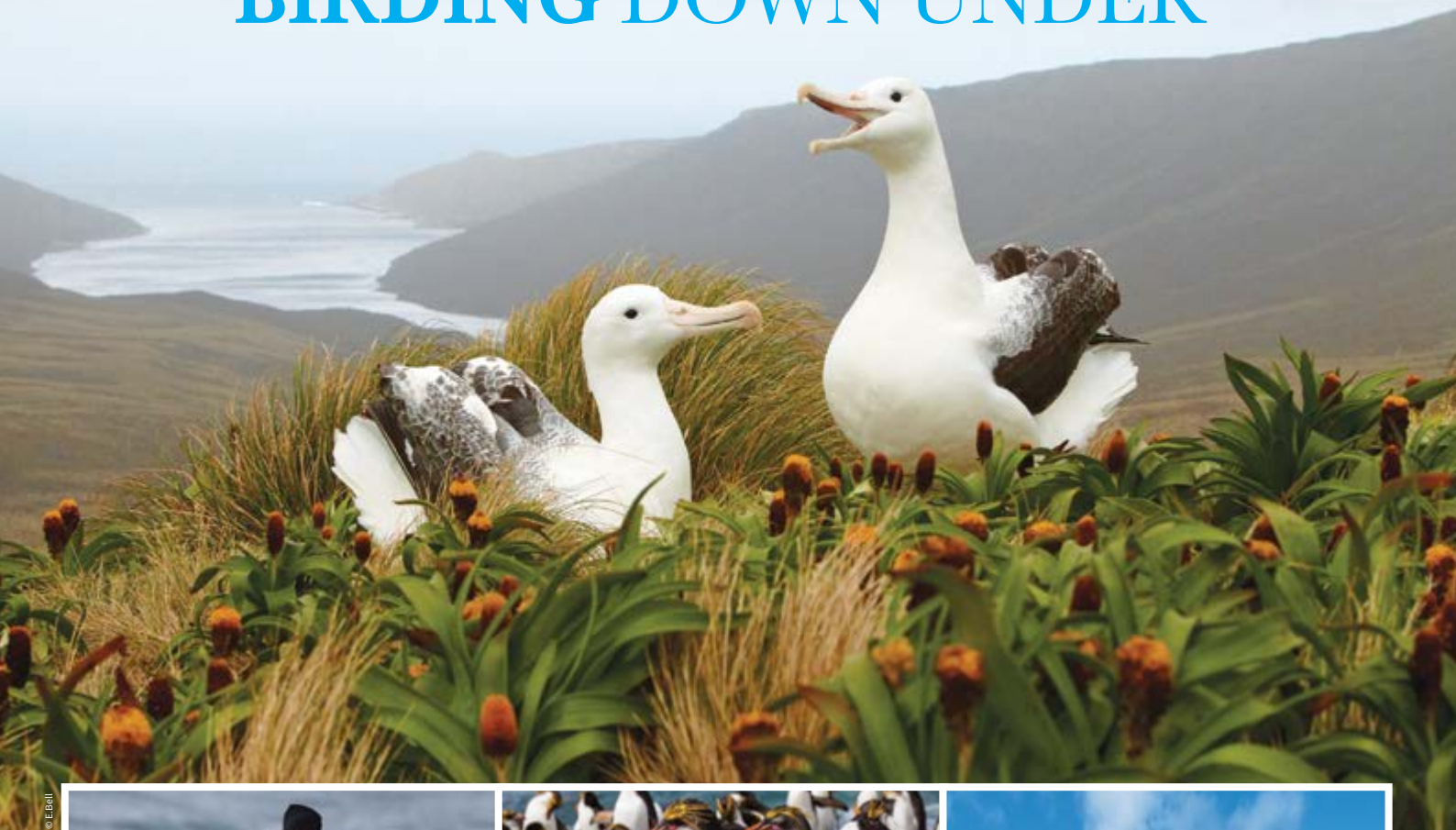
This is undoubtedly the best performing spotting scope I've ever used. Try it for yourself at your nearest stockist to see if it's the one for you.

Swarovski produce a global birding publication each year called 'Closer'. For a free copy send a request with your postal address to: [jp.klaus@swarovski.com](mailto:jp.klaus@swarovski.com)

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



# BIRDING DOWN UNDER



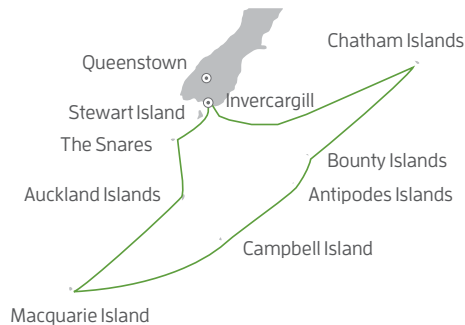
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