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Otago Region Newsletter 5/2022

June 2022

We will continue to wear face masks out of consideration for others at the indoor meetings



Ornithological Snippets

A **Hudsonian Godwit** was picked out among the Bar-tailed Godwits at Aramoana on 12 June. 17 **Black-billed Gulls** foraging on paddock at Makarora on 20 June were strange to see at this time of year, the first sighting since summer migration, while count of 31 **Pied Shags** at the Waikouaiti River Mouth on 8 June was the largest group recorded in Otago that I am aware of. Over the past month **White Herons** have been reported from Waikouaiti, Dunedin Botanic Gardens, Anderson's Bay Inlet/Tomahawk, Portobello and Kaikorai Lagoon.

4 Sulphur-crested Cockatoo put in an appearance at Catlins Lake during the wader count on 12 June; less expected were 2 Red-crowned Parakeet in the Waipori Gorge on 18 June.

Large numbers of **Skylark** were observed in the Maniototo area on 10 June, with 85 counted at Blakeleys Dam. (A couple of days earlier there were 325 counted on a checklist in the Hakataramea Valley). Other large counts were 109 **Blackbird** at Logan Park on 18th June, 400 **Goldfinch** at Goodwood 8th and 250 **Yellowhammer** at Lake Hayes Estate on 29 May.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com Richard Schofield

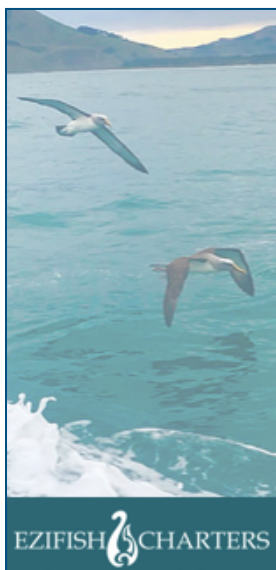
eBird News

As the Atlas project enters its final two years, sponsorship has been provided by Toi Toi wines to help with coverage in harder to reach areas. Some of this sponsorship has been awarded to Otago region, with the condition that it is used for the more remote areas of northern Otago (yes, those large blank areas on the Atlas effort map!) To this end we are planning a weekend visit in late November 2023 based in Ranfurly or possibly Naseby, and at this stage we are seeking to gauge interest prior to booking accommodation. So if you are keen to spend long, hard days in remote areas without coffee shops, potentially seeing very few birds, and if you have a 4wd vehicle that you would be willing to use, or possibly an eBike (or normal mountain bike) we would love to hear from you. This will be a subsidised trip, the amount to be determined when we have more certainty around numbers. Please let me know if you are interested at cluthaphotos@gmail.com

In the meantime, I am planning an Atlasing to trip to the Lawrence area on Sunday 3rd July. Meet at Bunnings at 8.30. Please let me know if you intend coming, so that you can be informed of any changes to the plan.

Also, a final call for thoughts on any name changes in eBird. In August each year, eBird updates its taxonomy, which includes new species, splits, lumps, and name changes. We have been invited to suggest potential name changes for NZ birds, to take effect from August 2022, and would like to take this opportunity to canvass opinion among NZ birders about their suggestions for changing the NZ names in eBird for something more familiar, or less confusing. Proposals so far include Southern Black-backed Gull for South Black-backed Gull, Australasian Shoveler instead of Australian Shoveler, Rock Wren replacing Rockwren, and Silver Gull (Red-billed) reverting to Red-billed Gull. It should be noted that some or most of the requests so far will align with those in common usage, and hence with the Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, the revised version of which is due out in the next few months. If you would like to have your say, please send your suggestions to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com



Spring dates for full-day pelagic trips with Ezifish Charters out of Moeraki, Otago to the offshore canyons are set for **Saturday 27th August, Sunday 28th August, Saturday 10th September, and Sunday 11th September**. There should be great opportunities for photography and viewing of a wide range of albatrosses, shearwaters, petrels, shags, penguins, whales, and dolphins.

We depart Moeraki at 8am (return by 4pm) on the 16.5 x 5m fibreglass vessel "The Sirocco". You'll need your own food, drinks and other supplies for the trip, a BBQ sausage sizzle lunch will be provided. To confirm, it is a deposit of \$150 (which is only refundable if I can fill your spot before the trip takes place). The final cost will be sorted closer to the time and depend on the number of people confirmed on the day. If the trip is cancelled due to weather then the payment will be fully refunded. The call will be made by the skipper about 48hrs ahead of the trip. If you are interested in reserving a spot or have any questions please email oscarkokako@gmail.com.

BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Bird Identification Workshop

A Bird Identification Workshop was held on Saturday 18th at the Valley Project, in North East Valley at the invitation of OpenVue. This was aimed to help people identify garden birds prior to taking part in the Garden Bird Survey. About 20 enthusiastic people turned up to learn more about the birds in our gardens and thanks to Maree, Martine and Bruce for coming to help. A pair of eastern rosella turned up outside the window which was a bonus.



Mary Thompson

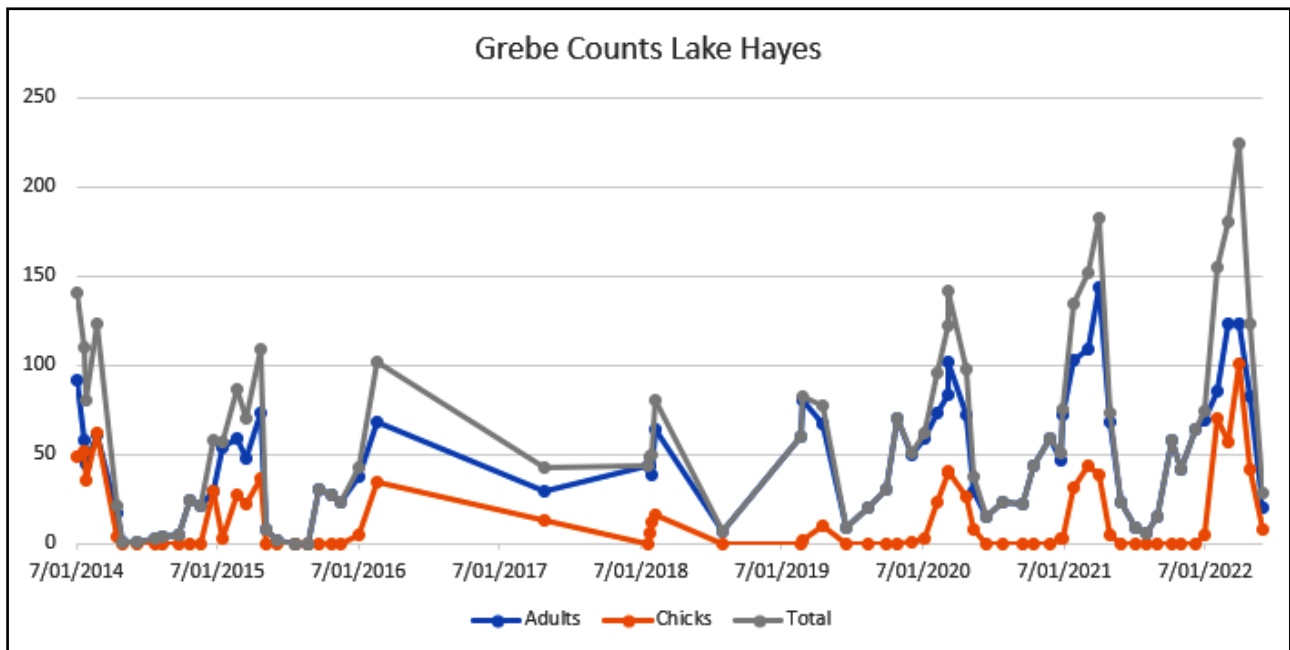
Grebe at Lake Hayes

I took over the monthly counting of Australasian crested grebe on Lake Hayes from John Darby in May 2018. Since then I have continued the counts and have been surprised at the steady increase in the number of grebe successfully breeding at Lake Hayes and the number of offspring each year.



Courting pair of grebe taken at Lake Hayes in November 2021
Richard Bowman

The results from 2014 - 2022 are summarised in the attached graph.



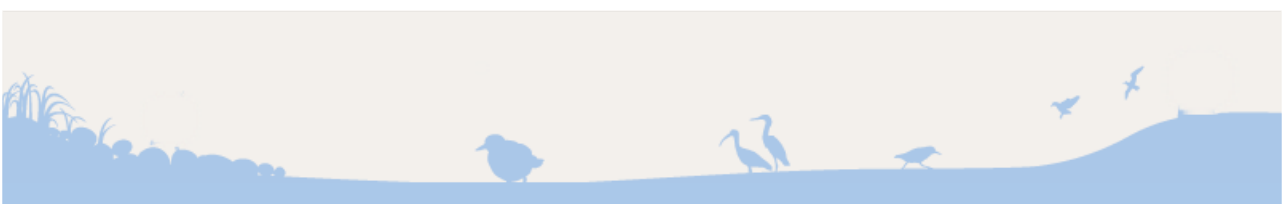
There appear to be clear seasonal trends in the data with peak numbers in April and the lows between June and August. The highest count I have recorded was a total of 224 grebe on 3 April 2022 and the lowest was 6 on 10 August 2021. Breeding seems to be remarkably successful over the last 4 years with individual pairs raising up to 5 young and some may be breeding twice in the season. There is also quite a number of immature/non-breeding birds that flock up particularly at the SW end of the lake from December through to April.

On this basis Lake Hayes seems to be one of the more significant breeding sites for grebe in New Zealand. We think this is due to the abundance of good sheltered nesting sites mainly on willow overhanging the lake, plenty of food in the form of juvenile perch and low levels of human disturbance (the lake has a 5 knot speed limit.) In addition for the last three years Lake Hayes Predator Free had installed and maintained a network of over 50 traps around the perimeter of the lake. Generally catch rates for predators have decreased over this time but rats, possum, ferrets and stoats are still caught in small numbers. It is hoped that this has reduced predation pressure on the grebe and other water fowl.

A question we would like to put to birders is 'where do Lake Hayes grebe go in winter'? We'd be very interested to learn where the 200 or more grebe that leave the lake live for several months before returning again to breed.

We look forward to any light that can be shed on this mystery.

Richard Bowman



Otago Winter Wader Count 12 June 2022

	Karitane	Blueskin Bay	Aramoana	Harbour west	Harbour east	Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Catlins	Total 2022	Total 2021	Total 2020
South Is Pied Oystercatcher	29	318	86	214	63	115	1	244	1070	932	1370
Variable Oystercatcher	12	38	4		48	2		7	111	147	160
Pied Stilt	32	65	30		2	2	42	10	183	244	152
Banded Dotterel		30	110					40	180	150	155
Spur-winged Plover	63	4	6	18	2	5		64	162	102	103
Bar-tailed Godwit	3	73	120					103	299	341	388

What an interesting day! The high tide of 2.2 metres coupled with low pressure and very strong northerly winds resulted in water where it shouldn't have been! The wind was particularly strong and gusty on Sunday morning but had dropped at least in some areas by early afternoon.

Everyone, without exception, commented on high water levels.

Lala said 'many of the usual roosts, e.g. wharfs or ramps on boatsheds were submerged. Even the artificial island bird roost in Bayfield Inlet was covered – have never seen that before, although the birds still stood there but some with their feet in the water.'



Lala Frazer



Francie, Oscar and Ela discovered at Aramoana that the 'boardwalk was practically underwater'



Oscar commented 'that it was hard to get any accurate numbers with the strong winds and the very high tide keeping the birds unsettled.' Even so he still managed to record a Hudsonian godwit flying with a flock of 120 or so Bar-tailed godwits. Great sighting Oscar!



Another good find was at Hooper's Inlet where Jon and Adrienne recorded a raft of 24 black shags. They tried very hard to find godwits at Hoopers but to no avail. I wonder where they roosted?

Some of you will have seen the amusing photo taken by Chris Lalas at Papanui inlet. He suggests 'a snorkel as an optional extra for wader counts'



Nick and George at Evansdale found that SIPO and pied stilts were not in the usual places but in paddocks obscured by tall vegetation.

The Catlins didn't escape the conditions either with water halfway over the road in places. Richard reported 103 bar-tailed godwits, which he thinks is the largest winter count for these birds. Perhaps some of these are Hoopers birds? Also 9 spoonbills, more than usual for this time of year.

Thank you all for braving the conditions and promptly sending your results and images.

Maree Johnstone



The Marsh crake at Tomahawk Lagoon



The Marsh crake is still active at Tomahawk Lagoon.

The wee bird was shy but it eventually came out for foraging in front of me...

Photos taken under ideal light conditions on 17 June.



Lei Zhu

Programme 2022

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held on the 4th **Tuesday** at 7.30pm in the Valley Project Community Rooms, 262 North Road, NEV. Just past the primary school, with a parking area in front. Look for the NZ Falcon Mural.

The meetings will be zoomed live for those unable to attend. We welcome our members from Central Otago area and others who can't get to Dunedin, and members not so comfortable with attending meetings at this time. You can join the meetings by Zoom link. This will be emailed to members the previous evening, so check for the link.

25 June to 3 July	Garden Bird Survey
Tuesday 28 June	Ursula Ellenberg Seabird conservation research between the midnight sun and shadowlands (starting with some pre-pandemic work in Siberia and ending on some recent highlights of our tawaki research in Fiordland.)
Tuesday 26 July	Birding in the Chathams, Antipodes and other Subantarctic Islands Ela Hunt, Nick Beckwith and Richard Schofield. Followed by AGM.
Tuesday 23 August	Nic Rawlence Latest discoveries about ancient NZ birds
Sunday 11 Sept	Botanic Garden Birdwatching Walks; Birds NZ members will guides groups around the gardens spotting and identifying birds, 10 - 12 noon
Tuesday 27 Sept	Bruce McKinlay Town Belt Bird Survey findings.

Suggestions of locations for field trips and atlassing trips, and offers to help lead trips would really be appreciated, please contact Mary birds.otago@birds.nz.org.nz

Please send all contributions for the June newsletter to: Sue Odlin sodlin@gmail.com

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **19 July**

