

Birds Whanganui  
e-Newsletter April–May 2022



Whitehead | Pōpokatea (*Mohoua albicilla*) photographed on the Whanganui  
River Road (photo: Peter Frost)

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**Birds New Zealand** (Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc.)

**Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa**

Whanganui Region “fostering the study and enjoyment of birds”

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## **Whitehead|Pōpokotea translocated to Bushy Park**

Mandy Brooke, Forest & Bird's Forest Sanctuary Manager at Bushy Park reports that in early May Kevin Parker (Parker Conservation) and his team of 12 specialist helpers successfully translocated 52 Whiteheads|Pōpokotea from Waitahinga Reserve to Bushy Park Tarapurui. The released birds comprised a fairly even mix of males and females. At Waitahinga, the birds were foraging high in the canopy and so were not easy to catch. In the days following the birds' release, several groups had already formed and could be seen and heard around the volunteers' buildings and Interpretation Centre and within the forest itself. Mandy noted that Pōpokotea are still common at Waitahinga. No doubt they will recover quickly. The birds at Bushy Park will be surveyed before and after the 2022/23 breeding season (and presumably also in following breeding seasons), to determine how well they are doing. Mandy thanked Ngaa Rauru Kaitahi, Bushy Park Trust, Forest & Bird, Horizons Regional Council (which provided funding), the Whanganui District Council (which granted access to Waitahinga and provided other support), and the many Bushy Park volunteers who helped in numerous ways with catering, assisting the catching team to move the birds, and for their general support.

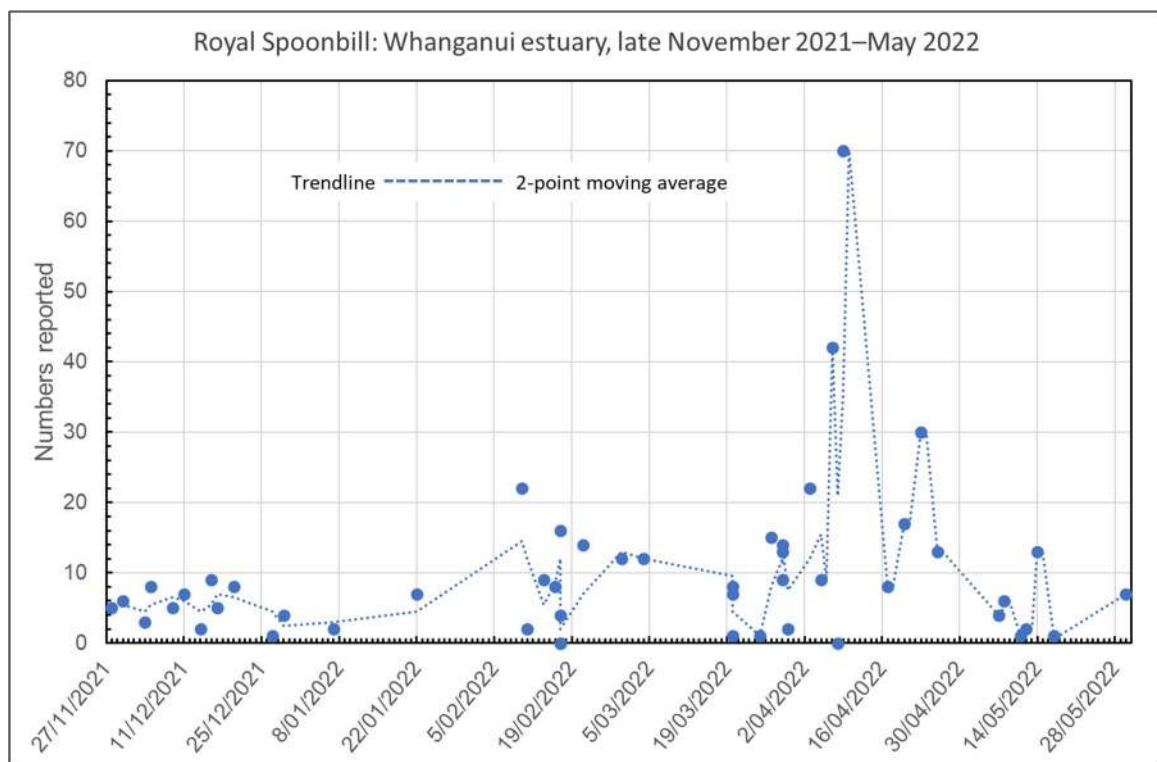
Whitehead|Pōpokotea are presumed to have occurred at Bushy Park in the past, so the species' reintroduction there fulfils one of the Bushy Park Trust's ambitions of reconstituting as near as possible a full spectrum of the species (not just birds) that would once have been found in the forest. The next bird species on the list for reintroduction is Rifleman|Tītipounamu, with arrangements being made to translocate birds from Taranaki to Bushy Park. (Rifleman have been recorded at Waitahinga, but numbers are likely to be low, given the paucity of records from there.)

The species can be seen and heard quite regularly in the interior of Whanganui District wherever there is suitable habitat. This is not only native forest and tall bush, but also includes mature pine forest, at least where there are patches of native bush nearby. For example, along Rangitatau East Rd, the species occurs not just at Waitahinga but all the way along Watershed Rd and down the Ahu Ahu Valley and Kauarapaoa roads. It has been recorded as close as 2 km from the northern boundary of Bushy Park, and may be even closer, in the secondary forest and pine plantations along the Okehu and Mangahoropiti streams. But the 0.6–1.0 km stretch of pasture and other open country between these forested areas and Bushy Park appears to be too much of a barrier for Whiteheads to cross.

Pōpokotea also occur east of the Whanganui R. Peter Frost recently recorded groups in native bush remnants and pine forest about 1 km up the Whanganui River Road from SH4, and at several places further on. At the end of May, he also found it along Parihauhau Rd, a no-exit farm road that goes up to into the Matahiwi backcountry between SH3 and SH4. There, the birds were present both in native bush remnants on the banks of the steeply incised Upokongaro Stream, and in pine forests at the top of the Kahakaha Stream/Maktuku Stream watershed. Pōpokotea have also been recorded along the Skyline Walk at Athene and is quite common in the region between Pipiriki and Raetihi. In brief, Whitehead|Pōpokotea seem to survive well wherever there is contiguous cover of both native and plantation forests, but seems absent from wholly isolated, small forest patches.

## Bowls of Spoonbills

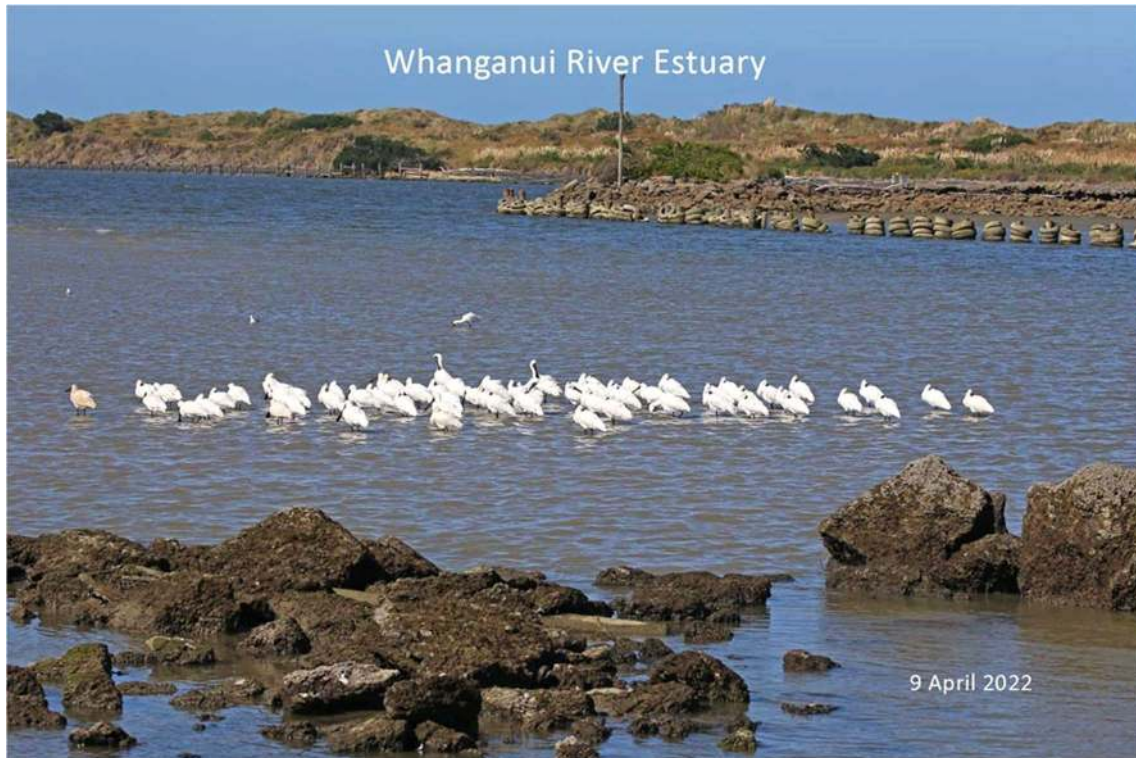
Yes, apparently ‘a bowl’ is the collective noun for spoonbills. Jim Norris, Paul Gibson, Lynne Douglas and Michael O’Shea—with additional inputs from Celia Thompson and Gavin Coveney (through Lynne Douglas)—continue to report the numbers of Royal Spoonbills|Kōtuku Ngutupapa seen on the estuary. The main points were reported in the last newsletter: the numbers present are highly variable but there always seem to be around 5–7 semi-resident individuals on the Whanganui estuary (we don’t know if these are always the same birds but suspect that they might be). The numbers are periodically boosted by flocks of spoonbills moving through; at this time of the year, heading north. When on the move, these flocks, usually between 10 and 30 birds at a time, have been seen arriving from the southeast and departing north-westwards, sometimes flying out through the river mouth before heading up the coast. Figure 1 shows the numbers recorded since late November 2021.



**Figure 1.** Reported numbers of Royal Spoonbill|Kōtuku Ngutupapa seen on the Whanganui River from late November 2021 to the end of May 2022. Not all of the estuary and lower river were searched for birds on every occasion, which makes the numbers seem more variable than they might otherwise be.

Two spikes are apparent: a minor one in mid-February, which may reflect early departures from their mainly South Island colonies, perhaps of non-breeders and failed breeders; and a major spike in April, presumably representing the main passage of breeding birds and juveniles from these colonies, heading to their northern wintering grounds. Of course, there could be smaller numbers moving through in-between times, but these are less easy to pick up against variability introduced by us not always managing to search the whole estuary and river on every occasion. When Jim Norris has done such whole-area surveys, he has found individuals and small groups throughout, with the main concentrations being birds roosting on the derelict Affco-Imlay wharf piles and at the northern end of Corliss Island.

Royal Spoonbills also occur on adjacent estuaries. Jim Norris recorded 6 birds on the Whangaehu Estuary on 10 May, and he, Bevin Shaw and Peter Frost found 11 there a couple of days later. But the species may not always be resident there. Jim saw no birds there on 13 and 14 April. In the past, at the same time of year, Ormond Torr has recorded as many as 19 and 23 birds on 28 March 2013 and 15 April 2016, respectively. These are likely to have been flocks migrating north. Further west, on the Waitōtara estuary, Peter Frost saw 7 spoonbills on 18 May. These birds may have also been migrating because usually only 2–3 birds are seen there in autumn and winter.



**Figure 2.** A flock of 70 Royal Spoonbills (including at least 6 juveniles) photographed by Paul Gibson on the Whanganui River on 9 April 2022, where they were resting before being seen to head off northwest on migration. One juvenile, with its distinctive brownish white plumage can be seen clearly on the extreme left-hand side of the group.



**Figure 3.** A juvenile Royal Spoonbill (left), showing black tips to its primaries (the narrow black line along the bottom edge of the folded wing) and a smooth bill; and an adult (right), which has no black on the wing, a bill with wrinkles on the top, a prominent crest, and a distinctive yellow 'eyebrow' (Photo credit: Lynne Douglas).



## Other waterbirds

Royal Spoonbill is not the only species visiting the Whanganui estuary on migration. We've previously mentioned Bar-tailed Godwit | Kūaka, a summer visitor from the northern hemisphere. Most of these have now returned to their Arctic breeding grounds. The few that remain over winter tend to gather at the larger and more productive estuaries. Most are first- or second-year birds that may not yet be sufficiently mature and experienced enough to handle the rigours of long-distance migration and breeding. Numbers on the Whanganui estuary have now dropped off considerably. Paul Gibson photographed a solitary godwit on 22 April and 25 April, but on other occasions none have been seen.

One of the species that becomes more common in autumn and winter is Caspian Tern | Taranui. Although never numerous, up to 8 have been reported this autumn, including several birds with alpha-numeric leg bands. Paul Gibson dutifully photographed these birds (Figure 4) and sent the details to the Banding Office at the Department of Conservation. Three of these birds—H22 (seen on 23 April), J64 (seen on 22 April and 2 May) and H39 (seen on 2 May)—had been banded on the same day, 9 December 2021, at the Bell Island shell-bank, Waimea Inlet, Nelson, while the fourth bird, J32, seen on 5 April, was banded at the same location on 30 December 2021. So, all were less than a year old when seen. Willie Cook in Nelson is banding these birds as part of a study that he started in 1993 to discover where the terns breeding at Bell Island go to around New Zealand.



**Figure 4.** Four alpha-numeric banded Caspian Terns, originally banded as chicks on Bell Island, Nelson, in December 2021, photographed on the Whanganui estuary by Paul Gibson 4–5 months later.

These are not the only banded birds visiting the Whanganui estuary. Last year, on 10 January 2021, Jim Norris saw a colour-banded **Wrybill** | **Ngutu pare** and another with just a metal band. These birds were part of a flock of 10 Wrybill, probably on migration northwards. The colour-band combination was black[K]-over-red[R] on the left leg and red[R]-over-orange[O] on the right (you always read colour bands from left leg to right leg, top to bottom, hence KR-RO). From this, the Banding Office at the Department of Conservation could tell Jim that the colour-banded bird was an adult

female that had been banded on the upper Rangitata R, at the foot of the Southern Alps, on 17 October 2017, as part of an ongoing study to monitor Wrybill and determine the effectiveness of weed and predator control programmes along these braided rivers. The other bird, with just a metal band, had probably been banded at Miranda in the Firth of Thames by John Dowding, but without knowing the band number, the Banding Office was unable to say precisely where and when. Each band has a unique number and an address to which anyone finding a banded bird can send in the details. Nowadays, such details can be submitted online at <https://app.birdbanding.doc.govt.nz/> or by email to [falcon@doc.govt.nz](mailto:falcon@doc.govt.nz).

It is not easy to read band numbers from photographs, as Lynne Douglas can testify. On 21 May 2022, she photographed a **Red-billed Gull|Tarāpunga** with a metal band. Although she could read some of the numbers, she could not easily determine the full set. So, here is a test for you. Try reading the numbers on the bands shown in the following photographs from Lynne (Figure 5). To make it a bit easier, I've photo-enhanced them. What is your reading of these numbers? Answer at the end (based on my reading of them).

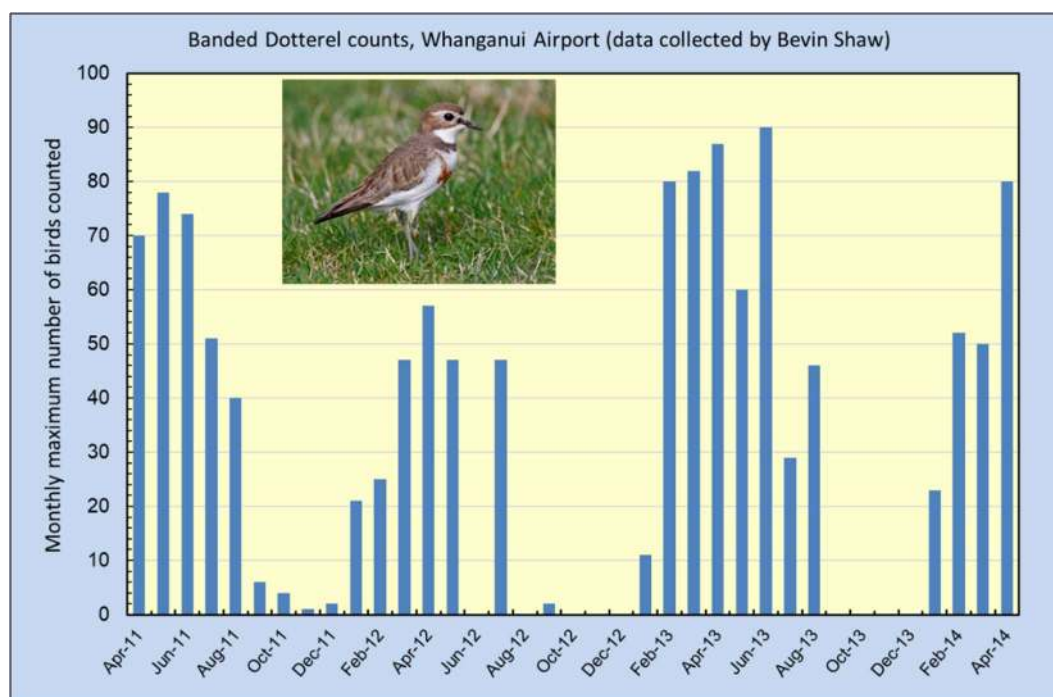


**Figure 5.** A uniquely numbered metal band on a red-billed gull, photographed by Lynne Douglas. If one could read all the numbers (and the preceding letter), one would be able to identify this individual and where and when it was banded. Of course, this is difficult because the numbers go all the way around the band, requiring multiple photographs of the band concerned. It is easier when one has the bird in hand.

Although Red-billed Gull occur year-round along the local coast, numbers build up considerably in autumn and winter when the non-breeding immature and sub-adult birds found here in spring and summer are joined by adults and juveniles dispersing from their breeding colonies. We know from previous sightings of colour-banded birds that at least some come from the large colonies at Kaikoura, where they have been studied by Dr Jim Mills and colleagues for the past 58 years. We do not know if birds from other colonies, such as those on the Sugarloaf Islands (New Plymouth), Mana and Kapiti islands, and Stephens Island Takapourewa, also visit this coast in the non-breeding season. Whether birds from different breeding locations intermingle, and with what consequences, is not known. It surely must happen. But Jim Mills found that Red-billed Gulls are strongly philopatric (almost all of the birds that disperse from Kaikoura after breeding return subsequently to breed in their natal colony), so if there is any intermingling of populations from different colonies in the region, this may not result in much or any interchange among these breeding populations.

Red-billed Gulls are not the only species whose numbers build up in autumn/winter. I've referred several times before to the multi-year counts of **Banded Dotterel|Pohowhera** made by Bevin Shaw at Whanganui Airport. Between April 2011 and April 2014, while working at the airport, he counted the numbers of Banded Dotterel on the grassland alongside the airport runways that he could see from a viewing point just outside the airport buildings. These counts were made 2-3 times daily for 4-5 days

a week over this 3-year period. Not surprisingly, the numbers fluctuated wildly, given the snapshot nature of the counts. Nevertheless, if one takes the maximum number recorded in each month, then a clear and consistent annual pattern emerges (Figure 6). In essence, the birds are away breeding from around August to December. Numbers begin building up from January onwards, peaking around May–June, before dropping as the birds disperse to breed. We know that they nest along the coast in shell-filled dune slacks, and some may even go inland to the Rangipo Desert, on the southern slopes of Mt Ruapehu, but we’d need to colour-band and then look for such birds to test this.



**Figure 6.** Seasonal occurrence of Banded Dotterel on Whanganui Airport, based on the monthly maximum number of birds counted in single visual sweeps of birds visible on the aircraft taxiway outside the airport terminal. Gaps in monthly figures during winter in 2012 and 2013 were when Bevin was away, and no counts were made. Data courtesy of Bevin Shaw. Inset photograph of a bird at the airport courtesy of Paul Gibson

The trends that Bevin’s study so clearly reveals shows the merit of systematic data collection and reporting. Even though the resulting data encompass considerable variation, an interpretable pattern still emerges, provided one chooses a relevant metric and has a sufficiently long time series of counts. It also provides a context for understanding the numbers of dotterel recorded in April–May 2022. No one is counting the Banded Dotterel at the airport at present, but reasonably numbers of birds have been reported from the nearby Whangaehu estuary: 9 on 14 April (Jim Norris); 26+ on 30 April (Des Bovey); 12 on 10 May (Jim Norris); and 18 on 12 May (Jim Norris, Bevin Shaw and Peter Frost).

The Whangaehu estuary is also a noted locality for seeing **Black-fronted Dotterel**. Jim Norris recorded 4 birds there on 14 April, 1 on 10 May, and then 4 seen and photographed there on 12 May by himself, Bevin Shaw and Peter Frost. Black-fronted Dotterel is a self-introduced species from Australia that settled in New Zealand in 1954, from where it has been spreading slowly westwards. It was recorded for the first time on the Whanganui R on the shingle bank just downstream of Pungarehu Marae in early March 2022, but none were seen there when checked on 28 May, nor on the nearby shingle bank just downstream from Parikino. Recent heavy rains in the interior caused the river to overflow these shingle banks and then recede, leaving a fine layer of silt over and between the pebbles. This intermittent but reasonably frequent flooding by silt-laden water flowing down the Whanganui River may limit Black-fronted Dotterel from becoming permanently established on the river itself.



## **Pied Shag | Kāruhiruhi**

Arnim Littek from Foxton Beach photographed 3–4 Pied Shag on Whangaehu estuary on 25 April and reported these to iNaturalist (<https://inaturalist.nz/observations/112799081>). Colin Ogle brought this to our attention, asking if others have seen Pied Shags there. Ormond Torr mentioned that he'd seen Pied Shags several times at the Whangaehu in recent years, but only ever one or two birds. Jim Norris, Bevin Shaw and Peter Frost saw four birds there on 12 May (Jim had seen just one bird two days earlier). Peter Frost has recorded the species at Koitiata and the Turakina R mouth (2 on 13 June 2021; 1 on 25 September 2021). With Pied Shag now well established on the Whanganui River, breeding at Putiki, and being seen regularly on the Waitōtara estuary and elsewhere further west, the species now seems to have successfully colonised this region, continuing a trend of westwards expansion that started at least a decade ago.

In this regard, the small colony at Putiki, where 5 pairs are nesting in the poplars alongside the Whanganui R, continues to thrive. On 10 May, Jim Norris recorded two nest with 2 and 3 young, respectively, and three nests each with an adult either incubating eggs or brooding small chicks. This is the second or third nesting attempt this season, all apparently successful. Young birds (and adults) are regularly seen on the nearby estuary, with the birds feeding in the river both up and downstream of the colony, and at sea near the mouth.

## **Canada Goose | Kuihi**

Pied Shag and Black-fronted Dotterel are not the only species spreading westwards into the Whanganui region. Canada geese have been doing so for some time, to the extent that the species has now become well established in the on the coastal plain in South Taranaki. For example, in mid-March 2022, Peter Frost recorded eight flocks, comprising 161 birds in total, flying towards the Waitōtara R estuary from places inland, where most of the land use is intensive dairying on improved (planted) pastures. Large numbers continue to be recorded locally, but a here-today-gone-tomorrow pattern suggests considerable movement within the district. On the Whangaehu estuary, Jim Norris counted 21 and 23 on 13 and 14 April, respectively, then 253 of 10 May, which had dropped to 48 by 12 May (Jim Norris, Bevin Shaw and Peter Frost).

## **Nankeen Night-heron | Umu Kōtuku**

Jim Norris continues to keep track of the resident Nankeen Night-herons at Upokongaro. They are more difficult to see in summer and much of autumn when the trees along the Upokongaro Stream still have all their leaves. But the poplars and other deciduous species begin shedding their leaves towards the end of May, notionally making it easier to see the birds, but they still need to come out from cover. The night-herons mostly shelter in the various evergreen trees behind the 'Behind the Door on 4' café. One favourite spot is the holm oak that grows over the ex-carport (now providing outdoor shelter for some chairs and tables). There is usually at least one bird roosting in this tree although, because of its dense canopy, the birds are hard to see. (Holm oak is an unusual oak, having many, closely packed, small unlobed leaves.) Jim saw 2 birds in the oak on 4 April, at least one of which was an adult (Figure 7), as did Paul Gibson four days later. Jim heard but did not see Nankeen Night-heron there on 26 April, and found one bird roosting in the holm oak on 14 May. At least 3 birds were recorded in the vicinity of the café on 25 May, one of which was in the holm oak initially, with two in the low-growing gum trees behind the Goose's Roost next door. Three birds left their roosts around 28–33 minutes after sunset, all flying downstream from Upokongaro. Jim returned the next day to find one bird in the holm oak, a young bird with distinctly streaked underparts. Elsewhere, Peter Frost checked the roost at Pitangi on 28 May and found one adult roosting in a kahikatea.





**Figure 7.** Adult Nankeen Night-heron roosting in the holm oak above the ex-carport in the grounds of the ‘Behind the Door on 4’ café at Upokongaro (Photo credit: Jim Norris)

### **Kōtuku | White Heron**

Scotty Moore and his family saw and photographed a Kōtuku at the mouth of the Kaitoke Stream on 30 April (Figure 8). We get birds coming through almost every year, but they do not seem to stay. The assumption is that these are birds from the colony on the Waitangiroto River, just north of Okarito, still the only known colony in New Zealand, first reported in 1865, but could there be vagrants from Australia among these non-breeding season visitors?



**Figure 8.** Kōtuku seen by Scotty Moore and family at the mouth of Kaitoke Stream on 30 April 2022 (Photo credit: Scotty Moore (Horizons Regional Council)).

## Spotless Crake | Pūweto

Following the discovery by Russell Cannings (Waikato) of Spotless Crake | Pūweto at Westmere in July 2021, and follow-up records by Jim Norris in October 2021 and Peter Frost's sighting of at least 4 birds at Westmere in mid-March, one bird was seen briefly on 17 April (Peter Frost) and at least three heard at the same spot on 27, 29 and 30 April (Jim Norris, Paul Gibson and Ormond Torr). The birds occupy the flooded woodland alongside the track going up the north-northeast arm of the lake, beyond the picnic bench under the pines near the top of the main lake on the eastern side. Further afield, Jono Gribble recorded one or more birds giving their characteristic intermittent "whit" calls on his Tokomaru East Rd property. The apparent near-permanent presence of birds on this small wetland, surrounded by regenerating natural forest, pine plantation and mixed gorse/bramble scrub, illustrates that spotless crake may occur anywhere where there is suitable habitat (muddy substrate; both lateral and overhead cover, often with clumps of *Carex*). The size of an area does not seem to be a major factor. Within the Whanganui District more broadly, Spotless Crakes have been found on wetlands as small as ~1 ha (e.g., Matatara Stream, south of Lismore Forest; Morikau Station, inland from Ranana, where at least 5 birds were found on two small, adjacent farm dams surrounded by rough pasture with a small patch on native forest on one side: Figure 9).

No doubt Spotless Crakes occur more widely than we appreciate. Listen for their characteristic calls, especially the male's territorial advertising purring call ("grrrr"), and the pair's gurgling and "whit" contact calls. To hear recordings of these calls, go to the species' page at NZ Birds Online (<https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/?q=node/320>) and scroll down to the 'Sounds' panel on the right-hand side of the page.



**Figure 9.** Spotless Crake | Pūweto photographed on Morikau Station's Twin Dams in mid-May 2010, one of at least 5 birds seen and heard at this isolated patch of habitat for this species. (Photo credit: Peter Frost)



## New Zealand Falcon | Kārearea

Bill Fleury saw something recently which brought to mind an aphorism about foxes and rabbits. On 27 May, Bill wrote, *"We've just come home (4.35 pm) to be treated to the sight of a falcon chasing an eastern rosella [kākā uhi where] above us. The pair circled around and through the big trees above the house with the falcon steadily gaining over a period of about 5 minutes. They disappeared to the south with the falcon about 1 metre behind the rosella. Not sure if the falcon got its dinner! A great sight. This is the first time I've seen a falcon here but I've [previously] picked up rosella feathers on the lawn so perhaps falcon have hunted here in the past."* (I've edited this slightly; apologies Bill.)

In a later email, Bill wrote that he'd checked with several of his neighbours but there was no sign of a kill by the falcon, so perhaps the rosella managed to get away after all. If so, it aptly illustrates the truth of the aphorism "The rabbit runs faster than the fox, because the rabbit is running for his life while the fox is only running for his dinner" (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, quoting Aesop). This notion became the basis of what is known in evolutionary biology as the Red Queen hypothesis (after the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, who said "it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!").

Put simply, this hypothesis postulates that in any close relationship, the pressures—be they predation, competition or even mutualism—exerted by one species on another, helps to drive the selection of features that maximise the chances of survival and successful reproduction in both. So, in the case of the falcon and the rosella, only the fastest and wiliest of rosellas will escape from a hungry falcon and therefore live, potentially to reproduce and pass on its genes—including those that allowed it to escape—to the next generation. Likewise, in having to deal with quick and clever prey like a rosella, only those individual falcons that have the attributes of greater speed and agility that enable them to successfully catch all but the quickest and craftiest individual rosellas will be favoured. Think of this as a coevolutionary arms (weapons) race, a snapshot of which Bill observed. If you'd like to learn more, look up **Red Queen hypothesis** in Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Queen\\_hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Queen_hypothesis)).

Falcons are regularly seen in Whanganui, especially in autumn and winter. On 3 April, Peter Frost recorded a female, based on size, attempting to catch a feral rock pigeon, one of around 30 birds circling in a tight flock over the Virginia Lake gardens. The falcon was in level flight, not stooping on the pigeons. The pigeon at which it made a pass, one of the peripheral birds in the flock, jinked away on the falcon's approach. The falcon started to follow but then broke off the attempt. In level flight, the rock pigeons appear to fly as fast as the falcon, another example of one bird flying for its meal and another for its life. The next day, 4 April, two falcons, a male and a female—based on the marked disparity in their sizes—were seen circling over James McGregor Park. "What brought these birds to my attention was an unusual, somewhat guttural 3-note call 'krreg, krreg, krreg', all notes on the same frequency" (Peter Frost). Has anyone heard anything similar?

Falcons are regularly seen over Bastia Hill, where the upward air flow seems to provide birds with additional lift, allowing them to soar at minimal energy cost. Single birds were reported from there on 15 April (Jim Norris); and on 1, 5 and 9 May, possibly all the same bird, an immature female (Peter Frost). Elsewhere, Colin Ogle recorded one over Kitto's Bush on Tokomaru West Rd on 3 April; Sandra Morris saw one in Aramoho on 7 April; and Sue Frost reported an apparent female attempting to catch a feral pigeon from a tight flock circling over Whanganui High School on 5 May. More widely, Peter Frost saw an immature female near Parakino on 28 May and, the next day, heard one calling above pine forest on Parihau Rd. Bevin Shaw mentions that he saw New Zealand Falcon from Tasman Views a couple of times in March–April.



## Australasian Harrier | Kāhu

Paul Gibson, Jim Norris, Ormond Torr and Lynne Douglas have all had occasion to photograph Australasian Harrier perched on fence posts. This is not as easy as it sounds, given the birds' extreme timidity. The approach adopted is best summed up in Paul and Jim's words. On 8 April, Paul and Jane Gibson were returning from Upokongaro when Paul saw a harrier perched on a fence post beside the road. He wrote: *"I did a U-turn and returned opposite the spot, behind a row of traffic passing on the other side. The young bird eventually allowed us so close, I could not fit him in the frame! We were in our vehicle the whole time. He was sitting on a fence post in front of a corn field, and every once in a while, dropped down to the ground looking for something – maybe mice? Never had I got so close to a harrier. They are a very timid bird. This bird was young, as he or she had very dark plumage, and brown eyes. Their eyes turn yellow at three years of age."* (Figure 10A)

Jim's follow-up email illustrates the frustrations of trying to photograph these wary birds. The next day, going back to the spot where Paul had photographed his bird, Jim wrote: *"Stopped well short of his post, took a distant pic to make sure I got him. Then moved closer, stopped and watched him move 50 yards or so to another post, when he saw my camera. Moved up again and watched as he responded again by moving when he saw the camera. The third post was near an area where they had been stockpiling metal for the road resurfacing. Plenty of room to pull off the road and I managed a poor photo of him, half off the post, as he saw the camera again."* (Figure 10B)



**Figure 10.** Australasian Harrier, perhaps the same bird, an immature (note, brown iris), photographed on fenceposts alongside a maize field at Kukuta, near Upokongaro, by Paul Gibson (A) and Jim Norris (B).

In the above cases, the bird(s) appeared to be hunting, probably for mice. This is a sit-and-wait strategy, rather than the species' usual habit of coursing over the landscape then briefly pursuing a surprised prey (search-and-pursuit) or searching for road kills (a scavenging strategy). The energetic costs of these foraging strategies are worth considering in terms of the time and energy needed to search for prey and to capture, kill and consume it, and the rate at which different potential prey are encountered. The sit-and-wait strategy, while not necessarily expending much energy, takes time. It is presumably only economic if there is a realistic probability of encountering prey in a reasonable period of time. Consider this. If nothing comes past, when should the bird move to a new perch? How would this vary with different sizes of potential prey and the rate at which they are encountered? This is a field ripe for study with binoculars, a notebook, stopwatch and a suitable sit-and-wait study species (e.g., **Sacred Kingfisher | Kōtare** hunting crabs on an estuary: see photograph at the back).

## Other interesting sightings

Lynne Douglas, a long-time resident of Castlecliff, saw a **Kererū|New Zealand Pigeon** in Morgan Street there on 26 April, noting that was her first-ever sighting in this suburb. Michael O'Shea recorded one eating lilly-pilly (*Syzigium paniculatum*) fruits in Balgownie Avenue. Colin Ogle reported **Song Thrush|Manu-kai-hua-rakau** in full song at Virginia Heights, St Johns Hill, on 14 April. The species apparently started singling later in Whanganui East, the first being recorded on 23 April (Peter Frost). Many **North Island Robin|Toutouwai** were calling at Waitahinga on 15 April (Colin Ogle). Three were calling from small patches of native bush along a drainage line in a pine plantation near the head of the Kahukahu Stream on Parihauhau Rd on 29 May (Peter Frost).

## Annual Garden Bird Survey, 25 June – 3 July

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual New Zealand Garden Bird Survey, being organised by Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, is being held from 25 June to 3 July this year. This is New Zealand's largest and longest running citizen-science project. The aim is to track the changes in the composition and relative abundance of birds occurring in areas around human habitation (gardens, parks, schools, marae). The longer the project runs, the more valuable each year's counts become, because real trends begin to emerge, rather than be obscured among short-term year-to-year variation in numbers.

The request is simple. Spend one hour on any one day between Saturday 25 June and Sunday 3 July in your garden, marae, school or local park and, for each species seen, record the highest number of individuals seen or heard at one time. Submit your results online through the NZ Garden Bird Survey website (<https://gardenbirdssurvey.nz/>). A link to the survey form will go live here on 25 June. You can download a tally sheet (<https://gardenbirdssurvey.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NZGBS-tally-sheet-2022.pdf>), to help you keep track of what you see and hear during your survey.

Last year's State of NZ Garden Birds 2021 showed positive trends locally for several native species. In the Manawatū-Whanganui counts of kererū have increased 125% in during the 10-year period, 2011–2021. Tūi numbers increased 39% over the same 10-year period, as did those for fantail/pīwakawaka (up 23% over the past 10 years). Conversely, bellbird/korimako numbers have declined by 17% over the same period, although only by -3% in the last 5 years. The numbers of Silvereye/tauhou (Figure 11) have changed little over the past 10 years. But with 39% increase since 2016, numbers must have declined between 2011 and 2016 and are now recovering.

Among the introduced species, the reported numbers of greenfinch (up 92%), goldfinch (up 40%), and myna (up 31%) all show moderate to shallow increases over the past 10 years, with blackbird (up 10%), house sparrow (+1%), song thrush (-1%), starling and dunnock (both -9%), are effectively unchanged. Chaffinch numbers (-11%) indicate a shallow decline. Whether any of these trends are significant in the long-term depends much on how long the surveys have been undertaken and on the starting point (if numbers were abnormally high initially, for whatever reason, then later, more normal counts would appear to show a decline). These questions can only be resolved with long-term data.

The photographic competition is back this year (see <https://gardenbirdssurvey.nz/photocomp/>) for details. Eligible photos must be taken in New Zealand sometime during the period 7:00 am Saturday 25 June 2022 and 7:00 pm Sunday 3 July 2022. The winning entry will feature on the cover of *State of NZ Garden Birds 2022 | Te Āhua o ngā Manu o te Kāri i Aotearoa* and the winner will get a pair of Nikon Prostaff 5 10×42 binoculars valued at \$409 from Photo & Video International. There is also a colouring competition for children in three age categories: 6 and under, 7–11 and 12–15 (see <https://gardenbirdssurvey.nz/children-teachers/colouring/> for details and resources). The winners in each category will get a TopFlite Nectar Nutra Feeder set (including packs of bird food).



**Figure 11.** Results from the New Zealand Garden Birds Survey show that the numbers of silvereye/tahou reported in 2021 from Manawatū–Whanganui are little changed from those counted 10 years earlier.

You can visit the NZ Garden Bird website (<https://gardenbirdssurvey.nz/>) for more information and resources and copies of last year’s national report. Please take part.

### **New (revised) Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand published online**

In 1953, the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ), now more popularly known as Birds New Zealand, published a checklist of New Zealand birds. Its aimed to provide information on the official (scientific) names of the birds occurring in New Zealand, their relationships relative to each other (i.e., how they are classified) and summaries of their past and present distribution. This became the authoritative text on the bird species here—the official list—including regular or occasional migrants and even rare vagrants. Since then, the checklist has been fully revised three times and amended once, as knowledge of our birds and their relationships became better known. All were published in hard copy, an expensive exercise.

The last revision was in 2010, a 500-page compendium published by Te Papa Press and the OSNZ. It presented relevant information on all the birds (including now-extinct species) accepted as occurring or having occurred in New Zealand, its offshore islands, the Ross Dependency in Antarctica, as well as Macquarie and Norfolk Is. The latter two were included because, even if they are politically part of Australia, they are geologically part of Zealandia and their bird species more closely related to those in New Zealand.

A fifth checklist has now just been published, updating the list of accepted species, their nomenclature (scientific names) and their taxonomy (how they are classified relative to each other). Coverage of the birds of Norfolk and Macquarie Is and the Ross Dependency in Antarctica has been dropped. They are dealt with in other checklists. The other change is a conscious decision to include the Māori names for as many species for which these are known. As there are often several such names, as there are in English, the checklist includes a detailed 10-page appendix (Appendix 3) that lists the alternative English, Māori and Moriori names of New Zealand birds,



all linked to the currently accepted scientific names for these species. The checklist is published online rather than as hard copy (see <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/society-publications/checklist/>), making it easier and cheaper to published revisions as our knowledge and understanding improves further. You can download a PDF version at <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/checklist-2022.pdf>.

#### **Banded Red-billed Gull (Answer)**

The numbers in the images in Figure 5, from left to right, are 7479, 747, and what looks like 207, possibly with a hyphen preceding it (either that or it is a 4). Put together in the correct sequence, this is band number could be -207479, and would probably be preceded by an E (all metal bands have letter preceding the number, the letter signifying the size of the band); thus E-207479.



**Sacred Kingfisher | Kōtare** another sit-and-wait predator, foraging on crabs on the Whanganui Estuary, 29 April 2022 (Photo credit: Ormond Torr)

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