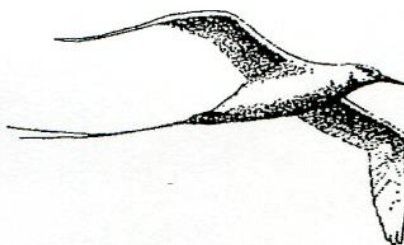


# AMOKURA



## NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHLAND BRANCH OF THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



Buller's Mollymawk.  
Photo John Ballinger

### BRANCH MEETINGS

**Meetings** are held each month on the second Thursday at 7:30 pm at the Alzheimer's Society, 148 Corks Road, Tikipunga, Whangarei.

Cost: \$3-00 per person per meeting toward the cost of Hall hire, supper and the distribution of Amokura.

Or you can pay an Annual fee of \$30.00 to the Northland Branch bank account 12-3099-0614160-00. Payment Due after the AGM

### ROLES

Regional representative	Ilse Corkery	027 3534884 <a href="mailto:birds.northland@birdsNZ.org.nz">birds.northland@birdsNZ.org.nz</a>
Secretary	Heather O'Brien	(09) 437 0085
Treasurer	Heather O'Brien (acting)	
Regional recorder	Tony Beauchamp	(09) 436 2224
Regional reporter	Vacant	
Amokura editor	John Ballinger	027 620 6479

Click here for [previous issues of Amokura](#)

## EVENTS CALENDER

Month	Speaker and topic	Field trips and monitoring
July	Adrian Riegen – <i>Gotwit migrations</i>	
August	Adam Willett – <i>Update from Bream head conservation trust</i>	
September	Harry Boorman – <i>Big Year birding 2021</i>	
October	Tertia Thurley – <i>Chatham Island robins</i>	29 <sup>th</sup> Waipu/ Wairahi reserve with Piroa Bryderwyns Landcare Group
November	Su Sinclair - <i>Rarotonga flycatcher</i>	Whangarei Harbour count - 6 <sup>th</sup> Nov*  Ngunguru count - 6th Nov 9:30am - meet Ngunguru School in Te Maika Road **  Kaipara Harbour Count – 26th Nov. Hight tide Onehunga 4.2m at 13:09*
December	Christmas party	

\* Contact Tony at 0275403487 for Harbour Counts; \*\* Contact Hilton Ward for Ngunguru count 027 626 7166

## RECENT SITINGS AND RARETIES

## BRIDLED TERN - FIRST LIVE NZ RECORD!

In February Scott Brooks posted the following on the Northland Birds Facebook page:

“On Sunday my friend David Howes and I did a land-based beach mission to the very top of Northland, New Zealand to coincide with the tail winds of Cyclone Dovi bashing in, and with the very warm ocean temperatures we have this summer. We were wanting to see what tropical birds might be pushed in and also if any seabirds needed a rescue. We didn't find a lot but what did come in was the NZ mega Bridled Tern (the first live NZ

record - previously only one beach wrecked bird was found in 1987). We also spotted a Black Noddy at the same location. And we saw a Great Frigatebird (which was reported earlier that morning at a different spot).

Other awesome tropical seabirds seen by others that day in northern NZ were a Black-naped Tern (a NZ first!!), a Sooty Tern, a Brown Noddy, a White-tailed Tropicbird and a Brown Booby. A staggering day for NZ tropical seabird sightings - all which are very uncommon vagrants. What a day!!”





*Bridled tern (above) and Black Noddy (below) at the Bluff, Ninety Mile Beach. Photos by Scott Brooks*





*Banded rail. Photo  
by Bartek Wypych*

## NORTHLAND SCIENCE & SCIENTISTS – BANDED RAIL

Tony Beauchamp has published a paper on banded rail in volume 69, part 2 of the journal *Notornis* titled:

The detection, breeding behavior, and use of mangroves (*Avicennia marina australasica*) by banded rails (*Gallirallus philippensis assimilis*)

## Hundreds of dead little blue penguins wash up on Northland beaches

On May 2 to 8, more than 40 dead little penguins were found washed up on Tokerau Bay, just around the corner from Cable Bay. On May 31, more than 100 little blue penguins were found dead on Ninety Mile Beach (Te One-roa-a-Tōhē), according to photographs on social media.

Beach patrol data submitted by Patrick Miller showed kororā deaths weren't restricted to the Far North with birds found on Uretiti, Ocean Beach, Patua north, Great Expedition Bay, Henderson, Kowhai and Ripiro Beach as well.

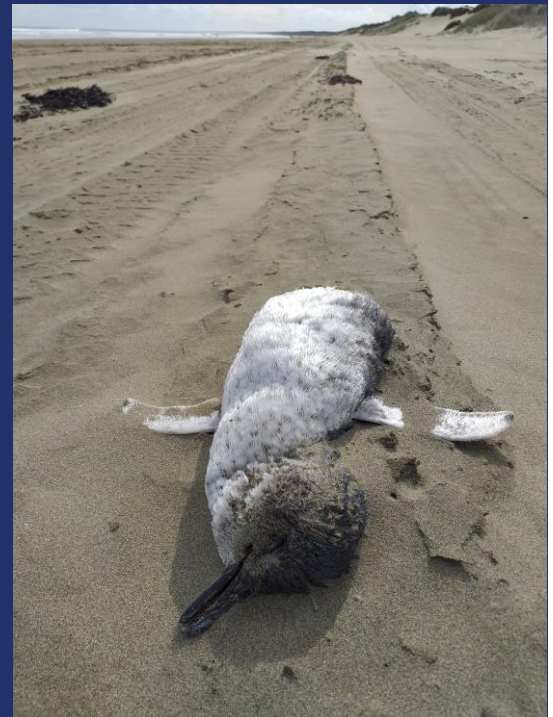
As reported by Radio NZ, Kevin Mathews from Birds New Zealand lives just north of Kaitia and said groups had been doing monthly checks around the area, and they'd been finding birds washed up in huge numbers.

"One of the first things I do is look at the condition of the bird, see whether they've died at sea or have struggled to shore and died on the dune line. The birds that I found that were freshly washed ashore [so it] certainly appeared that they'd died at sea."

"You can do a little simple test by checking the sharpness of the keel bone on the breastbone, and they were in very poor condition."

An investigation by Department of Conservation showed the kororā had signs of starvation and hypothermia, due to a lack of blubber to keep them warm in the water. The penguins had poor body condition and their gastrointestinal tract was empty.

Graeme Taylor from the Department of Conservation said natural deaths of kororā can be exacerbated by climate change and the La Niña weather conditions, which have continued into winter in Aotearoa. This is because warmer waters drive the fish the penguins live on into cooler, deeper waters – making it harder for them to find food.



*Dead penguin on 90 mile beach. Photos by  
Jeff Rice*

## THE PETREL STATION

### TUTUKAKA PELAGIC SEABIRD TRIPS

As usual, there was lots of fabulous birding at the “Petrel Station”, a series of pelagic trips off Tutukaka organized by Scott Brooks. A good variety of birds and marine life were seen with some of the highlights including:

- multiple species of albatross,
- up to 30 NZ storm petrels off the back of the boat at once
- a massive Scorpion Fish (aka Grand Daddy Hapuka) come up from the deep to try and eat a young Buller's Shearwater
- different species of skua
- 3 Wilson's Storm Petrels
- 67 Grey Noddies (Ternlets)
- Thousands of seabirds!



Looking for a great day out with some awesome seabirds? There are a few spaces left on the upcoming winter August Tutukaka pelagic seabird trips to the Petrel Station. For more information check out the links below:

[www.facebook.com/thepetrelstation](https://www.facebook.com/thepetrelstation); [www.instagram.com/thepetrelstation/](https://www.instagram.com/thepetrelstation/)

***“Winter is when the albatross and southern seabirds head up north to our area, and we've also had some real seabird rarities show up too, so there's no telling what could make an appearance” Scott Brooks***

All photos by Scott Brookes



*Brown skua (left); Campbell albatross (mollymawk) (right)*





*NZ Storm petrel (left); Arctic skua (right).*



*Northern Giant Petrel*





*Buller's Shearwater and Scorpion Fish*



*Black petrels (left); Grey Noddy (Ternlet)(right)*



## TRIP REPORT – IN SERACH OF WHIO ON THE TONGARIRO RIVER

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY HEATHER O'BRIEN

Early in May 2022 Steve and I set off on a road trip. Our tour was via Turangi then over the hills to Hastings / Napier, Whakatane then home to Whangarei. Why go via Turangi? To see whio on the Tongoriro river of course!

We drove from Whangarei to Turangi in a day arriving at 4pm. I couldn't wait to see if the ducks were there so Steve dropped me off at the river with camera and binos while he checked in at our accommodation. The river surface reflected the autumn colours in the late afternoon light and the trout fisher people were out in force, but there were no whio in sight.

I wandered up and down the river track investigating the side trails the trout fishers used to access the river. I marveled at the agility of the many welcome swallows as they flew in fast dip and dive patterns, sometimes plunge diving fully into the river to catch their food.



*A combination of shots to show the sequence of the swallow dive*

Finally, as the light was fading, I spotted a pair of whio resting on rocks not far from the walking bridge. I gently approached and watched one bird enter the water to swim downriver. I was able to watch the other bird for a short time and heard it call to its mate downriver before it too took off upriver flying across the top of the water. I was very pleased to have found and photographed whio. As I walked back along the river track to meet Steve, we came to a more open part of the river and to my delight found 6 whio milling around a large fallen log on the other side of the river. There were 3 mallard feeding close by, while the whio didn't seem too fussed by them, we observed the whio herding the mallard away after a time. Other species present on the river were little pied shag, black shag, white faced heron, black backed gull and paradise duck.

I got up very early the following morning to photograph the stars and see if I could spot any of the Aquarid meteors falling. It was also the beginning of duck shooting season. I heard some early morning shots and ducks were active flying up and down the river.



*Whio resting on a rock*





*Milky way over the Tongariro river just before the dawn light takes over from the stars*



*Tongariro river at Turangi just after sunrise*





*The autumn colours of Turangi*

The following day we explored the National Park circuit stopping at many lakes and canals that link water flow together for hydro power generation. I was back at the Tongariro river at 4pm in the hope of finding the whio a little closer for photographing. I must have looked like I was on a mission all kitted out with camera, long lens and binos. As I walked out the back gate from our accommodation onto the river walkway the first person I came across directed me to some whio at the same place as the day before. All I had said was hello.

I watched quite a large number of whio gathering and dispersing about 200m up and down the river until it was too dark to see. The total number of whio I counted that evening was

13, some were juveniles as their eyes were darker. I noticed one bird had lost a foot, that bird looked just as capable in the fast-flowing water as any of the other birds. The locals that stopped to ask me what I was looking at were amazed that there were 13 Whio currently in this part of the river. They commented that they usually only saw the resident pair. Maybe once they saw the local birds that they were expecting, people didn't notice or look for more whio? Or maybe that was an unusual number to see. The locals I spoke to were certainly very pleased with the trapping and other conservation work going on to help these unique ducks and I felt really blessed to have a front row seat to watch them.



*Sunlight shows the lovely colours of a Whio pair (top left), Whio pair seeing some mallards off their patch (top right), Eight Whio (bottom left), and Whio with missing foot (bottom right).*

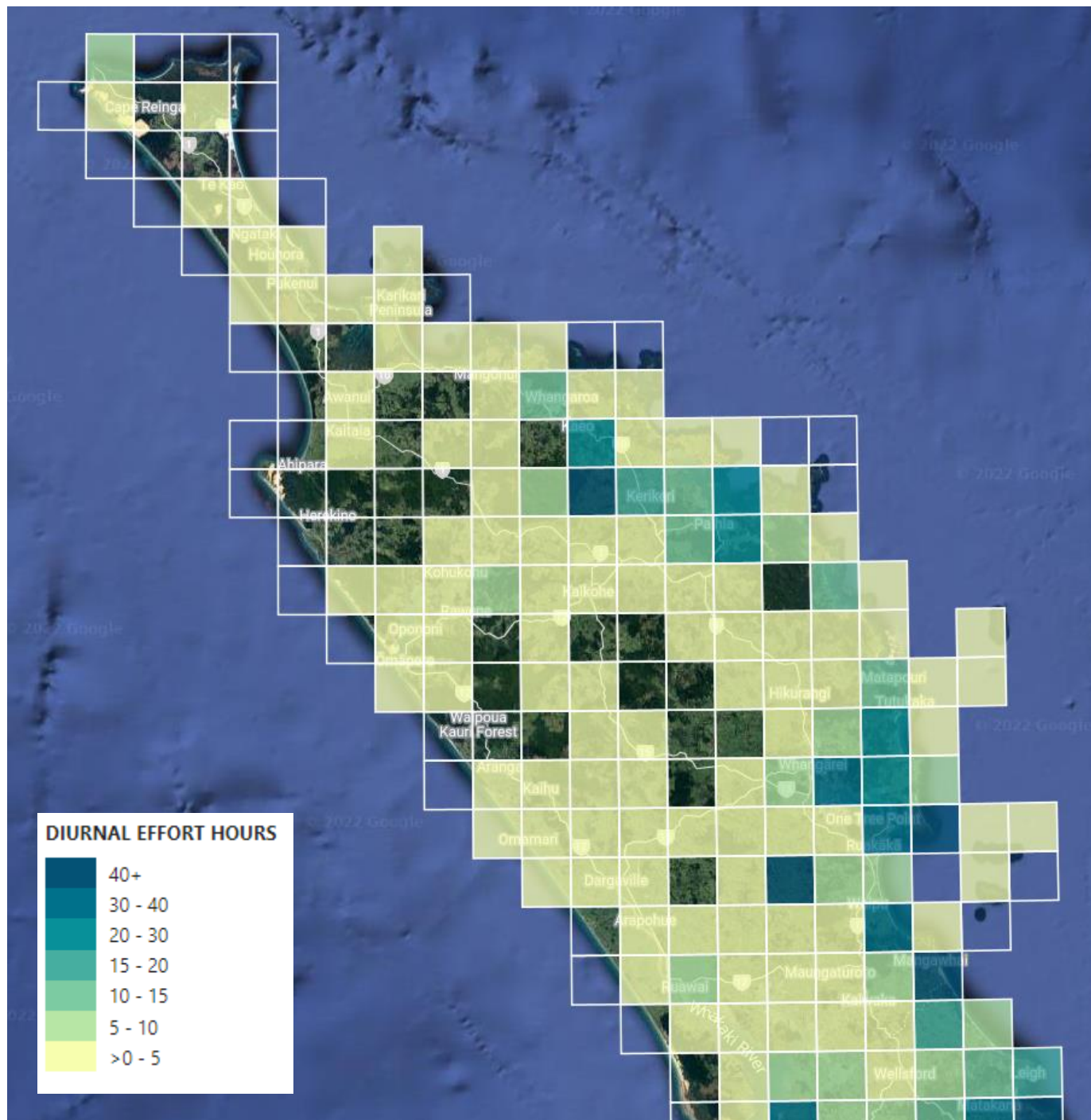


## NZ BIRD ATLAS UPDATE

### WINTER EFFORT TO DATE

Unsurprisingly, most birding effort has been conducted on the east coast near the populated centers of Mangawhai, Whangarei and Kerikeri (see map below).

The biggest data gaps are in areas of the west coast around Waipoua forest and the Pouto peninsula, in addition to mid-north areas such as the Mangakahia valley. In the Far north there are gaps around Herekino, Ahipara and Kaitaia as well as a few squares in the Aupouri peninsula.



*Winter (June -August) diurnal effort hours*

## HOW ARE OUR BIRDS DOING? – NORTH ISLAND KOKAKO

UPDATE BY ILSE CORKERY

North Island kōkako (*Callaeas wilsoni*) belong to the endemic New Zealand wattlebird family Callaeidae, an ancient family of birds which includes the North and South Island tieke/saddleback and the extinct huia. Kōkako were formerly found throughout the North Island but by 1999 the population was reduced to just 330 pairs scattered across 11 sites.

Nationally, kōkako management is a story of success. Research during the 1990's identified that kōkako were on the road to extinction due to predation. That research identified the key predators and how to manage them specifically for kōkako. The rebuilding of the kōkako national population is a conservation success story achieved over many decades. And in 2021 the conservation milestone of 2000 pairs was reached. North Island kōkako are now classed as "Threatened–Nationally Increasing".

There are two remaining populations of kōkako in Northland. The Waima-Mataraua kōkako population (comprised of Matarau and the Waima sub-population approximately 10 kilometres to the northwest) is of national significance as it is one of the original 11 relic populations. This wider Waipoua/Mataraua/Waima forest covers approximately 30,000 hectares and is situated 50 kilometres northwest of Dargaville. Predator control targeting ship rats and possums was initiated at Matarau in 1990 by the Department of Conservation. In 1990, prior to the implementation of predator control, 5 pairs and 5 territorial single kōkako were recorded within the eastern Waipoua-Mataraua forest. Following the implementation of predator control, the population increased slowly to approximately 60 pairs in 2020.

The second Northland population is at Puketi Forest. Puketi-Omahuta forest is situated 14 kilometres west of Kerikeri and it encompasses approximately 21,000 hectares. Tragically, Puketi was one of the largest and densest kōkako populations known to exist in the 1980s, but it declined from at least 100 individuals in 1982 to just 7 males by 2002. No relic Puketi birds are known to survive today. In 2003, the Puketi Forest Trust was initiated, and work began establishing networks for the control of introduced mammalian predators in the southern and eastern areas of Puketi forest. After unsuccessful attempts at hand rearing and captive breeding of kōkako, a fresh start was made in 2012 – 2014 with the transfer of 20 kōkako from Mataraua, a captive reared pair from Hamilton Zoo and one captive bred male from Lady Alice Island (a total of 23 birds).

Unfortunately, recent kōkako surveys indicate that both populations are declining again. Future landscape predator control is critical if we want to retain populations of kōkako in Northland.



North Island kokako. Adult showing front view of wattles. Tiritiri Matangi Island, April 2010. Image by Cheryl Marriner [www.glen.co.nz/cheryl](http://www.glen.co.nz/cheryl)