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Otago Region Newsletter 7/2022

August 2022

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



Ornithological Snippets

Firstly, an apology for there being no column last month; some outstanding records are included here.

A new site for **Marsh Crane** was a farm in the Owaka Valley, where one was seen and photographed on 24 June; birds continue to be reported from Tomahawk Lagoon and Lake Dunstan.

A loose flock of **SIPO** near Dunrobin (West Otago) on 23 July numbered 137 birds, an impressive number inland for the time of year. Also present were at least 4 **Black-fronted Terns**, with the first of the year at Bendigo being seen on 31 July. Meanwhile a **Spur-winged Plover** was on a nest near Balclutha 19 July. In addition to those already reported, a **White Heron** was at Brighton on 11 July.

15 **Australasian Harrier** were seen simultaneously at Clarendon on 31 July, presumably gathering prior to roosting by Lake Waiholo. 2 **Red-crowned Kakariki** were seen at close range in the Waipori Gorge on 18 June, not far from where 2 were seen last December.

2 **Fantail** were hunting under a street light in central Dunedin after dark on 25 June, and **Silvereye** hit the headlines in late July, when a leucistic bird was seen in Maori Hill in late July, with another in Mosgiel around the same time. <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/two-rare-leucistic-silvereyes-spotted-city>

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

eBird News

As alluded to over the last few months, there have been a few changes to English (NZ) names for some of our birds. We now have Southern Black-backed Gull, New Zealand (not Australasian) Pipit, Australasian Shoveler, NZ Rock Wren (much easier to search for than Rockwren), White-capped Mollymawk, Banded Rail and Southern Brown Kiwi (Tokoeke). No luck yet with reverting to Red-billed Gull, despite that being what everyone calls them here. The full taxonomic update takes place in early October.

At the start of August there was a major change in the way exotic species are treated. of exotics. They now fall into three categories: established – which in NZ applies to most of the common European introductions; provisional – possibly self-sustaining populations, and escapes. Each category has a different symbol, which appears whenever an exotic species is listed in eBird. (Hint: the darker the background of the symbol, the more exotic the species.) Escaped species do not count on your eBird life list, but are listed separately at the end of the list, along with hybrids and other non-species. Maps now show ranges of native and introduced populations in different colours: traditional purple for native species, and orange for exotics. The rationale behind this change is to encourage observers to include exotic species on checklists, in order to document changes in range.

Contact Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com

BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Guided Bird-watching Walk at Dunedin Botanic Garden

10 – 11 am Sunday, 11th September

We have missed these events for a couple of years because of covid regulations so it will be good to resume. This year our walk coincides with Conservation Week, 5-11 Sept with its theme of “take a moment to act for nature” and hopefully we will get some advertising through this. In addition, could any Birds NZ members with Facebook or Twitter also advertise this event; thanks.

Other years we have had about 40 visitors which we divide into groups of about 6-8 each. This should be a fun activity and we will meander around the lower garden for up to 1 hour, helping people to spot birds and identify them. You don't have to be an ornithological expert to be a guide, just a bird enthusiast who knows the local garden birds. It would be best if we can have 2 guides per group.

If you can help – the more the merrier – Contact: Suzanne Middleton
smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz ph 022 2601 8579

This is an excellent way to increase our profile and enthuse more people about birds.

Mary Thompson



<https://dunedinbotanicgarden.co.nz/?a=733955>

Adventure Atlassing, based at Naseby Labour Weekend, 21-24 October

This trip is for the more adventurous, active and outdoorsy-types among us, who can cope with some wilderness walking, maybe mountain- or e-biking, and 4WD driving into some of the more remoter squares in north Otago that haven't yet had any birding coverage.

The Otago Branch has received funding for this trip from The Atlas Team via Toi Toi Wines, so it will be highly subsidised, so this is a great opportunity to have fun birding and get into some lesser known backcountry. We have already had many expressions of interest.

To register and confirm participation please email Richard at cluthaphotos@gmail.com before the end of August as we need to reserve accommodation at Naseby Holiday Park.



Survey and Monitoring of bittern and crakes in Otago wetlands Workshop Weekend at Sinclair Wetlands, Saturday and Sunday 17 and 18 September.



This is our new project that Birds NZ has committed to being involved in over the next few years. Birds NZ was invited by Scott Jarvie (ORC Biodiversity Scientist and Birds NZ member) to be involved in this project. This survey will also provide useful data on the distribution of these cryptic species for our Atlas Project.

The Otago Regional Council is undertaking a survey of bittern and crakes as part of their biodiversity monitoring related to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and the information gathered will provide local authorities with direction on how they should manage freshwater under the RMA.

Funding is available from ORC to cover most expenses associated with the surveys and analysis of audio recordings. So I am trusting that a goodly number of Otago Birds NZ members will be keen to help and be actively involved in some way.

The project will have several aspects to it and should cater for different skills and interests. Bittern survey: The field work may involve travel to wetlands and placing Automatic acoustic recording devices (ARDs) in the wetlands and collecting them. Alternatively, active listening for bittern booms during spring.

Crakes: Active monitoring for crakes using call-playback.

Analysis of spectrograms obtained from ARDs using Raven Pro software (can be done in the off-season at home).

It is important that as many folk who may be interested in this project to come to the Workshop; there is bunkroom accommodation for about 12 people and camp sites for campervans and the new hut on Ram Island is available for the younger men to try out (and listen for bittern all night!!). Some folk may prefer to travel out each day (or can only make it for one day) and that is OK too. **Please let Mary Thompson know ASAP so a place can be reserved for you (on a first come first served basis) and you can be put on the information email list.** nzmaryt@gmail.com

The workshop will cover the methodology of the survey; passive monitoring of Australasian bittern with acoustic recording devices (ARDs), including technical aspects, such as site deployment, downloading, data entry. (Some ARDs will be installed in advance, so that real recordings can be downloaded and analysed.); active monitoring of Australasian bittern, marsh crake and spotless crake. On Saturday evening we will walk transects of the wetland to use call-playback to listen for crakes.

Representatives from ORC and DOC will also be attending as they are also contributing to this project.

For the 2022 breeding season it is envisaged that the Sinclair Wetlands, Lakes Waipori/Waiholā and Lake Tuakitoto will be the sites surveyed and possibly a site in the Catlins area. Both active monitoring and ARDs will be employed. The analysis of recordings can be any time over January to August 2023. After this pilot study has been done the project will be reviewed to decide how best to proceed.

Mary Thompson

Distinguishing Black-billed and Red-billed (Silver) Gulls

It seems there is some uncertainty among observers regarding the separation of New Zealand's two small gull species. The names suggest that all you need to do is see the bill colour, and by extension the leg colour, to know which species you are looking at. However, it is not quite so straightforward, and in fact away from a breeding colony bare parts colour is one of the less reliable features, as immature Red-billed Gull can have dark (sometimes black) bill and legs, while these can be red or orange on Black-billed Gull. There are several features

which, especially if taken in combination, should enable identification as one species or the other. The following is a simplified guide to telling the two apart.

If birds are on the ground or water, the first thing I look for is the colour of the mantle: Red-billed is a distinctly darker shade of grey, and this is especially noticeable in cloudy conditions. Another feature is the bulk of the bird: Red-billed is generally a bulkier bird, with a heavier build and less streamlined than Black-billed. Thirdly, Red-billed gull has a stouter, shorter bill.

In flight, the darker mantle of Red-billed is still usually noticeable. A more obvious feature is the wing pattern, with Red-billed having more extensive black in the wingtip, extending from the front to the rear of the wing, with a white patch beyond. The black is more extensive on immature birds. On Black-billed Gull the black is usually confined to a narrow subterminal band on the outer primaries.

A final pointer is the head shape, which is more rounded in Black-billed, compared with the more angular form of Red-billed, which gives the Black-billed a gentler appearance.

Armed with this knowledge, most birds should be identifiable, given reasonable views, but if you are really stuck (and aren't able to get a photograph), then there is the option in eBird of submitting "Black-billed/Silver Gull", and there is no shame in using this.



Black-billed (L) and Red-billed Gulls. The former has a more slender build, and paler grey upperparts, than the latter. Notice that both have red or orange legs. The different bill shape is also obvious in this photo.



Black-billed (L) and Red-billed Gulls in flight. Red-billed has more black in the wingtip, with a different pattern, plus darker grey upperparts.

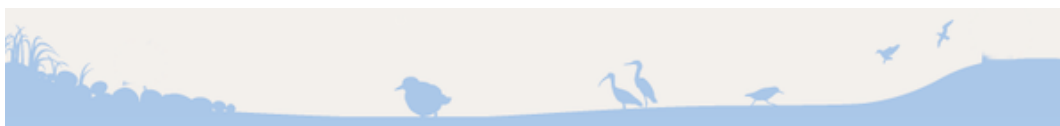


Composite image.
All images show Black-billed Gull on the left



Plumage varies through the year, and moult doesn't help the situation, but relative differences in plumage tone and pattern still apply

Richard Schofield



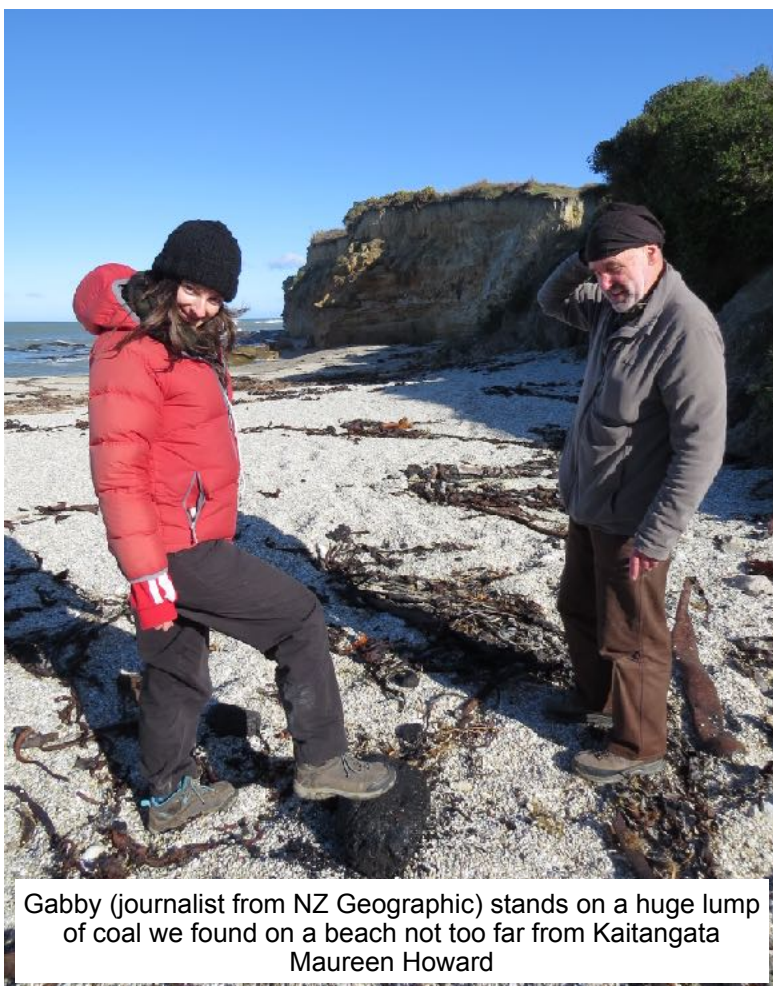
A sunny sojourn to Toko Mouth

Our group of 13 met up the Toko Domain for an atlassing expedition on Sunday 14 August. Mary and Richard were focused on several atlassing squares in the Milton area between the Tokomairiro River Mouth and Mitchells Rocks aka EC29 Toko Mouth S.



On the beach at Toko Mouth

Maureen Howard



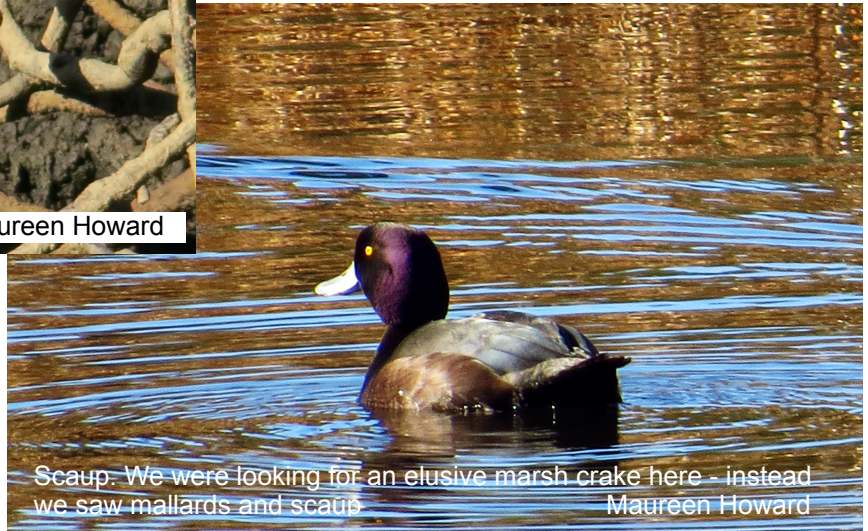
Gabby (journalist from NZ Geographic) stands on a huge lump of coal we found on a beach not too far from Kaitangata
Maureen Howard

The weather was perfect: clear and sunny with just a hint of a chilly breeze to remind us it was winter. Several of us were new to atlassing (including me), so it was a great opportunity to take a turn using the eBird app under the watchful and helpful gaze of the more experienced birders. A highlight for me was the group process for identifying the birds. With so many experienced and knowledgeable people it was fun observing the spirited discussions, knowing glances, and bird call double checking. Everyone was very generous with their knowledge and I had the chance to learn how to tell a dunnoek from a sparrow.

After a turn about the river mouth and a walk along the beach to nab another square, we headed to the domain for a spot of lunch. Some shared chocolate cake prompted a spontaneous round of happy birthday singing. After lunch we separated into smaller groups and headed to different areas for the afternoon.



Pied shag Toko mouth coast Maureen Howard



Scaup. We were looking for an elusive marsh crake here - instead we saw mallards and scaup Maureen Howard

A total of 29 checklists were completed in two different squares. There were plenty of birds – 46 species in total including Black Swan, Grey Teal, three types of Cormorant (Pied, Little Pied and Great), Kingfisher, Green Finch, South Island Oyster Catcher, more than 300 white fronted terns, fernbird and surprisingly a spoonbill.

Joy Liddicoat



Leucistic Silvereye side by side with another Silvereye

Kurien (Koshy) Yohannan

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.

Tuesday 23 August Nic Rawlence
Latest discoveries about ancient NZ birds

Zoom Meeting link

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7868201621?pwd=VlhaTWILWWt1cWgrS3B0dzhkWIUwUT09>

Meeting ID: 786 820 1621

Passcode: 389044

Sunday 11 Sept Botanic Garden Birdwatching Walks; Birds NZ members will guides groups around the gardens spotting and identifying birds, 10 - 12 noon. This is running as part of Conservation Week, "Take a moment to act for nature". See article in newsletter

Sat 17/Sun 18 Sept Wetland Birds Workshop at Te Nohoaka o Tukiauaau/Sinclair Wetlands See article in newsletter and contact Mary nzmaryt@gmail.com

Sunday 25 Sept Birds NZ is holding a guided 5MBC along the Town Belt Bird Count Trail with student members of AAPES 10 - 12 noon, followed by pizza lunch. Contact Bruce if you can come to help brucejmckinlay@gmail.com

Tuesday 27 Sept Bruce McKinlay
Town Belt Bird Survey findings

21 - 24 Oct Adventure Atlassing Labour weekend - Naseby area. Contact Richard cluthaphotos@gmail.com See more information in newsletter.

Tuesday 25 Oct Oscar Thomas, Catherine Bradley and Zac Martin
The kakapo recovery programme ~ highlights of our experiences.

Tuesday 22 Nov Bird Quiz Night ???

If we would like to have another quiz for the last meeting of the year we **need someone to volunteer as Quiz master** to coordinate the event, devise questions (ask others to contribute questions or ideas) and collate the quiz content. If this sounds like you, please let Mary know.

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

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

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **20 September**