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## *Otago Region Newsletter 9/2022*

### *October 2022*

Face masks are now an individual choice.  
However, if you feel unwell, please stay home out of  
consideration for others.



### **Ornithological Snippets**

A **Cape Barren Goose** was seen and photographed at Bendigo on 13 October, while a **Mute Swan** was near Lake Waihola on the 8, presumably the bird seen on nearby Lake Tuakaitoto in late August. A small influx of **Wrybill** started with 2 at Aramoana on 26 September, followed by a single at Cabbage Point on 1 & 8 October, then 11 at Warrington on 10, dropping to 5 on 11, when 6 at Cabbage Point.

A **Red Knot** was also at Cabbage Point on 8 October. Alan Baker reports a pair of **SI Pied Oystercatchers** with 2 chicks at the Leith mouth on 16 September

A **Kaka** was reported feeding on apple blossom and kowhai in Roxburgh on 24 September, and a **Brown Creeper** identified at Bendigo on 1 October. Finally a report appeared in the ODT of a starling with an abnormal bill -<https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/big-beaked-bird-dines-out-scone>

Please send any interesting reports to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com) **Richard Schofield**

## eBird News

At this stage of the Atlas, most of the easily accessible squares have good coverage, and the ones that need fieldwork are either distant or not so accessible, or both. In any case we need to make sure that our visits are as efficient as possible, so that we don't have to make another trip (in the relevant season) when the time could be more usefully employed elsewhere. So, I'm going to make a few suggestions for finding as many birds as possible when in an unfamiliar area.

Assuming you've already checked the Atlas Effort Map to find suitable locations, next look at either a topomap (paper or digital), or satellite imagery, or preferably both ([www.topomap.co.nz](http://www.topomap.co.nz) has the ability to toggle between the two forms, likewise the [outdoor access map](#), on which you can also overlay the Atlas grid). Look for different habitats – waterways are a good start, but bear in mind that in some areas irrigation ponds in particular are appearing all the time, and may not show on the map. Look for bush and forestry, which can be distinguished from each other on either form of map.

Try to cover all habitats in a square, even if you think you've found all likely species. And if you're in a square that has (or seems to have) very few species, do multiple counts, ideally a mixture of stationary and travelling counts, as this will maximise your chances of finding as many species as possible.

### Global Big Day

Despite not making a coordinated effort this time Otago still managed a very creditable total of 74 species on 8 October, putting us in equal second place behind Canterbury. 23 observers contributed, and again Otago provided the only Yellowhead/Mohua sighting in the world on the day.

Contact **Richard 027 281 8701** or [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

### Enjoy Meeting Talks again on YouTube

The talks at Birds NZ meetings were recorded and have been uploaded to YouTube with the following links.

<a href="https://youtu.be/DgYt3t4KcHs">https://youtu.be/DgYt3t4KcHs</a>	Adrian Reagans talk on juvenile godwits
<a href="https://youtu.be/cnvYKSmOUYY">https://youtu.be/cnvYKSmOUYY</a>	Photographing birds by Craig McKenzie
<a href="https://youtu.be/hq9dz87NNsE">https://youtu.be/hq9dz87NNsE</a>	Seabird Identification by Oscar Thomas
<a href="https://youtu.be/IYkGK4rSZv0">https://youtu.be/IYkGK4rSZv0</a>	Torea on the Move by Anne Schlesselmann
<a href="https://youtu.be/lUbkhAc0FmE">https://youtu.be/lUbkhAc0FmE</a>	Seabird Conservation research Ursula Ellenberg
<a href="https://youtu.be/22QhGp4ukNo">https://youtu.be/22QhGp4ukNo</a>	Ancient NZ Birds by Nic Rawlence
<a href="https://youtu.be/-KvbdESNjJo">https://youtu.be/-KvbdESNjJo</a>	Chatham Island Wildlife by Ela Hunt

## Town Belt Counts get a boost with AAPES university students

On a dismal drizzly Sunday morning 10 students from the university ecology society and 10 Birds NZ members got together to do 5-minute bird counts at the new count stations along the Town Belt. We had been expecting 20 or more students but many were put off by the weather, but the intrepid had their first encounter with the 5 minute bird count technique and the new [birdcount.nz](http://birdcount.nz) website for recording the counts. After the counts we met up at Woodhaugh Gardens for pizza and coffee and a debrief. The students are a very enthusiastic bunch and keen to learn new things and be actively involved with various conservation activities, so we intend to keep in touch with that group. Thanks to all of us who turned up to help.

Please endeavour to do as many as possible 5MBC throughout October and November on fine mornings; counts can be entered on spreadsheet or via [birdcount.nz](http://birdcount.nz) on your phone (or at home). Please put Birds NZ along with your name so we can identify which are counts by us.



**Photos by Bruce and Mary**

## Bittern Monitoring in Otago Wetlands

### Part 1 Acoustic recorders in Sinclair Wetlands

Our new 5-year project is underway. The first sets of automatic acoustic recording devices (ARDs) have been deployed in various wetlands: Sinclair, Lake Tuakitoto and Tahakopa Valley, thanks to our team and Richard and Catriona.

They will be recording morning and evening for 20 days then reset for a further 20 days. The SD cards will be downloaded and spectrograms of sounds will be analysed using the computer software package, Raven, from Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The protocols we are using align with those used by DOC so our data will contribute to the national survey as well as finding out where bitterns are in Otago.

Zohara, Fayas, Martine, Scott and Mary enjoyed the gloriously fine day on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October for placing recorders at Sinclair Wetlands. Zohara is going back to change batteries and SD cards when necessary and we will have a group trip out there on **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October** to reset the ARDs for the second 20 days of recording, and then again on **20<sup>th</sup> November**.

Let Mary know if you are able to help either day. [nzmaryt@gmail.com](mailto:nzmaryt@gmail.com)



Photos by Martine Darrou

## Part 2

### Bittern Survey Weekend at Tautuku, Friday 11 to 13 November

Franny Cunninghame is helping us plan a weekend of active bittern listening down at Tautuku in the Catlins.

We would be able to do active listening around several wetlands Tautuku and Tahakopa wetlands and maybe upper Fleming. The plan would be to listen 1 h - 1 1/2 h on Friday night (arrive by 8pm at latest), and Saturday night and possibly in mornings as well (depending on enthusiasm for early mornings!). Franny has seen Bittern in these wetlands already so chances are very good on hearing some. During the day we could try call playback for crakes.

The accommodation is booked in the Cottage at the Forest and Bird Tautuku lodge, which sleeps 10 (4 x bunks in two rooms plus two mattress beds in the lounge). All travel and accommodation costs will be covered from our bittern funding from ORC. So this is a great opportunity to do something new and renew your acquaintance with the Catlins area.

**Even if you weren't at the workshop, training will be given in the field so don't feel you have missed out. We need all the help we can get and aim to develop a team of enthusiastic bittern hunters for this project.**

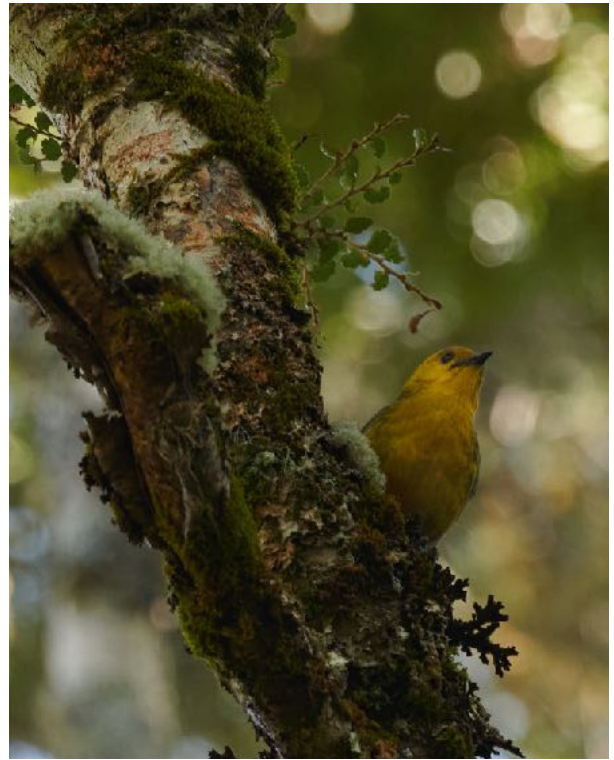
**Please let Franny know ASAP if you are planning to come.** You will be emailed further details nearer the time, re food etc. [francescacunninghame@gmail.com](mailto:francescacunninghame@gmail.com)

### Oscar's and Nick's Great Global Day Out

8th October was a Global Big Day for eBird. Our region didn't actively try to better our total but Oscar and Nick's trip to the Catlins area netted 63 species and with contribution from 23 observers around Otago 74 species were seen. Canterbury topped the list with 76 species.



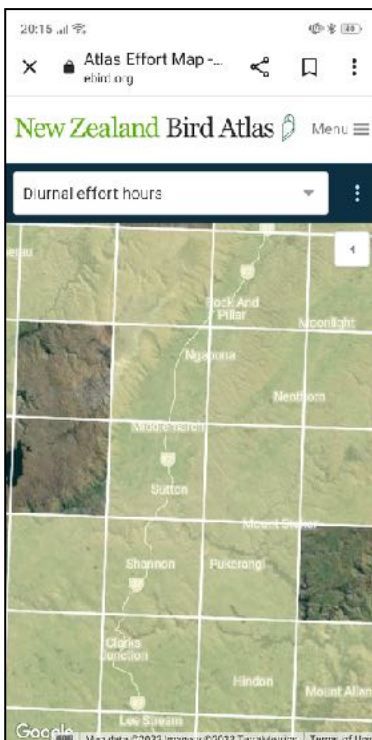
The most unusual birds seen by Oscar and Nick were a mute swan, and a white morph Southern Giant petrel seen just beyond the Nuggets. Good views of mohua and rifleman at the Wisp, and a wrybill and red knot at Pounaweia together with 400 godwits.



Photos by Nick Beckwith  
Mary Thompson

## Spring atlassing about Middlemarch

After being scuppered by the weather two weeks earlier, Richard and I set out on Sunday 18 September with the intention of filling in a glaringly empty set of spring squares about Middlemarch.



First task was to collect Richard from Sinclair Wetlands where he had been attending a Bittern workshop. Then we headed inland and got going on the square bashing.

I have often felt that one of the bonuses of atlassing is that it takes you to out of the way places that you would not normally make an effort to go. We don't have a four wheel vehicle, so the chances of wandering along the road from Clarkes Junction - the Old Dunstan Road - was not high in the normal run of things. We went as far as we could (the road proper doesn't open until late October) and made multiple stops along the way. Pretty much the expected birds about - farmland and a few ponds gave us a small selection of water birds. A stop without a Song Thrush or Magpie was to become rare!

Having made it into Rocklands Station (yet again an amazing amount of territory that you would never realise was there, plus a family connection for me) we headed out again to meet the main Middlemarch Road further north.

Lunch was beckoning, but we still managed a couple more stops, including a very satisfying water bird count from a pond near

Sutton, before heading into Middlemarch and lunch at the Kissing Gate Cafe.

The afternoon's aim was to explore a couple of squares along the road to Moonlight. Off to a great start as, just out of Middlemarch, there was an irrigation pond with very satisfying numbers of waterbirds. In fact, the pond bagged us all the waterbirds that we could reasonably expect to see (or so we thought!)

Once again we found ourselves exploring an area of New Zealand that we would probably not have visited otherwise. We discovered where Foulden Mar was located and climbed the hills to the east of Middlemarch up to about 600 metres. Surprise of this square was finding Australasian Shoveler on a pond at 600 metres and then seeing a White Faced Heron fly by! We were also grateful for our only New Zealand Pipit of the trip, which did show very nicely amongst the rocks and scraggly pasture. Oddly nearly absent (considering the apparently ideal habitat) were Spur Winged Plover, which were in good numbers at lower altitudes.

(As an aside – being a sheep farmer's daughter from South Otago – I was moderately appalled at the marginal land which had been ploughed and converted to pasture, which would have been much better of in tussock or at least semi grassed tussock land; when in South Otago increasing numbers of easy hill country farms are being put into mono culture pine forests. One ponders the common sense or rather lack of it in permission being given to overseas companies to do this sort of thing?)

I don't know about other people surveying, but I find about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon my enthusiasm starts waning and dinner beckons. There are only so many Magpies, Song Thrushes and Yellowhammers a person can count before the concentration wanders...

So we turned back and found a few more places to loiter and count birds (is there anything more frustrating than trying to count lots of little brown birds as they flit about in a crop?) before landing back in Middlemarch.

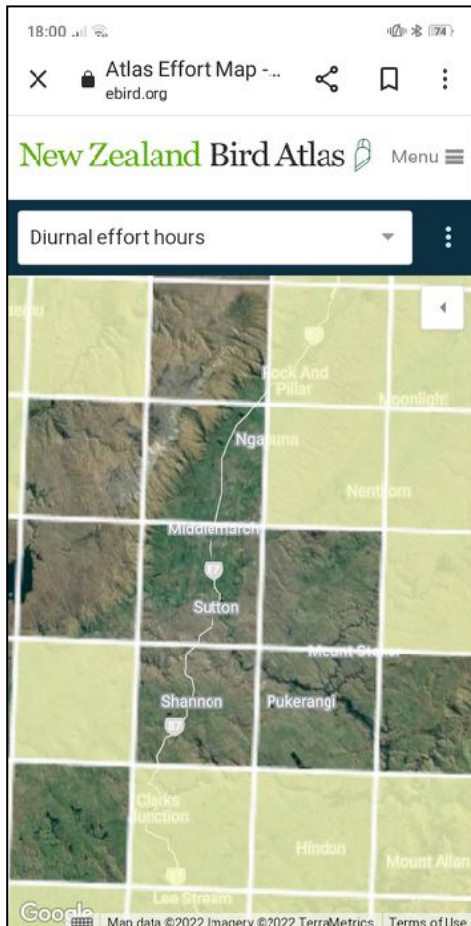
The only dinner option was the Strath Taieri Hotel and a very nice meal they put on as well.

I took Katie (our German shepherd dog along for the adventure) for a walk about the block after dinner. I had heard a likely Little Owl behind the school and was walking past St Chad's Anglican church, when there was a screech and a Little Owl literally flew out of the belfry into an oak tree at the front of the section. Very cool. By the time I had retrieved Richard and returned the owl had flown, but we heard another when taking a night time stroll up the start of the Otago Central Rail Trail.

Monday we headed north of Middlemarch to fill in further gaps not really expecting anything exciting. But a stop overlooking a pond near Ngapuna had a final surprise in store for us. Quite unexpectedly we found Coots! They seemed very out on a limb distribution wise, though subsequent research done by Richard did show them to be about in low numbers and fairly well spaced out. A reminder that though they may appear quite sedentary, they are capable of covering distances.



Turning south we ran along the flanks of the Rock and Pillars simply working at getting all the species we would expect to find and then lunch (compulsory as far as I am concerned – coffee must be imbibed!) in Middlemarch before heading south again. We first tried the north side of the Taieri (trying to twitch a Sacred Kingfisher with no luck) and then followed the railway on the south side into Pukerangi Station. We decided to drive a little further down Reefs Road and a small series of ponds yielded a nice number of waterbirds along with two more Coots!



The day was getting on, but Richard still had his sights set on a few more lists before we started the run back to Sinclair Wetlands to retrieve the other car. Once again mid afternoon fatigue had settled in for me and, with nothing exciting to be found, my sights were set on getting home.

As we zipped down one of the cross lanes on the Taieri Plains, a New Zealand Falcon flew across the front of the car and on through a hedge very neatly and away. A nice finale to a busy couple of days and great to see a falcon, as that had been the obvious miss about Middlemarch. Subsequently discovered to be unreported in the well covered Taieri square as well! Also absent on any checklists was the kingfisher. Thin on the ground were Fantail and completely absent Bellbird and Tui.- though a good number of Grey Warblers were heard and seen. Most unexpectedly hard to find common bird would have to go to the Greenfinch!

Back home with lists loaded it was satisfying to see the gap about Middlemarch had been reduced to a few difficult to get to squares – tick another successful mission.

**Suzanne Schofield**

## **Vote in Bird of the Year competition, 17-30 October**

Why not vote for the New Zealand Southern Dotterel this year.

Alexandra Tutbury, Daniel Cocker and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year Zoology students are campaigning for NZ Southern Dotterel for this year's Bird of the Year.

This is the first time NZ Southern dotterel has made it as a separate species.

The campaigners are hoping you will cast your vote for this southern species.

“The New Zealand Southern Dotterel (Tūturiwhatu) has been on a rapid decline for the past few decades. Currently at 144 individuals, the species is on the brink of extinction. Once widespread throughout the South Island, the introduction of pests in the 1900s has led the species to seek refuge on Stewart Island, remaining in Awarua Bay (Southland) for feeding. Their only current breeding habitat is on the mountain tops of Rakiura during the summer time (up to 2,500m above sea level), whereas their preferred feeding habitats are on estuaries



and beaches. The lowest count of them was in 1992, with a total of 62 and an estimated of only 12 males due to the parental care of chicks being shared, meaning the night-shift fathers were most likely to be attacked by feral cats. However, thanks to conservation efforts by the Department of Conservation their population bounced back to around 290 in 2010 but despite continued management their population has been in decline ever since. The Southern dotterels are not well known in NZ and get almost no media attention, despite having one of the lowest population counts in the country. The northern sub species are more prominent in the media, having well over 2000 individuals.



Photo by Craig McKenzie for use in the campaign

This taonga needs protection, one of the first steps is bringing attention to the species! Help this treasure by voting #1 New Zealand Southern Dotterel in the annual 'Bird of the Year' competition held by Forest and Bird."

**Alex Tutbury**

## **Cats and Birds**

For my Science Communication studies this year, I made a 12 minute podcast about keeping cats inside to help native birds.

Click on the symbol

**Beth Wishart**

## A Bird's Eye View - Answers

Can you identify all 15 eyes from native NZ birds?



Top: L-R kereru/NZ pigeon, karearea/NZ falcon, tui, tauhou/silvereye, kaka

Middle: L-R kakariki/yellow-crowned parakeet, kakaruwai/South Island robin, kahu/swamp harrier, whio/blue duck, korimako/bellbird.

Bottom: L-R ruru/morepork, mohua/yellowhead, kea, riroriro/grey warbler, titipounamu/rifleman.

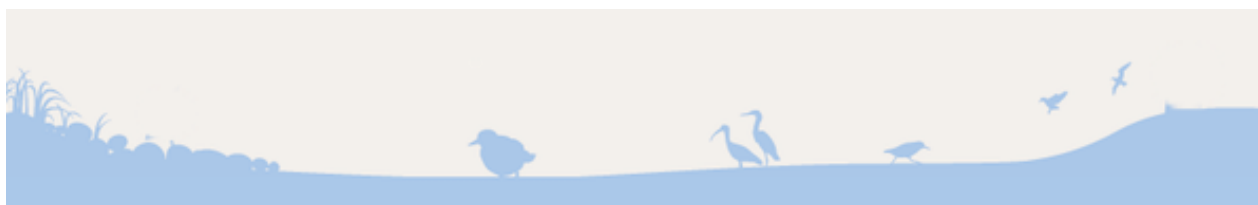
**Petrina Duncan**

### Wader Count

Volunteers wanted for wader count Sunday November 6th. High tide(2m)at Dunedin is at 2.37pm. In case of bad weather the Reserve day is Sunday November 20th. New members most welcome to participate (as are 'old' members!).

Please contact Maree email: [mareej@kinect.co.nz](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz), phone 027 6609446 to be assigned to a team.

Many thanks  
Maree



## **Why do the Regional Councils have it in for Rooks?**

Having lived in the UK for 13 years and travelled extensively in Europe, one of the familiar sights are the Rooks returning to their rookeries in the evenings. During the day they are seen in varying numbers out and about on pastures and ploughed fields, doing their business – eating the bugs and grubs that eat the crops and pastures.

They obviously don't cause extensive crop damage as farmers still seem to get satisfactory harvests.

But, for some reason, here in NZ the Rook is cast as a villain - a monstrous black bird responsible for ripping out crops and predated the countryside.

They are harried from place to place; shot, poisoned, have their eggs and nests destroyed and generally vilified.

I have enjoyed seeing the small populations of Rooks about in NZ, in the same manner I enjoy seeing Song Thrushes, Yellowhammers, Redpolls and the rest. They don't belong in NZ but are generally better than the birdless pastures we would otherwise have.

So why pick on the Rooks? (Ok, Feral Pigeons have had a hard time too, but the regional councils don't seem to have the same enthusiasm for pursuing them).

When it comes down to it, it appears to be because they are big and black and make an obvious target. Farmers have decided they damage crops (Really? These birds are mainly carnivores!) and that is reason enough. And, for some reason, rabbits, hares, deer, goats and pigs don't come into it at all – when did you last hear of a farmer who had the ORC on their property for the purpose of eliminating rabbits?

So, I was disappointed to see the ORC vendetta given prominence in Septembers newsletter. Are we as an organisation now promoting the slaughter of introduced bird species in NZ? If this is the case we should encourage the regional councils to consider the other birds threatening NZ – Rosella's spring to mind along with Sulphur Crested Cockatoos – as birds that might compete with our native parrots and parakeets as well as damaging fruit crops. Should we be hunting the Skylark as a competitor of the Pipit? Will we one day, in a distant and hopeful future, find ourselves setting out to hunt down Kiwis because their night time foraging is damaging crops? Perhaps the current atlassing effort can be used to target these damned invaders and work out how to eliminate them all!

Imagine going out atlassing with no introduced species to track down, admire and tick. Large swathes of NZ would be birdless. Oh, but wait, if we are to eliminate all introduced species, we won't be here either! Phew!

**Suzanne Schofield**

## Programme 2022

**Monthly Indoor Meetings** will be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> **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.

The Meeting zoom link

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88345925381>

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|----------------|---|
| Tuesday 25 Oct | Oscar Thomas, Catherine Bradley and Zac Martin<br>The kakapo recovery programme ~ highlights of our experiences.  |
| Sunday 6 Nov   | Summer Wader Count<br>High tide(2m)at Dunedin is at 2.37pm. In case of bad weather the Reserve day is Sunday November 20th.<br>Please contact Maree email: <a href="mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz">mareej@kinect.co.nz</a> , phone 027 6609446 |
| 11-13 November | Tautuku Lodge. Bittern Survey.<br>See elsewhere in newsletter for details Weekend Field Trip  |



Tuesday 22 Nov      Bird Quiz Night is happening  
Georgina has offered to be quizmaster with the help of Oscar; you may be asked to contribute questions so get you thinking caps on. As usual this will be our end-of-year event so please bring some festive food to share for supper if you are able. If you are a relatively new member this is a great time to meet others, so do come along.

**Suggestions of locations for field trips and atlassing trips, and offers to help lead trips would really be appreciated, please contact Mary [birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz)**

Please send all contributions for the November newsletter to: Sue Odlin [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

Final date for copy for next newsletter: **15 November**