

TŌREA PANGO

NELSON BRANCH BIRDS NZ. NEWSLETTER ISSUE 5. NOV 2022

From the Editor

This is the last newsletter for 2022 which means that Tōrea Pango has pretty much been in action for a whole year. It also means that Christmas is approaching. However, if you are expecting pictures of Godwits in silly Santa hats you have probably got the wrong person as Editor. Honestly. Oh, what the heck. Let's get it over with. Here you are. I now have no pride left.



A big thanks to all the folks who have contributed this year and made it possible. I'm sure there are loads of you out there dying to write something but maybe feeling a tad shy. So, over the Christmas break pour an extra wine; put fingers to keyboard and send us something. People really are interested; book reviews, birding snippets, a bit of science, a birdy encounter. Let's hear about it!

Summary of last meetings

October 3rd

I counted 26 members attending the October meeting and there were some late arrivals on top of that. This is the biggest attendance I can remember and is surely an indicator that the Nelson Group is in good heart.

- The large audience were rewarded by a talk from Ron Moorhouse, a great speaker with the rare ability to engage, entertain and inform. More of Ron's talk below.
- The OSNZ Birds NZ conference venues (2024) have now been finalised and confirmed as the Nelson Trafalgar Centre (Northern extension) and the Trailways Motel.
- There is a photography competition run by the Northern NZ seabirds trust who are trying to establish what white fronted terns feed on. If you have managed that magic shot of a WF tern plucking something from the water this could be your lucky moment. Details are

available on the Birds NZ website or here is a direct link; <u>https://www.nzseabirdtrust.com/tara</u>

- Avian flu H5N1 is causing high mortality in British and presumably other seabird populations (See the article below). Although it doesn't appear to have affected NZ populations yet this is surely just a matter of time. Keep your eyes out!
- Ruru! Several members reported hearing Ruru which prompted discussion around whether another survey would be timely. Peter Gaze is on to this.

Nov 3rd

Again, another well attended meeting with 20 members present.

- Welcome to new members Paul Russel and Hilary Kirby
- Peter introduced Josh Kemp from D.O.C. Nelson who gave a great talk on 'What is killing kea in the Nelson Lakes?' After many years of monitoring, it was determined in 1999 that the kea population in the Nelson Lakes was 'stable' with 10 pairs occupying the area. So, it was a bit of a shock when a survey 10 years later in 2009 found only 3 pairs remaining. What had happened? The short answer was cats and stoats. Josh talked us through the now wellknown beech mast/ predator/prey relationships in relation to this particular kea population.
- Sharen Graham submitted a report on a recent atlassing weekend by the Marlborough branch. See below.

Local sightings

- A black-tailed godwit has been seen at Moturoa / Rabbit Island feeding with bar tailed. It's likely to stay around so a good opportunity for a bit of a twitch if you haven't seen this species.
- Shining cuckoos have been heard since late September
- A long-tailed cuckoo (Pacific koel) has been seen at Wakapuaka
- Tree Martin. For the first time in 70 years I have actually seen a rare(ish) vagrant! A tree martin flew over our property in Aniseed Valley on 24th Oct. It was visible for around 45 seconds and the white rump and pale underside were very clear as was the twisting flight pattern. It's a strange feeling -even though I had enough time, good views and was able to make a positive ID, once it was out of sight, I was rubbing my eyes and doubting the reality of what I had just clearly seen (PB) I also saw a kaka at the top of the Aniseed Valley hill.



Tree Martin Courtesy NZ Birds on line Laratinga Wetlands, South Australia, October 2015. Image © John Fennell by John Fennell

National Sightings

- A Stejneger's petrel was seen on the Tutukaka 'Petrel station pelagic' on 13th October
- Subantarctic shearwaters were seen off Tairoa Head on 4th Oct
- 9 !!! bittern have been observed at the mouth of the Halswell (Lake Ellesmere) in what might be a communal roost.

More on Bird Flu

Just when we are learning to deal with Covid 19 we now have an avian equivalent in the form of the H5N1 flu virus. This has caused the death of thousands of seabirds at some of the UK's most important seabird colonies. Many bird flu virus strains are already present in bird populations but this one has a much higher mortality. At the October meeting members returning from the UK reported seeing many gannets washed up on beaches. Gannets seem to be particularly susceptible although other colonial nesters such as puffins and guillemots are also at risk from the highly contagious disease which is easily transmitted in such situations. The virus attacks multiple body organs and causes internal bleeding with a very high mortality rate. As with covid, there is some debate as to the origin of this new strain with the possibility that it has arisen in captive bird populations, possibly poultry. Of course, seabirds are already under huge pressure from nets, plastics, climate change, depletion of food resources and for island nesters, introduced predators.



Marahau fernbird nest – location and nest material characteristics YI

Paul Fisher writes:

"Attached is a brief description of an active fernbird nest that Craig Martin (Nelson OSNZ) recently found at Marahau from a pair that he has studied and photographed for several years. Having access to tall grass/rush/sedgeland close to low scrub appears to be an important habitat for fernbirds when building nests, with managed fresh grass swards and over planting scrub/trees less suitable to support nests. I had a search for a nest this evening close to a banded pair at the Wakapuaka Flats, whilst not ideal in windy conditions. I managed to find an old nest in a location similar to the attached description - I did see the male RG-YM close by carrying a moth and followed it flying more than 10m between patches of scrub though lost the bird in a sea of Plagianthus. More watching the fernbirds with food required to locate the nest. Some of the rush/grassland on the Wakapuaka Flats has been flattened in the recent rain and wind, which should recover hopefully over time."



Photos from Paul showing location and nesting material of a fernbird nest at Wakapuaka

Craig Martin's report

Fernbird nesting September to December. The nest was ~6 feet from a Plagianthus bush with tall fescue and oioi surrounding the Plagianthus. Fernbirds typically fly with food to an elevated spot on Plagianthus /other scrub and move down through the bush under cover and through the grass/rushland/sedgeland to the nest. Nests can also be found closer to the elevated scrub used by fernbirds for calling, foraging for insects and scanning the immediate area for predators. Craig standing between the Plagianthus bush with hand above the tall fescue (Lolium arundinaceum) and scattered oioi (Apodasmia similis) patch containing the nest. The tall fescue was ~900mm in height with the nest located ~400mm off the ground. The ground was wet with boggy patches when we visited. Janeen Collings (NCC Botanist/Ecologist) has provided a brief description of the nest material based on the photographs provided below: the nest is woven from some sort of purei/pukio grass, possibly Carex geminata, Carex, secta and/or Carex virgata. All folded leaved soft sedge species expected to be present within the habitat. There is another plant in small amounts, which maybe oioi or swamp twig rush (Machaerina juncea) with leaves round in cross section with distinct sectional markings.4 Another possibility [for nest material] is the summer green plants that die back over winter leaving lots of fibrous folded leaves that would be very easy to harvest come spring (if I was a wee bird). Such as Shenoplectus pungens (three square) or the purua grass, actually a sedge, (Bolboshoenus caldwellii). Wetland/scrubland restoration projects should consider maintaining open spaces between scrub and trees for grass/rush/sedgeland to establish potential nesting areas for fernbirds.

Kaka Reintroduction to the Abel Tasman -Ron Moorhouse talk

As indicated above, Ron gave a very informative and entertaining talk to the many members attending the October meeting. The brief outline below does not do it justice,

Ron managed kakapo recovery for many years before joining DOC and becoming involved with this reintroduction project. CV's for projects like this probably don't get much better! His talk started with a great video of the actual release of Kaka in 2018 from an acclimation aviary that had been built at Bark Bay. This area was chosen for easy access facilitating pest management and supplementary feeding. Once considered potential agricultural "pests' kaka are now rarely seen away from offshore or inland islands.



There was a very small remnant population present in the Abel Tasman, however it was likely that these were all male birds. Females are predated at the nesting sites and so have much lower survival rates. The introduced kaka had been sourced from eggs taken from wild populations (in the Wangapeka) with chicks mainly hand reared and also from captive held birds. Since Kaka populations show a significant size increase as well as other possible differences from North to South, it was important to source birds with "Top of the South" genetics. Hand rearing chicks is intensive and skilled and Ron stressed how important it is to avoid imprinting. I'm sure readers will be aware of the disastrous results that have happened with imprinted kakapo! If you somehow missed it watch below https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T1vfsHYiKY . Apparently male kaka are prone to similar issues and the best scenario is for birds to be reared by captive pairs.

35 kaka have now been released into the Abel Tasman. 25 are still alive along with 13 of their radio tagged chicks, so things are definitely looking promising Many people and groups have been involved in many facets of this project including Project Janszoon, Air NZ, DOC and the Abel Tasman Birdsong Trust.

Rock Wren/ Piwauwau No 1 in 'Bird of the Year' poll



And if I may say so 'About bloomin' time too!' Long may it hang on in there. Oh, and if some knowledgeable person feels like guiding a fast-aging newsletter editor to see one, don't hesitate to contact me. I've had several attempts over the years and failed dismally.

(Photo courtesy NZ birds on line. Rock wren | Pīwauwau. Adult male. Gertrude Valley, Fiordland, January 2012. Image © Craig McKenzie by Craig McKenzie)

4 BBRW sadly eclipsed by an Aussie

Tasmanians are claiming a new world record for the longest recorded godwit flight after a 5-monthold B.T.G. number 234684, landed in Anson's Bay Tasmania. The bird apparently flew a minimum of 13,560 km in 11 days 1 hour beating 4BBRs record of 13050km set in 2021. Of course we will take the moral high ground here and refrain from making cheap trans-Tasman jokes about its last 1000km.



Flood Impact on Fluttering Shearwater Colonies In Queen Charlotte Sound

Alec Milne writes----

"There are a number of challenges for our seabirds living with an increase in frequency of major weather events but here's another.

The source colony in Queen Charlotte Sound for the fluttering shearwater translocations took several direct hits during the flood events with 3 slips through the colony just as birds were starting to prospect.

Marian describes the event here in her Health Post Nature Trust newsletter Cheers, Alec"

'SOOO much rain. I am sure the summer IS coming. We do get a glimpse of it every now and then. Warm summery thoughts with a fresh breeze to all of you who have suffered damage in the recent storm events and to those of us who are just plain over the rain!



Long Island slip, September 2022

We also spare thoughts for the wildlife who have also been suffering from weather stressors. Large numbers of seabirds have been found washed up on the inside of the spit and other places after the earlier spring storms, including fluttering shearwaters and diving petrels. Our source colony for the fluttering shearwater translocations in the Marlborough Sounds took a hit with large slips crashing down through the centre gully of the colony. A salvage trip was mounted with support from Bird NZ Marlborough and DOC and our HPNT team are hopeful that the majority of the colony area will be ready for the birds as they begin to prospect and nest build over the next few weeks. Thanks, in particular to Richard and Alec for volunteering for the trust.'

Forest bird monitoring techniques II: use of trail cameras for roroa and kea nest monitoring

Robin and Sandy Toy

Next in our series of forest bird monitoring methods used by Friends of Flora is the use of trail cameras to monitor breeding success. We first used them outside roroa/ great spotted kiwi nest burrows, normally set to record 30 s videos, but sometimes stills. The cameras are triggered by motion, but there is a slight delay between the trigger and the camera. So, fast moving critters can trigger the camera but there is nothing to show what was responsible. This makes interpretation of the results complex – was it a kiwi chick departing the nest, or a stoat? When we started in 2012, there was no protocol to interpret the results of trail camera footage to determine breeding outcomes, so we developed one with DOC. Using this protocol we determined how many roroa chicks were surviving and hence bounds on population growth in the Flora.

The cameras also provided insight into roroa family life. Night-time incubation is shared by both parents. At the middle-of-the-night changeover, the incubating bird emerges and often it would call. Sometimes it's mate would answer, but sometimes there was a delay of an hour or more before it turned up to take over the incubation. Given how persistently weka harass incubating kiwi during the day, we expected to see them visiting at night, especially around incubation changeovers. In fact, while weka visited the nests frequently during crepuscular hours, we hardly ever saw them at night. Weka call all night, but maybe they aren't foraging? If not, why not - an unanswered question.

If the roroa egg hatched, the chick would not leave the nest for around ten days. It stayed close to the nest burrow for the first nights after emerging and often one or both parents were close at hand. Some chicks seemed unwilling to go into the nest towards dawn and would need shepherding in by a parent. Of course, we couldn't see what happened away from the nest burrow entrance – for that we'd need kiwi go-pros. We removed the transmitters from the Flora roroa in 2018, so we can no longer identify their nest burrows to install cameras. We miss the insight we gained into kiwi life,

and the excitement of long hours checking through the 1000's and 1000's of video clips. Check out our paper for the technical details. Toy, R.; Toy, S. 2021. Breeding ecology of a translocated population of great spotted kiwi (*Apteryx haastii*) Notornis 68: 131–146



Now we use the trail cameras for kea. In 2019, Kirsty Moran found a kea nest cave in the Flora. Each year since, we train the trail cameras on the entrance to that cave. This is much less nerve-wracking than installing cameras at kiwi nests burrows, because the kea don't react to our presence, whereas roroa have been known to abandon nest burrows if disturbed, though it never happened to us. The kea pair don't use the cave every year, maybe they don't breed every year or maybe they have more than one nest option. In 2019 three young fledged, in 2020 the nest cave wasn't used, in 2021, there was only one chick, but it fledged. It did, have an eventful start to life including a frantic struggle to free itself when it got stuck in a cleft stick. Check out the video at https://fb.watch/f6Et5Z5jcl/. Make sure you have the volume turned up, for the full effect! Monitoring a single nest limits the conclusions we can reach, but we did see a feral cat at the nest. We've not seen a lot of feral cats in the Flora – they were never seen at the kiwi nests – so we're now doing some more extensive monitoring to try to determine how widespread and numerous they are. Meanwhile, the kea pair have not moved into the nest cave yet this season.

Nest monitoring using trail cameras is time consuming since both roroa and kea have long breeding periods and will be at the nest site for six months or more. But they are a great, non-intrusive way to get data on breeding success and the footage gained is a fantastic way of engaging a wide audience.

What's Going On?

Lots happening!

- Still time to get your Ruru (morepork) survey results in. Email <u>nelson.nature@ncc.govt.nz</u> for a form.
- The spring wader count is scheduled for 25-28 November. Contact Rob Schuckard if you would like to take part. <u>rschckrd@xtra.co.nz</u>
- Lake Matiri Trip Sunday 20 November to look for Great Crested Grebe Probably a tad late but if somehow you haven't heard about this and are very keen contact Peter Gaze <u>peterdgaze@gmail.com</u>
- Oystercatcher catch and band Rabbit Island Meet 22nd Nov 6.30 am.at the crossroads in the middle of Rabbit Island. This should be finished by 14.00hr.
- December Social meeting at the Melville's -See below
- The fernbird (and harrier) projects are ongoing. If you would like to be involved, please contact Paul Fisher <u>wildlandsnelson@gmail.com</u>

Atlas project update

Spring is here and with less than two seasons to go we need to ramp up our Atlas efforts. The map below indicates spring diurnal effort over the last 3 years. Check it out in more detail at the Atlas webpage https://ebird.org/atlasnz/effortmap but the message is clear – the vast majority of our patch has had less than 5 hours atlas effort over the whole 3 years. Just head a little bit away from the coast and start birding. Remember the golden rules:

- Complete checklists i.e., record everything you can see or hear
- Minimum 5 minutes max 1 hour
- Travelling counts should not exceed 1km.



We tend to forget that the Atlas project needs nocturnal effort as well as diurnal – and most of the region has no spring nocturnal data at all! Nocturnal atlasing is really easy because you don't need to know a whole lot of bird calls, although you may be surprised by how many birds sometimes call at night. The branch owns a small acoustic recording unit (currently held by the Toys) which is great for boosting listening hours, although you do need to put in time later to analyse the recordings. Get in touch if you want to borrow the recorder and are keen to get into analysing spectrograms.



Happy Atlasing!

Just Because!

Who can resist a bit of spoonbill pic especially when they are Rebecca Bowater quality. Cheers Rebecca and sorry I attributed the spoonbill in the last edition to our dear leader!





The future of bird counts?



Red Billed Gulls nesting on the boulder bank as captured by a drone driven by Chris Harris. This was arranged by Peter and David. Apparently, there is computer technology to tally the results. This seems like a very non invasive and time/manpower saving way of counting bird numbers particularly for birds that nest colonially or have communal roosts.

Blenheim have a big weekend! Report submitted by Sharen Graham

Over labour weekend the Marlborough branch organized an Atlassing trip to Muzzle station, birding both sides of the Clarence River. It sounds like a fantastic, if exhausting effort as over the 4 days the group of 8 people submitted 327 checklists to ebird with 43 species sighted. Highlights included; 6 tomtit, 10 brown creeper, 16 NZ falcon, 105 black fronted tern, 10 Great Crested Grebe!! 16 Chukar, 45 banded dotterel and 2 shining cuckoo. The full report is available on the ebird link below.

ebird.org/trip report/79330



Muzzle Station Photo credit -Stuff.co

December Meeting

Many thanks to David and Vicky Melville who are once again welcoming members to their garden for the December meeting. This will be on Monday 12th. Please note that this is the **second** Monday of December. Further details will be sent out nearer the time.

Next Meeting and Newsletter

As usual due to the holiday season there is no January meeting and our first meeting of the year will be in February. The next Torea Pango will be in March with a deadline for articles of March the 12th

Paul Bennett thebraveryofbeingoutofrange@gmail.com 021454520

Have a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

