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Otago Region Newsletter 1/2023

January 2023

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



Ornithological Snippets

Blue Duck sightings away from normal areas include singles at Upper West Matukituki on 9 Dec, and at Blue Pools on 11 Dec. Marsh Crakes were reported from Glenorchy on 1 January, Lake Hayes on 9 Jan and Moke Lake on 16 Jan.

3 **Variable Oystercatchers** near Tarras on 6 January were about as far from their usual habitat as possible, while at Warrington Spit there were 2 **Wrybill** and a **Turnstone** on 20 November, and the continuing **Hudsonian Godwit** till 22 December, also seen at Evansdale on 22 November.

A **Grey-backed Storm Petrel** was found dead on the shore of Lake Hawea on 26 December, but managed a further flight to Wellington & Te Papa. **White Herons** were reported from Ocean View near Brighton on 28 October, Bushy (Waitaki) on 16 November, and Kinloch on 28 December. Nearby at Glenorchy Lagoon a **Fernbird** was seen and photographed on 6 January.

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

eBird News

We are now halfway through the penultimate summer season of the Atlas, and there are still plenty of choices of where to go to add meaningful data to the project. Looking at the Atlas Effort Map there are numerous squares with no summer coverage at all, and looking more closely at the Species Observed map, there are many (especially inland) squares with fewer species than would be expected. Please bear this in mind if you are heading away over the remainder of the summer.

Please ensure you are using the correct portal the quickest way to check is to go to "My eBird", then "Manage My Checklists". You should get a screen like the first screenshot, and if you click on "Show all details" you will be able to see which portal was used (second screenshot). You can change this if necessary by selecting the checklist(s) and then "Checklist tools" > "Change portal".

As there are various other things happening over Waitangi weekend, I would like to suggest a visit to the Clarks Junction/Lee Stream area on Saturday 11th February. Please let me know if you are interested in participating.

Contact **Richard 027 281 8701** or cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Oamaru Penguin Symposium 2023



The Oamaru Penguin Symposium will be happening on Wednesday and Thursday 3/4 May 2023.

Aside from it happening on a Wednesday & Thursday, all other details are the same as previous years.

It will be held at the Oamaru Opera House, in the Inkbox Theatrette and will cost \$145 per person to attend for the two days, which includes morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea both days.

Attendance for one day only will be \$80. There will be a two-course dinner on the Wednesday night with details to be confirmed early next year. Participants can also enjoy a trip to visit the Oamaru Blue Penguin Colony.

For those who have not attended previously, the Symposium is a biennial meeting involving two days of scientific presentations and is attended by researchers, volunteers, field workers, students and rehabilitators from all types of organisations.

The Symposium began in the late 1990's as the "Blue Penguin Scientific Symposium", grew to include other New Zealand penguin species and then include species from outside of New Zealand. In recent years, the meeting has been opened further to include presentations on all aspects of seabird biology and conservation.

If you would like to present at the meeting, please email me early in 2023 to aid planning.

Kind regards
 Philippa
research@penguins.co.nz

Dr Philippa Agnew

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BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Audrey Eagle



Audrey Eagle at the Friends of Te Papa event, Meet Audrey Eagle, botanical artist, 2009
Photograph by Michael Hall. Te Papa (14350)

We were sad to learn of the passing of Audrey on 27 November 2022, aged 97.

Audrey has left an incredible legacy. She is most well-known for *Eagle's Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand*, 2 volumes containing over 800 life-size botanical paintings; this won her and Te Papa several notable awards.

Audrey spent a lifetime supporting conservation issues through Forest and Bird and Birds NZ. Audrey has been the recipient of many distinguished awards including CNZM, the Loder Cup, and an honorary DSc from Otago University in 2013.

Upon moving to Dunedin in 1996, Audrey became an enthusiastic and knowledgeable participant on most of our projects, particularly the weekend field trips for the 1999-2004 Atlas project, regular wader counts, godwit cannon-netting, and our survey of robins in the Whare Flat area. All this continued well into her 80s.



Audrey, blue jacket, helping set up cannon net at Warrington, 2005



Audrey spotting chestnut-breasted shelducks at Hoopers Inlet, 2007



Audrey on left, Routeburn Station trip, 2008

Audrey was an inspiration and a joy to spend time with, and added hugely to our birding trips.

NZ Birds Conference, New Plymouth King's Birthday Weekend, 3-5 June 2023

This is the premier event for the communication of new research findings about birds in New Zealand, and for providing opportunities for discussion, networking and field trips for professional and amateur ornithologists, students and others who are interested in birds and their habitats. Three guided field trips are planned: Lake Rotokare, Lake Mangamahoe and Pukekura Park. This is an area that we in the south are not so familiar with so please consider registering for this conference. Early Bird deadline is 31 March.

Student Conference Support, 2023

Otago Branch Grant. Applications are called for from Otago university students wishing to present their research at the annual New Zealand Bird Conference to be held in New Plymouth at King's Birthday Weekend, 3 – 5 June, 2023. A grant-in-aid towards travel expenses to conference will be made to the successful applicants. More details from Mary. Applications close on 28th February, 2023 with the Otago Regional Representative, Mary Thompson birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz

Birds NZ Fledgling Fund Grant

Applications are now invited and will close on 27 February. For details see birdsnz.org.nz/news/fledgling-fund-grant/

Eyre Mountains Atlassing Trip. Waitangi weekend 2023

It may not be too late for Otago Members to be involved in this trip. Contact Pete McClelland as soon as possible to be considered for this trip. pmcclelland@xtra.co.nz

“Just to let you know we are working with Dan from WMIL to do an Atlas hit on the Eyre Mtns next year. We will try and knock off as many squares as we can and also redo a 2007 rockwren survey. We have got some Toitoto wine sponsorship and are putting in some regional \$\$ to cover chopper costs to get people into the rock wren areas but will also be doing as much road based work as possible. At present we are just looking at people from Southland, and possibly Otago if anyone is keen, in case the weather is no good and it has to be delayed. We are aiming for Waitangi weekend with a back up the last week in Feb. If you know of anyone up your way who may be interested please put them in touch with me.” Pete

Help requested

We received an email from Ian McLennan who is involved in predator trapping. He has had video cameras at some of his traps to figure out how rats and mice are avoiding traps but has observed the following:

“Immediately after the extreme weather this winter, my trap line had a very high by-catch of Silvereye. The behaviours that lead to this have been captured on video: I do not understand the behaviours that I am observing...I have also read most of the NZ studies of Silvereye. This has been very helpful, but I am left with very basic questions that someone with an interest in birds might be able to answer.

Do you know of someone who could look at a few videos with me?”

Please let Mary know if you are interested in following this up with Ian – I can put you in touch.

Mopanui Robins - 2022 Season Summary

The sixth season of monitoring the robin population at Mopanui seemed to whizz by. Once again it was very well supported, and massive thanks go to the 21 enthusiastic volunteers who came out to help between August and December, contributing over 230 hours of their time to the project.

Population size

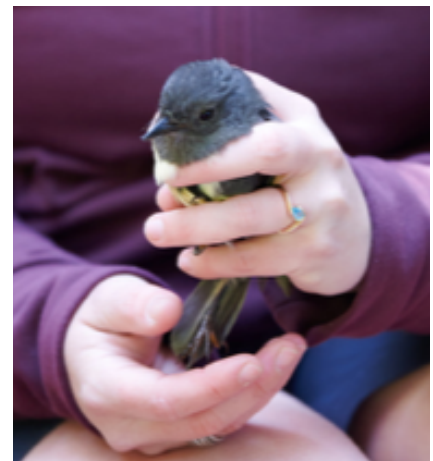
At the beginning of the season we surveyed for robins, finding as many individuals and pairs as possible, using a mixture of sightings, listening for calls and playback. It is not possible to provide accurate numbers because of the presence of unbanded birds, but we identified 8 pairs and a further 17 territories (primarily identified by male territorial singing and sightings). These numbers were similar to 2021, but with birds located in new areas, it suggests that the population continues to increase. We certainly only monitor nests for a proportion of the population.



Oscar, Erin and George on training day. Photo credit: Nick Beckwith

Banding and Resightings

We resighted 9 birds banded in previous seasons. This included one male who had not been seen since 2020. Sadly we did not see KO-BM, the male robin that has provided many firsts for the project: the first pair and nest found in 2017, and our first banded bird in 2019. All 5 robins we banded in 2019 are now believed to be deceased.



Erin with robin prior to banding. Photo credit: Nick Beckwith

We banded a further 5 robins in 2022. Particularly rewarding was that, following a training session, two Level 1 banders had the opportunity to catch and band robins for the first time.

Nesting success

We monitored the outcome of 10 nests from 6 pairs – a similar number of pairs and nests as the two previous years. The 2022 season was notable for the number of nests that failed, following the relatively successful 2020 and 2021 seasons. Only 2 nests were known to have fledged, 6 nests failed and the outcome of the other 2 nests was unknown – although we know the nestlings from these nests had reached a large size in the nest, fledglings were never seen. Causes of nest failure were abandonment likely due to the snowstorm on 6 October (1 nest) and probable predation (5 nests). In one of these cases, the remains of the female bird were found in the nest. Another pair failed in all 3 of its nest attempts – this pair had successfully fledged 2 nests in 2021. No evidence was found in any case to attribute the nest predator. However, trapping records from the wider area provided by Orokonui and the Halo Project suggest that rat numbers had been higher than usual.

Once again the Halo Project assisted us by providing 2 nest cameras. Unfortunately, nests that failed were either too high up for cameras to be placed, or in one case the SD card became full before the predation event and in another case the camera failed to capture the cause of failure but indicated it had occurred overnight. Another camera revealed that chicks from one nest fledged during the October snowstorm, with snow lying on the nest and a recorded daytime temperature of -2°C.

Simple Mayfield survival estimates reveal that the probability a nest survived to fledge was between 16 – 26 %* (depending on whether 2 or 4 nests fledged). This is much lower than estimates from the previous 2 years (63% in 2021 and 55% in 2020), but similar to 2019 levels. [*Apologies for lack of 95% CI on these estimates.]



Courtship feeding.
Photo credit: Oscar Thomas

Once again, huge thanks to Nick for providing mealworms, Jan for maintaining the dropbox trap, Halo Project for the cameras, and Jill and Ruth for their unwavering support. It won't be long till August 2023 – please get in touch if you would like to know more about the project.

George Pickerell

Town Belt Bird Count Trail

Urban Nature Panels advertising the trail have now been installed; one at Prospect Park overlooking Woodhaugh and one near Olveston.

Remember to tell your friends about the trail and to complete counts whenever you get a chance.



Live Cam Links

Ivan Lin has brought these Live Cam links to our attention, which will be of interest as you can do some birding from the comforts of home.

Oamaru Blue Penguin Colony Live Cam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1HAI0sdKro>

Otago Shag Colony Sumpter Wharf Oamaru

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqHrzib-bGE>

Tara photography competition

Help us find out what White-fronted terns are eating all around Aotearoa! We're kicking off a photographic citizen science research project into tara diet with a competition, so submit your images and be in to win!

DETAILS HERE

nzseabirds.com/tara/



photo & video
INTERNATIONAL



Entries CLOSE 10 February

Juvenile Godwits fitted with satellite transmitters.

On Tuesday 8 November the research team tagging juvenile godwits was at Warrington Beach and cannon netted seven godwits and fitted satellite transmitters to them. Nick Beckwith was helping the team and was able to explain the birds' behaviour on the beach and show where they roost so the nets could be set in the best places. Will Perry also helped the team.

Nick, Sharon Roberts, Richard Schofield and the team had spent the previous weekend cannon-netting at Cabbage Point, Pounawea resulting in more than 20 birds fitted with tags.



Bumper Breeding Season for Dunedin Kākā

It is still early in the current breeding season, but already three chicks have fledged. More are at various stages of development in the Dunedin Botanic Garden aviary, and Curator Alisha Sherriff is anticipating that the aviary will make a significant contribution to the local kākā population this year. With a greater number of birds in her care than ever before, Alisha expects a good number of chicks will have fledged by the end of the season.



Kākā egg hatching 18 October 2022 Photo credit: Alisha Sherriff

Until now, kākā have only been released at Orokonui Ecosanctuary, a partner in the breeding programme, where the birds are fenced to exclude predators, but not roofed to contain them. While they do breed within the sanctuary, some leave, and there is a wide corridor between Orokonui and the city, in which the birds are less safe, especially if they stop to breed.

Alisha says, “We are hopeful that from flocking done through 2022/23 we will get some new pairings to add new genetics to the current founder population. In the future the hope is for the Botanic Garden to be a second soft release site for South Island kākā, to support the establishment of an urban population of kākā in Ōtepoti Dunedin.”



Kākā parent and two chicks
14 December 2022
Photo credit: Alisha Sherriff

Continuing the work of her predecessors, Tony Pullar and Tim Cotter, Alisha has managed the South Island kākā breeding programme at the Garden Aviary for the past six years. Her background is as a veterinary nurse, with a particular interest in avian medicine, and she has spent time working in zoos in New Zealand, and veterinary nursing in Australia, with the most rewarding work being part of the Department of Conservation’s kākāpō recovery. The Aviary has a close working relationship with the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital, and it also supports the hospital through the rehabilitation of wild native birds. Alisha is thus well placed to envisage the steps towards her ultimate goal, a self maintaining urban population of kākā, based on the successful Zealandia, Wellington, model. To achieve this, she sees the requirements being education, assisted recovery via a strong breeding programme, and continued advocacy for endangered and threatened native birds. In relation to the general population of human city dwellers, education covers

understanding and possibly participation in predator control, and secondly, appreciating the issues involved with providing and maintaining an environment in the city compatible with the needs of kākā, and other birds. Breeding programmes and advocacy require ongoing funding and expertise.

Alisha speaks very positively of the efforts made in Ōtepoti, from the City Council's City Sanctuary, Halo project, to Predator Free Dunedin - whose focus includes supporting forest habitat restoration at Orokonui, and removing predators in and around the city, to the North East Valley Project, which provides tracking kits for children to identify the wildlife inhabiting their environment, and loaning predator traps.

Ultimately, Alisha says, this is a big team effort that will need the community's support to help make the vision come to life, but we are off to a good start with ground roots conservation happening all over the city in the form of trapping. The future looks bright for South Island kākā returning to Ōtepoti once again.

For further information on the work the Dunedin Botanic Garden Aviary is doing with kākā, please contact Aviary Curator Alisha Sherriff: alisha.sherriff@dcc.govt.nz



Kākā chicks 13 December 2022
Photo credit: Alisha Sherriff

Notes

While the number of kākā in the region is not known, there are pockets of birds in various areas, including Fiordland, Halfmoon Bay Stewart Island, Codfish Island, Ulva Island. There have also been sightings in recent years in Invercargill and Riverton, and Alexandra, and a number around Ōtepoti, including in the Botanic Gardens.

Overall, the breeding programme is led by DoC, and managed separately in the North and South Islands. South Island Centres include Dunedin at Orokonui, and Nelson/Tasman - Jansoon. Jansoon is a privately funded trust. The Abel Tasman is a release site. Sites that hold kākā are throughout the South Island but those that breed kākā currently are limited to Dunedin Botanic Garden and Kiwi Bird Park in Queenstown. NatureLand in Nelson hold Top of the South (TOS) kākā but have yet to successfully breed any young.

There is a distinction between South Island and North Island kākā, and sub species TOS kākā, with the more southern birds being identifiable as being larger. Since a further reclassification, the local population has become, 'the Lower South Island kākā'. The TOS kākā are supported by Project Jansoon, whose mission includes restoring the avian environment in the Abel Tasman National Park.

Grey-backed Storm Petrel at Lake Hāwea

As I walked along the shore of Lake Hāwea on the morning of Boxing Day 2022, I had no idea that I was about to make the best birding discovery of my year. At the time I was feeling very grumpy due to all the holidaymakers stretched along the shore with their 4WD's, off-lead dogs, noisy boats and jet skis which were destroying the normally serene end of the lake. As I grappled with keeping my puppy on a tight lead and trying to enjoy the mountain views over the chaos, I happened to spot a small dead bird on the shore near the waterline. I stopped to examine it: a body the size of a swallow with dark grey and white plumage. *A type of Australian swift?* I wondered. But then I saw its little beak which was clearly that of a seabird. Without a second thought, I pulled out a dog poo bag and popped the mystery bird inside it, then continued on my walk.

When I arrived home, I pulled out the seabird and my bird book to figure out what it was. I took photographs from all angles with a ruler for scale and eventually narrowed it down to perhaps a grey-backed storm petrel. I had never seen such a tiny seabird, nor a storm petrel, so I sent some photos to Oscar Thomas in the hope that he'd be able to verify my guess. Success! Oscar immediately confirmed it was indeed a [grey-backed storm petrel/reoreo](#) (*Garrodia nereis*). I had no idea why a tiny seabird would be lying on the shore of an inland glacially carved lake and we will never know how it got there.



Various angles showing the storm petrel's features and size Photo credit: Petrina Duncan

Oscar suggested that I contact [Colin Miskelly](#) – curator of vertebrates at Te Papa museum – because he might be interested in my finding. Amazingly I got an email back from Colin by the end of Boxing Day. (He admits to having “a small issue with work-life balance”!) He was very keen to get the bird because they are currently investigating whether Fiordland GB storm petrels differ from other populations (Chathams, subantarctic islands) based on their genetics, plumage markings and measurements. I put the bird in my freezer and made some travel plans.

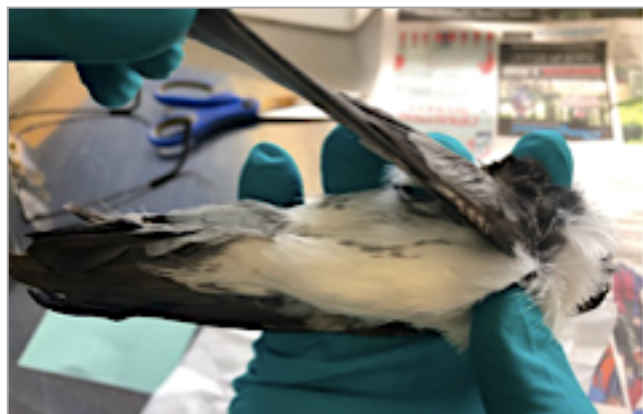
I also did some research and discovered that only five other GB storm petrels have ever been found in mountainous parts of inland Otago:

“Grey-backed storm petrels have been found in the Southern Alps more than once over the last few decades. In 1978, three birds were located, sadly deceased, on the slopes of Tititea [Mt Aspiring]. In 1982, ranger Kim Morrison found a live grey-backed storm petrel near Howden Hut on the Routeburn Track, and carried it down and released it, fit and well, into Milford Sound. And Colin Miskelly himself discovered another deceased petrel on the Routeburn Track when walking with his wife in 2018.¹”

On 13th January I flew from Queenstown to Wellington to deliver the storm petrel in person (this was such a good opportunity to meet Colin and see some of the Te Papa off-display collection). The frozen bird was still in excellent condition and Colin said that a DNA sample would be taken from its tongue that afternoon. The bird will be skinned and become a type specimen in their collection... how exciting! Colin showed me and my cousin (also a zoologist) around parts of the huge bird collection, pulling open cupboards and drawers to reveal gems such as huia, laughing owls, snipe, albatross, parakeets and fruit-doves. We were like two kids in a lolly shop! A big thank you to Colin for the amazing guided tour and incredible knowledge about the collection and birds in general. He'll be giving a talk about grey-backed storm petrels at this year's Birds NZ conference in June... stay tuned!



Colin Miskelly and Petrina Duncan at the Te Papa Collections building in Wellington. Photo credit: Cate Shave



The mottled grey pattern on the white flank of the bird, characteristic of the Fiordland populations. Photo credit: Cate Shave

For me, finding this special little seabird in the midst of a chaotic lakefront location was such a random surprise which led to fulfilling two dreams: of finding something important to science, and of going behind the scenes in our national museum's collection of birds. From this I have learned that sometimes we find a treasure when we are least expecting it and that I must always keep alert to the birds that are around me – whether they are alive or dead.

Relevant reading about this species:

1. <https://1964.co.nz/grey-backed-storm-petrel-new-zealand/>
2. <https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2020/12/02/storm-petrels-in-the-spotlight/>
3. <https://predatorfreenz.org/stories/colin-miskelly-petrels/>

Petrina Duncan

Programme 2023

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.

We will try to zoom the talks 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.

The Zoom link for all meetings is:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88009761837?pwd=RGY3WjVxcnRobm11YjZlXENMR2pMdz09>

February, Tuesday 28	Richard Schofield Beyond Fiordland
March, Tuesday 28	Derek Onley Experiences from a lifetime of ornithology
April, Sunday 16	Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching, 10 am to noon.
This is our contribution to the Wild Dunedin Festival. Members of the public are invited to view birds close-up using spotting scopes, with Birds NZ members to help with identification and information about the birds. Please reserve this morning so you can come and help.	
April, Tuesday 25	Rachel Hufton Bird counts of the Makarora/Aspiring area
May, Tuesday 23	Pascale Lubbe - PhD research Words on Birds: Effects of Ice Age climate change
June, 3-6	NZ Bird Conference at New Plymouth. Register now.
June, Tuesday 27	Manaia Pearmain-Fenton - MSc research; Silver Linings: Following Silver Stream and Orokonui Kākāruai/ South Island robin breeding behaviours over a single season
July, Tuesday 25	Kurien Koshy Yohannan - wildlife photography Painting with Light
August, Tuesday 22	Francesca Cunninghame - two Forest and Bird projects Restoring seabird colonies on Otago Peninsula Landscape-scale conservation in the Tautuku area

Regular Field trips are held, usually on first Saturdays or Sundays. Check for details within the newsletters. We carpool for these trips and share expenses.

Suggestions for speakers for September and October, and 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

Contributions for inclusion in the next newsletter should reach the editor by **20 February**.

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Disclaimer

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