

BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

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▣ Bar-tailed Godwit 'B6': Dan Ruthrauff/US Geological Survey.

Kuaka B6 sets a new world record

A four-month-old juvenile Bar-tailed Godwit or Kuaka with leg flag 'B6' has set a new world record for a non-stop migration flight by a wading bird, and is also the longest documented nonstop flight by any individual bird.

A team of scientists from the US Geological Survey, Max Planck Institute, and US Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a study to track the migration of juvenile Bar-tailed Godwits from breeding sites near Nome in Alaska. Their study sets out to better understand how these shorebirds navigate their first migrations from Alaska to wintering sites. It is also part of a larger effort to understand the locations and times of year where and when godwits face the greatest threats to their survival.

Kuaka B6 departed Alaska on 13th October 2022 and flew 13,560 kilometres non-stop to Tasmania. Satellite data suggests it did not stop during its first south-bound migration flight, and that it took 11 days and one hour to reach Ansons Bay in north-east Tasmania. The previous world record was held by an adult male Kuaka (4BBRW) that flew 13,000km in 2021, beating its own previous record of 12,000km set in 2020. According to data from the tracking project, Kuaka B6 flew from Alaska over open ocean passing west of Hawai'i and over Kiribati on 19th October, then over Vanuatu, continuing south between Australia and New Zealand until, on 23rd October, it turned west towards Tasmania and landed on 25th October.

Southland and Otago members of Birds New Zealand joined with members of the wader banding group to catch Bar-tailed Godwits to attach satellite tags to them at Cabbage Point on Hinahina Estuary near Pounaweia, Otago, on 6th November 2022. The day was part of a collaborative research project between Birds New Zealand, Massey University, and the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Germany (see story with photos on page 23).

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Email: secretary@birdsnz.org.nz Website: www.birdsnz.org.nz

Editor: Michael Szabo, 6/238 The Esplanade, Island Bay, Wellington 6023.

Email: editor.birdsnz@birdsnz.org.nz Tel: (04) 383 5784

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We welcome advertising. Free classified ads for members are at the editor's discretion. Articles or photographs of birds in New Zealand or the South Pacific are welcome such as news about birds, members' activities, birding sites, identification, or letters. Copy deadlines are 10th Feb, May, Aug and 1st Nov. Views expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of OSNZ (Inc) or the editor. When you are finished with your magazine please consider passing it on to others who are interested in New Zealand's birds.

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COVER IMAGE

King Penguin/Tokoraki, Maitara River mouth, 14th November 2022.
Photo by Bradley Shields.



▣ Whio adult and juvenile: Glenda Rees/NZ Birds Online.

Fewer Whio breeding pairs counted

The Department of Conservation (DOC) has reported a decline in the number of Whio breeding pairs counted between 2021 and 2022. A DOC Whio count found 694 pairs in monitored areas in 2022 compared to 862 pairs in 2021. DOC Whio Recovery Group Leader Andy Glaser says some of the decline may be due to 2021 being a full census year (done every five years). Counts on non-census years are less exhaustive and not all rivers are covered.

"What we're really seeing, however, is the impact of climate change. We're getting more severe weather events. Those combined with an already fragile landscape and increased water runoff mean changes to water quality and habitat in the catchments where Whio live," he says. "Torrential rainstorms earlier in 2022, in places such as Kahurangi National Park, meant really wet cold conditions for young ducklings. Storms can also split Whio families and reduce their ability to feed at a crucial time in their growth. Flooding washes away invertebrates such as insects and worms, limiting their food supply. The combined effect can be catastrophic."

He also reports that the Whio duckling survival rate dropped by half over the previous two years. In 2019/2020 fledglings numbered 430, but only 219 were counted in 2022. Nationally vulnerable, there are fewer than 3,000 Whio left, less than some species of kiwi.



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From the President's Desk

Council Meeting

Council met online in November and further discussed the Society's response to the new Incorporated Society's Act. On behalf of the Society, Ian Armitage and I had participated in an online round of consultation by MBIE on potential regulations to implement the Act. We also agreed to establish a 'Register of Conflicts of Interest', as required by the new Act. This will be reported on annually in a report to the Society AGM. Ian has continued to work through the implications of the new Act and to develop required changes to our Constitution. Effectively, the size of the changes required to meet the standards of the Act will require a new constitution for the Society. I will continue to update you as this work progresses.

Keith Woodley reported on behalf of Peter Fryer that arrangements for the 2023 New Zealand Bird Conference are well in hand. Council also received a brief report from David Lawrie who is representing the Society on the organising committee for the 2023 Australasian Ornithological Conference which is to be held in November 2023 in Brisbane. Council agreed to support Birds New Zealand prizes for the Best Student Poster and the Best Student oral presentation. We also agreed to support three student travel applications for the Conference. Details will be posted on the Society's website in due course.

Historical data

It was with a great deal of satisfaction that I helped Mary Thompson to curate 1,600 observations of Kōtare Sacred Kingfisher that Otago and Southland members gathered between 1989 and 1991 to a standard to enable them to be uploaded to *eBird*. Mary has navigated the torturous process of ensuring the data aligned with the *eBird* template and checked that all the dates are of United States style. She has now uploaded a significant historical record of the distribution of this species to *eBird*. Additionally, we also have a database of habitat and activity observations which are in desperate need of analysis; any offers?

I am sure that other regions have similar data sets that are in need of digitisation. Please don't leave such data sets sitting in a folder or on a desktop computer. We now have the tools to ensure that this data is made available to a wide audience.

New Zealand Bird Atlas

Our partnership with Toi Toi Wines to support atlas work in some of the more remote parts of New Zealand is progressing. Members might have seen a short report on the trip to the East Cape Region. Malcolm Rutherford reports a successful atlas work trip worked hard to collect data in the Ruatoria and Tikitiki areas. A similar atlas effort led by Pete McClelland is occurring on weekends in February in the Eyre Mountains, in northern Southland. A particular focus of this atlas work is to repeat work from 2007 when Rock Wren were recorded in this mountain range.

Planning for a Northland atlas work trip is underway, with potential proposed dates of Friday 28th April to Monday 1st May to avoid the Easter Holidays, with backup dates of Friday 14th April to Monday 17th April. This is yet to be fully confirmed though and more details are to come. Sponsorship by Toi Wines has enabled the NZ Bird Atlas team to support expensive surveys to remote parts of New Zealand to ensure good national coverage and for this I am very grateful.

I was pleased to note the recent uploading to the Atlas dataset of a copy of the Department of Conservation 2021/22 Tier 1 bird monitoring data. As the Tier 1 work programme samples some really remote areas of the country, this data really extends the reach of the atlas data.

Personally, I've found no shortage of Atlas grid squares to continue to survey. I had a particularly enjoyable day in January with a trip to the Lake Onslow and Paerau valleys in Central Otago and managed to complete 30 checklists with some 25 species reported. A third of the checklists had NZ Pipits on them including one group of 11 individuals which were recorded while foraging for insects along the road.

2023 New Zealand Bird Conference & AGM

Early bird registration for the conference and AGM ends on 31st March. Please make effort to register early and to join us all in New Plymouth and enjoy the conversations and the presentations on Kings Birthday weekend.

I also want to remind those members who are due to renew their 2023 subscription to do so. If you don't, this issue of the magazine and *Notornis* will be the last you will receive. It's easy to renew now online.

Finally, the first draft of this column was written at a family crib at Awaroa in Abel Tasman National Park. It's a place where I get renewal and some serious birding completed. The high tide count of the Tōrea South Island Pied Oystercatcher flock was 740 individuals with four tagged birds (one alphanumeric flag and one alphanumeric band and two metal bands). The Tōrea Pango Variable Oystercatcher were in family groups with large but unfledged chicks. The Karoro Southern Black-backed Gull chicks were remarkably quiet.

At the crib, the Weka come skulking through the undergrowth, even trying out my ankle for food. In the trees around the crib, Riroriro Grey Warblers and Piwakawaka NZ Fantails forage for insects; the House Sparrows are doing well on the cicadas. Early in the week, Karearea New Zealand Falcons were calling along the ridge, and the Tui were dancing in the breeze. Things have changed there over time. Tuturiwhatu NZ Dotterels no longer nest on the beach, but the Kōtuku Ngutupapa Royal Spoonbills and Kāruhiruhi Pied Shags have taken up residence along the northern side of the estuary mouth. A perfect interlude before another busy year.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT

2023 NZ Bird Conference & AGM

The 2023 Conference and Birds New Zealand AGM will be held in New Plymouth over King's Birthday weekend (3rd-4th June). All events and meals will be at The Devon Hotel, New Plymouth. See www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/conference-details/ for registration details, or contact your regional representative.

2 June 2023 (Friday)

18:00 - 19:30 Registration

3 June 2023 (Saturday)

08:00 - 09:00 Registration

09:00 - 17:00 Scientific Day One

19:00 Informal Dinner

4 June 2023 (Sunday)

08:00 - 09:00 Registration

09:00 - 15:30 Scientific Day Two

15:30 - 17:00 Awards and AGM

19:00 Conference Dinner

5 June 2023 (Monday) Field Trips

Lake Rotokare is by bus. Lake Mangamahoe by carpooling with participants expected to contribute towards the driver's fuel costs. Pukekura Park is a 20 minute walk from Devon Hotel and 10 minutes from the city centre. A packed lunch is available from the Devon Hotel for \$25 or bring your own.

Call for Nominations for Regional Representatives 2024

Each Regional Representative serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, although incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms. Nominations for each region close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 834, Nelson 7040 or secretary@birdsanz.org.nz) on 31st July 2023. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a financial member of the Society. If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination from a given region, a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of that region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2024 year. As per the Constitution, where practicable each Region shall hold an annual meeting before 31st March where an annual report of the Region's activities and a financial statement for the previous year are presented to the members. Lynne Anderson, Secretary, P.O. Box 834, Nelson: secretary@birdsanz.org.nz

Call for applications to the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Applications open on 1st April 2023 and must be received by 15th June 2023. Applications will be accepted from individuals, students, researchers within universities, or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of NZ birds or their environment. The applicant must be a current member of Birds New Zealand, living in NZ, and the project carried out in NZ or its outlying islands (e.g. Subantarctic Islands). Funding ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 may be awarded. This fund provides financial assistance for logistics and purchase of equipment and consumables. It does not fund salaries or wages. For smaller projects refer to the Society's Projects Assistance Fund. Payments will be funded retrospective (either after submission of the interim or final project report) and are for a 12-month period only. In the event of financial hardship, exemptions may be made after prior consultation.

Preference will be given to applications that will: clearly be of benefit to the conservation of NZ native birds; involve research with a well-defined and measurable outcome; provide opportunities for Birds New Zealand members to assist or participate in research activities; demonstrate intent to publish at least part of the funded work in the Society's journal *Notornis*; lead to results that will clearly be of benefit to the conservation of NZ birds; involve research on "Preferred Student Research Topics" (for student research projects). Applications must be received by 15th June 2023 on the official application form on the Society's website (<https://www.birdsanz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/>) and submitted as a single PDF file. For queries, please contact Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: eo@birdsanz.org.nz

Donations

We also thank: Claire Manning, Richard de Hamel, Daria Erastova, Murry Cave, Vicki M Carpenter, Brenda Pinfold, Tony Whitehead, Graham I. Hunt, Peter Howden, C. John Ralph, Annette Cunningham, Philip Munns, Luca Kornelia Kosa, Lois Wagener, Mary McEwen, Anthony Carey, Heather Smithers, Bruce McKinlay, Pua Westhead, Dan O'Halloran, Audrey Rendle, Vaughan Turner, Marti Eller, Darren Lees, Joy Sagar, Stuart Nicholson, Francois Flanagan, Timothy Short, Thalia Sachtleben, Alan Baker, Susan McIntosh, Susan Steedman, Michael Szabo, Kay Milton, Ashley Reid, Kevin A. Parker, Anant Dave, Geoff de Lisle, Christina Troup, Sue Drummond, Denise Poyner, John Flux, Anita Spencer, Andrew King, Mel Galbraith, Ian Williams, Rob Schuckard, Elizabeth Revell, Clive Robinson, Chris Sale, Noel Ward, Kerry Oates, Leslie Graney, Shelley Heiss-Dunlop, Ted Howard, Helen Morgan, Liz Brown, John A. Stewart, Michael North, Sandy Winterton.

2023 Membership Renewals

Annual memberships are renewable on the anniversary of your joining date. Birds New Zealand depends on your subscription, so please pay promptly. You can renew your membership via our website, either by a direct credit payment or a credit card payment: <https://www.birdsanz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount>

Position Vacant – Secretary for Birds New Zealand Council

Our current Secretary, Lynne Anderson, will stand down after the June 2023 AGM. Consequently the Society needs a new Secretary. The position includes: recording and writing up minutes at the quarterly Council meetings and AGM, monitoring emails, and ensuring Society notices are published in the magazine and online. The role description is here: <https://www.birdsanz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MembershipSecretary-Role-Description.pdf>

Nominations close on 28th February 2023. To apply, or for more info, contact President Bruce McKinlay: president@birdsanz.org.nz

New members

We warmly welcome: Cinzia Vestena, Gerlinde Maria Andraschko (Far North); Derek Kelsey, Gary Setterfield, Morag Fordham, Simon Fordham, Colin J Lunt, Sibylle Ferner, Annette Lees, Greg Balla, Maddieson White, Aaron de Raat, Rhianna Stevens, Tatjana Clemens (Auckland); Leo Schwartzel, Marleen Verhoeven (South Auckland); Greg Hadley, Basim Furat (Waikato); Claire Manning, Delight Gartlein, Nataalia Lunson, Jennie Russell, Ray Russell, Pip Woodward (Bay of Plenty); Robin Smith, Fiona Parkinson (Taranaki); Jeff Gray (Hawke's Bay); Helen Morgan, Anant Dave (Manawatu); Ken Barnett, Eiren Sweetman, Suzanne Miller, Charles Haynes, Ox Lennon, Sarah Wilcox, Deborah Gross, Maria Rosa Dussler, Andrew McEwen (Wellington); Hilary Kirby, Richard de Hamel, Nate Wilbourne, Jenny Edwards, Jennie Warr, Scott Burnett (Nelson); Mats Lanzing Olsthoorn, Jemima Gardiner-Rodden (Marlborough); Rachel Taylor (West Coast); Moya Keighley, Rachael Hemmer, Mark McFadden, Gerard Richardson, Sharon English, Liz Brown (Canterbury); Ross Haddow, Penny Jacks, Carol Haddow, Catherine Bradley, Annie Yohannan, Scott Bourke, Anne Ryan, Vanessa Barry (Otago).

New Silvereye banding record

"At the inaugural meeting of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand, on May 24th 1940, reference was made to the hope of forming a ringing scheme" (Cunningham, 1951). This was formally realised when the NZ National Bird Banding Scheme was inaugurated. The first bird to be banded under the scheme was a Silvereye on 27th February 1950. We are delighted to report that first marking records of Silvereyes have just reached 125,000 records!

MICHELLE BRADSHAW, DOC BANDING OFFICER

Opting-out of printed publications

Members can now opt-out of receiving a printed copy of *Notornis*, or opt-out of receiving printed copies of both *Notornis and Birds New Zealand* magazine. Please note that doing so will not lead to a reduction in the cost of your membership subscription. You can visit the Society's website ([birdsanz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount/](https://www.birdsanz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount/)) and log-in to your Members Account using your email address and password. At the foot of the Members webpage, you will see the opt-out choices in the drop-down selection box. Council encourages members to consider these choices carefully and to opt-out of receiving printed copies of our publications if you don't really need them. The journal and magazine are published four times a year (March/June/Sept/Dec) and can be accessed at no cost via the Publications Archive page on our website here: [birdsanz.org.nz/publications/](https://www.birdsanz.org.nz/publications/)

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT



Chatham Petrel/Rekohu Taiko: Dave Boyle.

Chatham Petrel foraging ecology and climate change vulnerability

The endemic Chatham Petrel/Rekohu Taiko is one of the rarest seabird species in the world (c.1100 adults). Once abundant on several Chatham islands, destruction of breeding habitat and introduction of invasive predators drastically reduced its population. While major threats on land have been identified and are being managed, the species' vulnerability to climate change is largely unknown. Around Aotearoa New Zealand, ocean temperature, acidity, and the frequency of marine heatwaves are increasing and the predicted impact on primary productivity includes an important decrease of macronutrients in the eastern Chatham Rise, near the Chatham Islands. These climate change induced alterations of the marine environment may affect the Chatham Petrel's forage availability.

Improving our understanding of the species foraging ecology would allow us to better assess and predict how climate change might affect this species. Year-round tracking with light-level geolocators provided a first insight into the species' at-sea movements and distribution, however, the resolution of the data and inherent drawbacks of geolocation limit behavioural and habitat analyses particularly during chick-rearing. Yet, the species may be particularly vulnerable to climate change during this period as central-place foraging constraints could limit the species' ability to cope with variation in forage availability.

With financial assistance from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2022, I will deploy 10 solar-powered GPS loggers on adult Chatham Petrels breeding on South East Island, the species' main colony. The birds will be tracked from late incubation and throughout the full chick-rearing period. Tracking will provide invaluable information on the species' foraging ecology, which will be used to provide insights into the species' vulnerability to climate change. It will allow us to characterise individual movements, at-sea behaviour, and general distribution, and identify marine areas of importance for the species, marine habitat preferences and the drivers of the birds' at-sea movements. Achieving these objectives will provide the necessary information for subsequent modelling of the species' marine habitats availability under different climate change scenarios, an important step to inform future conservation management.

JOHANNES CHAMBON, PhD STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Shorebirds counts using aerial imagery – a Pilot Study

Although aerial surveys for shorebirds have been used extensively overseas these have rarely been applied in Aotearoa New Zealand. Aerial imagery may provide a viable alternative or a potential supplementary data stream to observer-based monitoring of many shorebirds at high tide roosts. This is likely to prove particularly valuable to ensure coverage of key habitats/sites at scale, particularly where access is difficult and/or ground-based observers are unavailable. Depending on the ability to resolve different species and count individual birds, an assessment of the precision of standard ground surveys will also be attempted. With financial assistance from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, this pilot study aims to examine the suitability of small fixed-wing aircraft as a platform to gather high resolution vertical imagery as a means of accurately counting shorebirds.

TERRY GREENE, ROB SCHUCKARD & DAVID MELVILLE



Kiwi-Nui North Island Brown Kiwi: Colin Miskelly/NZ Birds Online.

Kiwi-Nui released into the wild in Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Eleven Kiwi-Nui North Island Brown Kiwi were released into the wild in a predator-free area on the hills above Mākara by the Capital Kiwi Project on 19th November. The release at Terawhiti Station among the wind turbines was the first kiwi release in the Te Whanganui-a-Tara area as part of project, which aims "To have kiwi wandering beneath the Brooklyn wind turbine and on Mt Kaukau. We want residents from Ōwhiro Bay to Karori and Ōhāriu falling to sleep to the sound of kiwi calling." Kiwi-Nui were lost as a wild species in this part of the country about 100 years ago.

The 11 Kiwi-Nui were transported from Otorohanga Kiwi House in Waikato with their Ngāti Hinewai kaitiaki, and are the first of 250 Kiwi-Nui to be released into the 23,000-hectare project site over the next six years.

Around 4,500 pest traps have been set across the area between the Mākara hills and the south-west Wellington suburb of Ōwhiro Bay. This area includes existing council and community group traps targeting Stoats. Around half of the traps are self-setting gas-powered A24 Stoat traps that instantly kill Stoats (and rats) and then reset themselves.

The other traps in the network are mainly DOC250s – spring-loaded traps set in wooden boxes to target Ferrets. Adult kiwi can fight off Stoats but Ferrets are, literally, a bigger challenge. The project says there are no Ferrets in the Wellington region at the moment, but that they need to insure against any possible future incursions. The rest of the traps are DOC200s and cage traps.

Stoat eradication methodology, used on Fiordland's sanctuary islands, is being deployed at a landscape-scale on the mainland for the first time. This requires one trap for every five hectares of land.

The Capital Kiwi Project is the country's largest community-owned mustelid-trapping project, and the second-largest anti-Stoat network after DOC's Murchison Mountains programme (which protects Takahē and Tokoeka Southern Brown Kiwi).

The first trap was set in November 2018 and the complete trapping network was rolled out and operational by 2020. Extensive monitoring over three years has demonstrated that mammalian predators have been removed to levels to enable the safe return of Kiwi-Nui. In late 2021 all technical criteria for the large-scale reintroduction of kiwi into the wild in Wellington were met.

Te Papa research reveals new species of prion

Aotearoa New Zealand is the centre of diversity for prions, a group of small seabirds. In a recent DNA study, we focused on examining the relationships of Fairy Prions and Fulmar Prions. Fairy Prions or Titi Wainui are abundant around Aotearoa New Zealand with as many as four million pairs breeding here. Dead Fairy Prions are commonly seen washed up on our beaches.

They also have breeding colonies in Australia as well as on a number of Subantarctic Islands. Fulmar Prions are far less common, only breeding on remote islands of the southern hemisphere, such as the Tini Heke Snares, Moutere Hauriri Bounty, and Rēkohu Chatham island archipelagos. The main morphological difference between Fairy and Fulmar prions is in the robustness of their bills, but there are also differences in their plumage, diet, calls, and behaviour.

Our DNA study confirmed a close relationship between Fairy Prions and Fulmar Prions but also tossed up some unexpected results. Most surprisingly Fulmar Prions from different island groups were more closely related to Fairy Prions than they were to each other. For example, Fulmar Prions from the Tini Heke Snares Islands were genetically closer to Fairy Prions from the Tini Heke Snares Islands than they were to Rēkohu Chatham Island Fulmar Prions. This result indicates independent origins of the chunky 'Fulmar' bill form on different island groups from Fairy Prion ancestors.

Our DNA results showed that the existing taxonomy does not reflect the evolutionary relationships within Fairy Prions and Fulmar Prions. Changes to the taxonomy were needed. Combining our genetic results with the morphological and ecological differences between the different breeding colonies, we suggest the following taxonomic changes.

The prions on the Rēkohu Chatham Islands with 'Fulmar'-like bills should be recognised as a separate species (Pyramid Prion; *Pachyptila pyramidalis*). This species is endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand (it only occurs here).

The remaining Fulmar Prions (*Pachyptila crassirostris*) are also now endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand. The prions on the Australian territory of Heard Island were thought to also be Fulmar Prions (although this had been debated). However, our DNA data shows that these are actually Fairy Prions, which is how Aotearoa New Zealand has gained two endemic species, while Australia has lost a breeding species!

In addition to recognising the Pyramid Prion as a distinct species, we recommend that two subspecies be recognised for both Fairy Prion and Fulmar Prion. When combined with other recent research on MacGillivray's Prion, this means a total of ten prion taxa should be recognised (with eight as full species):

Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*

MacGillivray's Prion *Pachyptila macgillivrayi*

Salvin's Prion *Pachyptila salvini*

Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*

Thin-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*

Pyramid Prion *Pachyptila pyramidalis* (Chatham Islands only)

Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur turtur* plus **Subantarctic Fairy Prion** subspecies *Pachyptila turtur eatoni*

Fulmar Prion *Pachyptila crassirostris crassirostris* (Bounty and Snares Islands) plus **Lesser Fulmar Prion** subspecies *Pachyptila crassirostris flemingi* (Auckland Islands only).

The reasons for these changes to Fairy Prion and Fulmar Prion names are explained in full in our paper, "Genomic analyses of fairy and fulmar prions (Procellariidae: *Pachyptila* spp.) reveals parallel evolution of bill morphology, and multiple species":

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0275102>

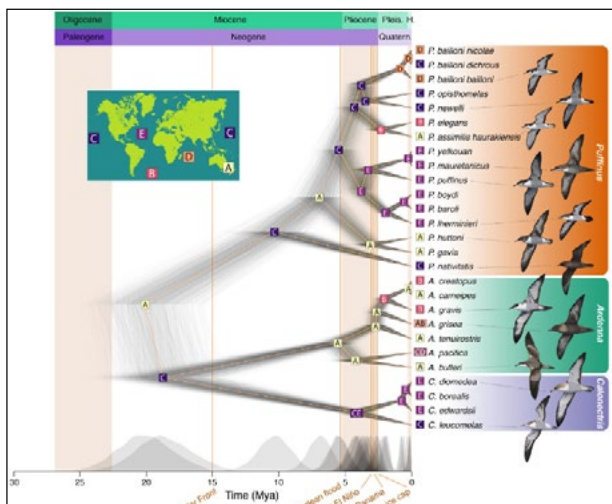
LARA SHEPHERD (SCIENCE RESEARCHER), COLIN MISKELLY & ALAN TENNYSON (CURATORS), TE PAPA



▲ Pyramid Prion, The Pyramid, Chatham Islands: Alan Tennyson/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Fulmar Prion, Bounty Islands: Alan Tennyson/NZ Birds Online.



Past oceanographic changes promoted rapid diversification in shearwaters

Oceanographic changes can act as drivers of diversification and speciation, including in highly mobile marine species such as seabirds. New research by Joan Ferrer Obiol *et al.*, (*Journal of Biogeography*, Vol 49, Issue 1) studied the role of past oceanographic changes on shearwater biogeography and evolution. Using genomic data the authors estimated ancestral ranges and evaluated the roles of founder events, geographic separation, and surface ocean currents in driving shearwater diversification. They identified a period of high dispersal and rapid speciation in shearwaters during the Late Pliocene [5.3–2.5 million years ago] to early Pleistocene [2.5 million–11,700 years ago]. They also found that species dispersal appears to have been favoured by surface ocean currents, and that founder events were supported as the main mode of speciation. Body mass also showed significant associations with life strategies and local conditions. The authors say that reductions in the relatively shallow parts of the ocean above the continental shelf drop-off during the Pliocene seem to have driven global extinctions of shearwater species, followed by a subsequent burst of speciation and dispersal probably promoted by Plio-Pleistocene climatic shifts.



▲ *Macronectes tinae* painting by Simone-Giovanardi.

First giant petrel fossils

In 2017, Taranaki collector Alastair Johnson found the fossil of a giant petrel. Initially, it was encased in rock but careful preparation revealed something stunning. Not only was it a complete skull but it was the first fossil ever found of an intriguing kind of seabird. Two years later, Alastair found part of a wing bone of a giant petrel too. Both fossils are three million years old.

Giant petrels are very distinctive birds, being the size of small albatrosses, with huge bulbous beaks. They are famous for their habit of following ships and their outrageous scavenging activities – sometimes getting fully immersed in the carcass of some poor creature, ripping it apart and becoming covered in blood and other goo. While their taste may be questionable to us, they perform a useful role as marine cleaners.

We find them endearing birds, with their unique look and distinctive musty smell. In contrast to their brazen behaviour fighting over carrion, towards people on land they are timid and wary. Like most kinds of petrels, they spend their lives roaming the oceans. For nesting, they maintain long-term partners, with which they share the duties of raising a single chick each year.

So what do the fossils tell us about the evolution of giant petrels? They reveal what we might have predicted, that is, ancestral giant petrels were smaller and had wing bones with features intermediate between living giant petrels and their closest relatives – the other much smaller fulmarine petrels.

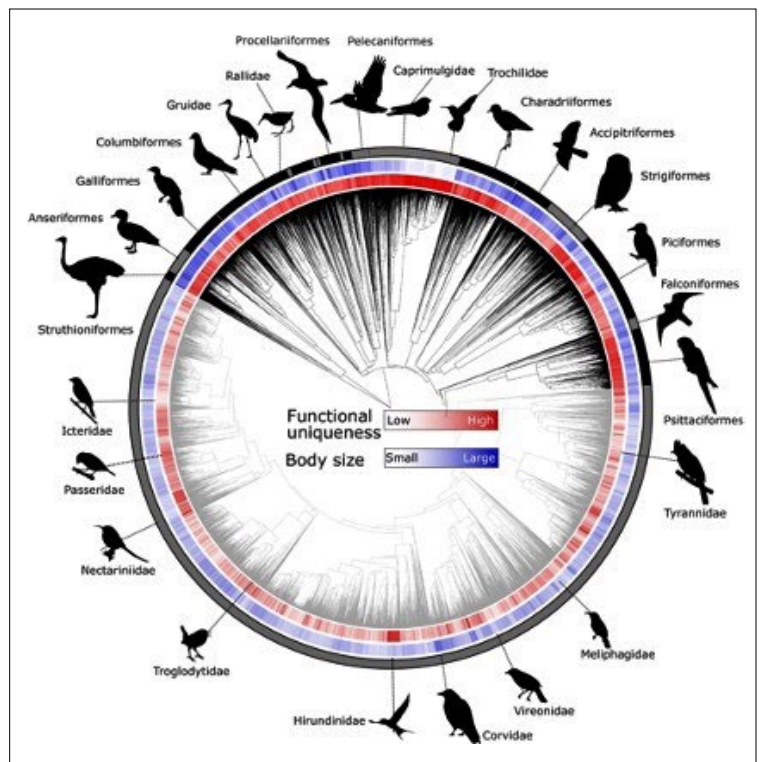
The fossil is named *Macronectes tinae* after Tina King – Alastair Johnson's late wife, because the giant petrel skull was her favourite fossil. Thanks very much to Alastair and John Buchanan-Brown for their expert fossil preparation skills and also Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāruahine for their ongoing support of Te Papa's work in their rohe.

Link to the full article: <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-6500/3/1/6>

ALAN TENNYSON (CURATOR) &
RODRIGO SALVADOR (RESEARCH FELLOW), TE PAPA



▲ Takahē Recovery has hit a historic high with 484 Takahē in October 2022. This is all thanks to the hard work at DOC's Burwood Takahē Centre, sanctuary sites around the country, and in the Murchison Mountains where a wild population is carefully managed. The chicks that are hatched at the different sites are strategically transferred to other sites to help maximise genetic variability in the population. Takahē painting by Rachel Walker on display at Zealandia Ecosanctuary.



Bird extinctions and ecosystems resilience

Bird species extinction rates are projected to increase worldwide, but it remains unclear how this loss of biodiversity might affect the way that ecosystems function. Since ecological processes are hard to quantify at global scales, morphological traits can provide useful insights into species' roles in ecosystems. For example, the size and shape of a bird's bill can predict the type and size of food items it consumes. We examined the morphological traits of 9,943 living bird species (99%), comparing those of threatened species with those of all other bird species. We quantified the total variation in bill and body shape as a measure of the diversity of ecological roles performed by birds, and we estimated how unique each species is in its combination of traits, relative to the total species pool.

Our analyses showed that bird species with the most unique traits are the species under most immediate threat of extinction. We also found evidence that this is not simply because extinction risk increases with body size, but because more specialised bird species with relatively unique shapes are more highly threatened. Altogether, our results showed that we risk losing many distinctive bird species to extinction along with their unique ecological roles, potentially resulting in less resilient ecosystems.

Joseph A. Tobias *et al*, *Bird extinctions threaten to cause disproportionate reductions of functional diversity and uniqueness*. *Functional Ecology*, November 2022.

Leaving a Gift in your will

Leaving a Gift to Birds New Zealand in your will makes a real difference. All funds we receive go to the Projects Assistance Fund so you can be confident your Gift will have a real impact. We suggest that you consult your solicitor, Guardian Trust, or Public Trust office for advice on drawing up your will. The two options we offer are:

* *Specific Legacy*: Leaving a specific amount of money, shares, bonds, items, or a nominated Gift to Birds New Zealand, or

* *Residual Legacy*: Leaving a Gift of all or part of your net estate (what remains after all taxes, specific gifts to family and friends, and the cost of administering the estate have been paid). This should be expressed as a percentage or share of your estate. If you would like to discuss either option please contact our Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: eo@birdsNZ.org.nz



❑ NZ Shore Plover being banded, Rangatira Island: Adrian Riegen.

NZ Shore Plover bumper breeding season

The Department of Conservation has reported that the NZ Shore Plover population on South East (Rangatira) Island had a bumper breeding season in 2021/2022 producing 41 juveniles, more than double the number of their best monitored breeding season in 2014. The Chatham Island Shore Plover recovery team banded and took blood samples from 38 of the juveniles. The adult population there has also increased to 138 adults, up from 125 in 2020.

Coromandel Kiwi-Nui monitoring reveals growing population

The Department of Conservation says that a 2022 survey of 78 sites around Mount Moehau on the Coromandel Peninsula detected 489 Kiwi-Nui North Island Brown Kiwi, an increase from 131 detected birds in 2000 when monitoring began, and from 264 birds in 2009.

"More than 20 years of hard work protecting the Coromandel Kiwi-Nui (Northern Brown Kiwi) is paying off with more birds in the bush," said DOC's Coromandel Operations Manager Nick Kelly. "What we're seeing here is how continued control and suppression of predators like possums and stoats can help our taonga species."

Moehau has been the focus for predator trapping by both DOC and community conservation organisation Moehau Environment Group for two decades, said Kelly. Trapping has been supplemented with periodic aerial 1080 operations run by DOC to control possums - operations which also kill resident stoats that avoid going into traps.

The monitoring also showed Kiwi-Nui detected at 99% of the monitoring points, an increase from 65% in 2000. This was good evidence the population around the mountain is expanding, Kelly said. Monitoring was undertaken by experienced kiwi monitoring professional Paddy Stewart of Red Admiral Ecology and his colleagues, who identified the location and distance of the birds from widely spaced monitoring points in a plotted area. Moehau Environment Group chair Leticia Williams welcomed the news: "This is an excellent result, and it reflects the consistent effort put in by volunteers, landowners and trappers."

New Southland branch scholarship

Our Southland Branch has received a significant bequest from Mrs Dorothy Alloo, a former Southlander with a passion for birds. The bequest was made to promote birds and bird-related research in Southland, and the branch decided that one of the best ways to do this was to set up a scholarship with the Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) for any degree students doing bird-related research. Last year Rose Hynson receiving a scholarship to assist with her work surveying the birds of the Sutton Lagoon in the Invercargill Estuary, comparing it to the work that past OSNZ member Roger Sutton did there more than 20 years ago, which also led to the protection of the site. The bequest has also been used to assist DOC with NZ Dotterel research.



❑ Black-tailed Native Hen, Murchison: Bradley Shields.

Australian 'Turbo Chook' in Murchison

Lynn Diamond Winter reported on 8/2 via Facebook that a Black-tailed Native Hen had taken up residence in the grounds of Winter Kiwi Park Motels and Holiday Park in Murchison, having "made itself at home with our chooks". Further details emerged after a few local birders visited to see the rare vagrant Australian native hen species, known colloquially as 'turbo chooks' in their native country because of their speed and fowl-like appearance. They were told by Brent Winter that the bird has been present there for the past four months, happily coming in to join their domestic chooks for a feed of kitchen scraps!

According to the New Zealand Birds Online website, Black-tailed Native Hens have reached NZ from Australia on at least seven occasions: near Colac Bay, Southland (June 1923), Tukituki River, Hawke's Bay (May 1957), Kongahu Swamp, Karamea (August to November 1984), Opuatia Swamp, Waikato (May 1986), Lake Hood, Canterbury (August 2002), near Ashburton (December 2011) and Waimatua, Southland (November 2017). Lynn has asked that anyone planning to visit Winter Kiwi Park Motels and Holiday Park in search of the local 'turbo chook' please call her first on 03 523 9248 or text her on 027 3783388 to make arrangements.

New 3D scanning method for identifying bird bones

I was very grateful to receive the 2020 David Medway Scholarship from Birds New Zealand which helped support my MSc research on bird bone shape and taxonomic identification. The main aim was to develop a method to identify the family that a bird belongs to using the shape of isolated bones. This method can be useful when molecular methods of identification are not available or not feasible, for example with fossils. I sought the scholarship so I might apply this method to a three million-year-old fossil bird bone from the Taranaki region that is housed in Canterbury Museum. A taxonomic identification for this fossil would contribute to our growing knowledge about the bird community of Zealandia during the Pliocene, when global temperatures were as warm as they are expected they will become again by the year 2100.

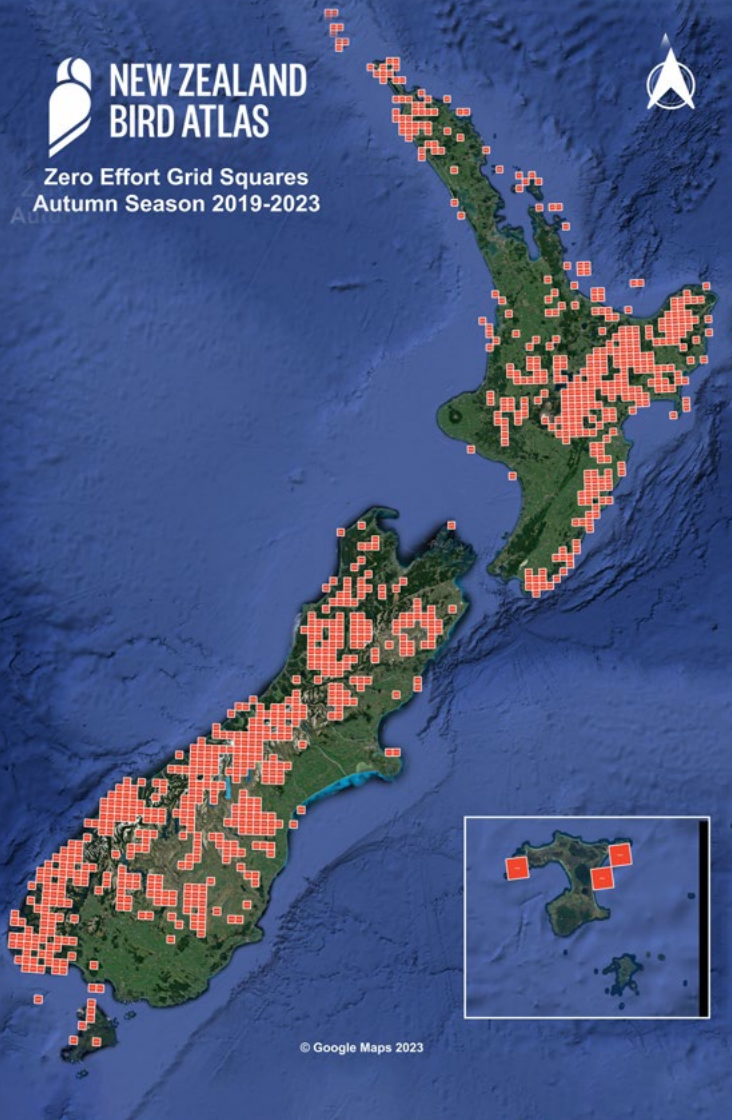
The novel 3D shape-based taxonomic classification method that I developed was highly successful at assigning seabird bones to their correct order and family. Landmark-based classification analysis assigned femora from penguins and tubenose seabirds to the correct order and family with 100% and 93.5% accuracy, respectively. Pseudolandmark-based (landmark-free) classification analysis assigned femora and humeri from penguins and tubenose seabirds to both the correct order and family with 100% accuracy. The David Medway Scholarship was pivotal in the success that I have achieved in this MSc project. With my thesis now submitted, I look forward to using the techniques developed to categorise and identify further fossil material.

EMMA HOLVAST

NEW ZEALAND BIRD ATLAS

Zero Effort Grid Squares
Autumn Season 2019-2023

Autumn



▲ Pectoral Sandpiper, Kai Iwi Lakes, 3/1/23: Aaron Skelton.



▲ South Island Saddleback with unusually long bill, Moturoa Island, 2009: Alan Morton.

NZ Bird Atlas project nearing final year

As we approach the final year of the five-year New Zealand Bird Atlas project (June 2023– June 2024), and enjoy the second to last Autumn season, we wanted to provide the following key updates on the project.

Latest milestones

To date the Atlas has received over 315,000 complete *eBird* checklists, submitted by over 1,360 Atlasers. A total of 3,076 of the project's 3,232 grid squares now have some data in them year round, even if only five minutes' worth! Nearly 105,000 effort hours have gone into the project so far (which equates to over 4,300 day equivalents and over \$2.4 million dollars if that time were paid out at the Living Wage!). The Atlas community has collectively achieved a huge amount in a relatively short space of time, all of that while navigating a global pandemic.

Continuing to enter data across the entire country, to spread our efforts and spend time in all of the Atlas squares still remains one of the highest priorities for us all. With 156 Atlas grid squares still left with no data in them, we still have plenty of Atlasing to do as a community and we'd love your continued support.

DOC Tier 1 2021/22 Season Data Uploaded

One of the key aspects of the Atlas is attempting to survey the entire country, spreading out the community's effort to ensure we gain as much of a complete picture as we can over the five years of the project. As many of you will know, this will involve

accessing harder to reach spots that will likely not receive a lot of data. The Department of Conservation (DOC) manages a third of NZ's land area and undertakes fantastic biodiversity monitoring throughout these areas. The 2021/22 DOC Tier 1 bird monitoring season's data has now been uploaded to the Atlas dataset, helping to fill in some of these harder to reach areas. This is the third season's worth of valuable bird count data that has now been included in the Atlas dataset.

This collaboration continues to provide a huge amount of support for the Atlas project, increasing the Atlas community's coverage both spatially and temporally. An additional 2,765 5-minute complete checklists have been uploaded to the DOC Tier 1 *eBird* profile, tallying up a total of 7,683 checklists across 645 grid squares altogether that the DOC Tier 1 team have worked hard to compile, and now contributed to the Atlas dataset. The Atlas team would like to say another huge thank you to Tier 1 data management team for their hard work to continue the support of the Atlas project for the upload of the DOC Tier 1 bird count data. We'd also like to send a thank you to all of the Tier 1 field staff who have undertaken counts and gathered such vital data, and to those undertaking counts this season.

Toi Toi Wines expeditions

Thanks to Toi Toi Wines, 2023 will see several funded Atlas trips being run, including the recent Gisborne and Southland expeditions in February. You can sign-up to support other trips once they're announced. These expeditions will be

oriented around gathering as much scientifically valuable bird observations in under surveyed areas as possible, targeting various habitats and species. The funding will help offset but not completely cover all costs, so please do bear that in mind. We need as many passionate Atlasers to support those efforts as possible, so do sign up! Please check our website and our Facebook page for more information regarding these awesome opportunities. A huge thanks again to Toi Toi Wines for providing this funding!

Year Five

As we venture towards the final 12 months of the Atlas project, we need to remember there are many ways we can tease out areas to increase Atlas effort and find new spots for some Atlasing adventures. 2023 is the year to undertake more focused Atlasing as a community, to support each other across regions, and ultimately reach the target of, not only 100% Atlas grid squares with data, but also documenting as many of the possible species, within each square, across all four seasons. We'll continue to need cross regional communication and support, as well as the effective use of the various specialized tools available both within the Atlas *eBird* portal itself, and a few additional tools the Atlas team have generated. Many of these tools can be found within the 'Explore' tab on the Atlas portal.

Atlasers win Global *eBird* Challenge

Stuart Nicholson recently joined Dawn Palmer and Cathy Mitchell as global *eBird* challenge winners. Congratulations again to all of you for your efforts and putting Aotearoa on the global birding map!

Outreach and advocacy

We know many regions have been undertaking regular Atlasing outings, and advocating with their local communities to get involved with the Atlas. Articles were published about the Atlas project in Federated Mountain Clubs magazine and NZ Geographic magazine, and on the Global *eBird* portal page helping to raise the profile of the project.

New to the Atlas?

Some active birders, including many Birds New Zealand members, have yet to submit their first Atlas *eBird* checklist. Do you have a slight pang of guilt each time you receive an *eBird* Alert, feeling that you should be submitting your sightings too? It's okay, many of us have been there. Let 2023 be a chance to share your bird reports with others, just as their reports have helped you. Whether you're seeing common birds or endangered species, the Atlas and *eBird* thrives on the enthusiasm and engagement of dedicated participants who make Atlasing part of their regular birding activities.

Remember, Atlasing doesn't have to be day-long endeavours into the far reaches of the bush (although this is encouraged!). Many Atlasers submit checklists from short counts in their garden, over lunchtime walks, or when visiting friends/family. The Atlas, and *eBird*, welcomes scientifically valuable counts from anywhere, so even a complete checklist in a car park, or quick survey from your doorstep will help you contribute valuable data.

Top 100

Fancy some friendly competition with other *eBirders*? The Top 100 reflects the accomplishments of individual *eBirders*, and they can be a great tool to inspire or motivate yourself to get out and find more birds, explore new grid squares, or submit more complete checklists. The Atlas Top 100 is constantly updating as Atlasers go out and submit their observations. You can look at your region or indeed the whole of the country and see how your efforts compare with the rest of the Atlas community!

Explore new grid squares

Tired of submitting checklists from your home grid square? Use the Atlas Effort Map to select a handful of new Grid Squares to go and explore over the season, or year! You can quickly find one that is either adjacent to your home grid square, along the local river, or even at a campsite you know you're going to be visiting this season/year. We're always encouraging Atlasers to find new grid squares to explore and submit checklists in, especially those that are under-surveyed. You can quickly gauge which squares have no, or very little effort in from the Effort Map, and can then plan an exciting Atlasing trip knowing that you may well be the first to colour in that square for the season or even the Atlas project!

Autumn Season 2023

We recently shared the Autumn Atlas 'zero' squares maps to really showcase those squares that are still without data for the Autumn season. There are 885 grid squares without Autumn data around the country, so we encourage the Atlas community to help us gather data in those under-surveyed areas. You might be surprised to see areas that haven't been visited in Autumn. Use the Effort Map to hone in on these squares to give them some Autumn Atlas love!

Birding after dark

If the sun has set and you still haven't submitted your daily list, don't worry it isn't too late! We'd encourage Atlasers to submit a nocturnal count. Nocturnal counts are valuable (and often under-represented as we predominantly all go birding during the day), as they help us understand where and when Atlasers are finding Ruru/Morepork, Little Owl, kiwi, and other species active at night. Sometimes there are no birds calling at all on nocturnal counts. This is okay – lists with zero species are still immensely valuable, and welcome as they help show what is not being detected. We recommend you add checklist notes indicating that you tried for birds and found none.

Scientific value

Your daily efforts may not always tally a lot of birds, but remember that as long as you are searching your hardest, complete checklists with accurate abundances for all species, whether from busy streets, on bad weather days, or at night all qualify and all contribute valuable insights. While long lists and rare species are often the targets for a day of birding, the scientific value of an *eBird* list is not measured by the quantity or quality of the species list. In fact, it is often the short counts from under sampled areas that are most valuable. One of the main scientific challenges with understanding *eBird* data is that effort tends to be concentrated around birding hotspots, rare birds, and certain types of habitats. Spreading your effort around the country in as many different places as possible will certainly help get a better understanding of birds across New Zealand's diverse landscapes. If Atlasers commit to following our guidelines and participate in the "Checklist-a-day" challenge, it'll go a long way towards filling in the gaps in the Atlas Effort Map.

Thank you!

We can't thank everyone in the Atlas community enough for making the project such a success, we really appreciate all your time and effort to help us gather the most scientifically valuable Atlas dataset. Remember, anyone with an interest in birds and basic identification skills can get involved with the project via *eBird*. Every observation is of use; from the alpine tussock, forested lowlands, farmland, urban centres, and even your backyard; it all counts. We can't wait to see what we can achieve together in these final stages of the Atlas – happy Atlasing!

NZ Bird Atlas Team nzbirdatlas@wml.co.nz



▣ Campbell Albatrosses taking off: Oskar Ehrhardt.

Home of the wild

'True Young Explorer' scholarship recipient Oskar Ehrhardt reports on his recent trip to the Subantarctic Islands with Heritage Expeditions.

Synchronised flights of Light-mantled Sooty Albatross pairs, fending off New Zealand Sea Lions, and people as friendly as they are interesting made for an incredible adventure for so many reasons.

So what do six well-spent days in the South Pacific Ocean look like?

Our first day at sea aboard *Heritage Adventurer*, the new 125-metre expedition vessel operated by Heritage Expeditions, held plenty of opportunities to watch seabirds from the deck as we travelled south, although the weather was so calm it made for fewer seabird sightings.

Our first stop was the southernmost of the trip, a visit to Campbell Island. The challenging hike there was rewarded with incredible birdwatching, including the island's endemic snipe and teal species. Dots of white littered the tussock and megaherb-covered slopes – nesting Southern Royal Albatrosses! These birds were not shy, watching calmly as we walked past on the boardwalk within metres of some of the nests.

The guides aboard *Heritage Adventurer* were an enthusiastic mix of biologists, historians, photographers, and more. Among them was Em, who is working on a facial recognition programme for the control of feral cats. As I am currently working on an artificial intelligence project about machine learning to recognise the unique features in the bills of individual Kākā, it was very interesting to hear about his project. I also got to talk about my Kākā project with a fellow passenger who is doing a PhD on artificial intelligence.

Our next stop was to visit Enderby Island, which is the greatest place I've ever visited. As a home to Hoiho, Northern Giant Petrels, NZ Sea Lions, and various albatross species, the island hosts a paradise of biodiversity. The other endemic species such as the Auckland Island Snipe, Rail, Shag and Teal add to the island's magic. As I walked around the island, fly-bys from Brown Skuas, giant petrels, and albatrosses left me in awe.

The endemic snipe eluded me for hours until one stood by

the edge of a tussock and stared at me for ten whole seconds! A Brown Skua stood aimlessly among some miffed Auckland Islands Banded Dotterels for about 20 minutes. I sat on the edge of the boardwalk watching and photographing them. We spent the remaining time on Enderby overlooking the beach with hundreds of New Zealand Sea Lions. As the sun sank lower, the boat was hidden by a fog that had come in and surrounded us. We were in a dome enclosing nothing but untouched Subantarctic beauty.

En route to the Snares Islands, with a few hours of morning daylight before our destination, I spent some seabird-watching time on deck. The boat's bird expert was Dave Howes. My mornings on the deck were shared with him and fellow bird photographer, Anna.

The deep sea collided dramatically with coastal land at the Snares. With no beaches, waves just crash right into the rocks and cliffs. Albatrosses, Cape Petrels, and prions covered the surrounding water. We saw krill and schools of fish from the zodiacs – the island acts as a natural trap for these sea creatures which the resident seabirds feed on.

The endemic Snares Crested Penguins make excellent use of any low-lying coastal rocks that are remotely hoppable. From our zodiac inflatable motor boats we ventured into shallower waters, but taking photos was a challenge. The eight people huddled around you, plus the waves, often made getting the intended shot a futile battle. You can wait for moments of stillness, or try a long burst of shots in the hope that one of them turns out okay. I tried both, but the latter method didn't work well.

Our last visit was to Ulva Island, which felt more familiar. A short walk, guided by a woman named Ulva, featured sightings of Mohua, South Island Tieke, Kākā, and Tititipounamu Rifleman.

Sifting through my photos in Invercargill airport brews envy for my last week's self. Sure, I can meet people and see sights anytime on the mainland, but there was an added magic at the Subantarctic Islands. My eyes get tired as I sort through thousands of photos. Every time I blink, I see a flash of soaring albatrosses. In the back of my mind, I'm already thinking about when I'll be able to go back there.

My thanks to Heritage Expeditions for the True Young Explorer Scholarship and my family for helping with the costs of my trip. You can see more of my work on my website:

<https://oskarehrhardt.com/>



❑ Snares Crested Penguins.



❑ Light-mantled Sooty Albatross.
This and the other three photos: Oskar Ehrhardt.

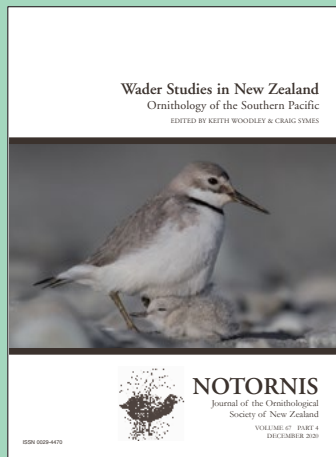


❑ Auckland Islands Snipe.



❑ Auckland Islands Tomtit.

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Ron Nilsson obituary

Ronald Jack Nilsson was born during WW2 and spent his earliest years in Hawke's Bay. His early interest in native flora and fauna created a childhood dream to join the Wildlife Service. After school he worked in animal research, joined the Ornithological Society of New Zealand in 1957, and moved to Dunedin in 1965. He joined the Otago Tramping Club and was well-known for his strong interest in the natural world and birds. In 1968, Ron mounted an expedition to search for Kākāpō in Fiordland which sadly yielded no sign of Kākāpō. In 1970 Ron was able to realise his dream and joined the Wildlife Service as a field officer at Murupara in the Fauna Conservation section responsible for threatened species, and then he returned to Dunedin in 1971.

During his years in Dunedin, Ron was able to work on a number of our iconic endangered species including Takahē, NZ Robin, Kākāpō, Black Stilt, Saddleback and Yellow-eyed Penguin. This work took him from places as far afield as Maud and Stephens islands in the Marlborough Sounds to the Subantarctic Islands. His expeditions included searches for species such as Black Petrel, South Island Bush Wren, Stead's Bush Wren, Laughing Owl, Orange-fronted Parakeet, and Great Spotted Kiwi. He was the first to search for and find South Georgian Diving Petrels (now Whenua Hou Diving Petrel) on Whenua Hou Codfish Island. Ron was involved in early work with Takahē, monitoring colour-banded birds in the wild, and capturing for translocation.

In 1965 there was a devastating rat invasion on Big South Cape Island and at the last minute some 36 South Island Saddlebacks were rescued and placed on two small predator-free islands in the Southern Muttonbird (Titi) Islands group. Between 1971 and 1986 Ron led a team that surveyed many of the Titi Islands for birdlife and as a result evolved an improved innovative management technique for South Island Saddleback. This groundbreaking work was a truly impressive early example for multiple island translocations for which NZ is acknowledged as a world pioneer.

In 1972 Brian Bell led a three-month expedition to survey the birdlife of the Subantarctic Auckland Islands with Ron as his second-in-command. This was the largest ever scientific expedition to leave NZ. It included 29 scientists from many disciplines. All of the islands in the Auckland Islands group were surveyed and Disappointment Island was visited for the first time. Between 1972 and 1986 Ron was fortunate to visit and work on all of the NZ Subantarctic islands, some several times.

Ron led the first Kākāpō expedition into the Esperance Valley in Fiordland in 1974 when the population was thought to be zero. Between 1974 and 1977, 18 male Kākāpō were found in Fiordland but no females were located. In 1975 Ron discovered the soon to be famous Kākāpō Richard Henry in the Gulliver Valley. Richard Henry was to make a crucial contribution to the genetic diversity of the Kākāpō breeding programme. The rediscovery of a population of about 150 birds (including females) on Rakiura Stewart Island in January of 1977 made it possible to begin the programme to conserve the species. Owing to predation by feral cats, all populations (about 60 individuals) were moved to safer places and now, from a tiny population with no known females in the late 1970s there is an increasingly viable population.

Ron considered his greatest contribution to conservation to be all the early work done to establish Whenua Hou Codfish Island as one of NZ's premiere island sanctuaries. Work began in 1972 with one of the first visits there since the 1930s. Ron was looking particularly for Cook's Petrels and found almost none, due to the island having large, predatory populations of Weka, possums and Kiore. The 1386-hectare island provided a potentially suitable ecosystem already supporting large populations of Kaka and Kakariki, both being good indicator species for forest health. It became critical to intervene and remove the predators. Ron directed the programme to remove all Weka from the island. This project involved nearly 200 volunteers over more than five years. Possums (introduced by sealers in 1840), were removed next and then Kiore. The work was intended to allow Cook's Petrels to

breed unhampered; the result was a pristine haven for a notably diverse range of endemic species, most notably Kākāpō in recent times.

No early ornithologists had ever visited Rakiura Stewart Island and early naturalists like Cockayne only recorded flora while Guthrie-Smith and Edgar Stead only visited tiny sections of the island. No lists of birds were made. From 1977 to 1980 Ron contrived to combine surveys of Rakiura's birdlife with extensive searches for Kākāpō elsewhere on the island.

In the 1970s, nothing was known about the Black Stilt population, distribution or breeding of this endemic high country bird. Ron led a project that initially monitored the population during winter when the birds moved away from their high country rivers to feed on the lower deltas of the large lakes. In 1980 the population crashed to around 27 adults and Black Stilts became the world's rarest wading bird. In response Ron created a team to intensively manage the population. A breeding centre was eventually set up in Twizel as part of this project as a follow on from Ron's pioneering work. The techniques developed to manage this species were a world first for wading birds.

With the formation of the Department of Conservation in 1987, Ron moved to Christchurch and was employed there until 1992. During this time his field work shifted to the Chatham Islands where he was involved with translocations of Black Robins between Mangere and Rangitira Islands. Previous experiences with management of Black Stilts and Saddlebacks benefitted this work. Ron acquired duties to monitor Forbes' Parakeets whose numbers were expanding as a result of the Wildlife Service's reforestation efforts a decade earlier. The Chatham Petrel was also in danger and in the early 1990s, he participated in surveys to find their breeding areas on Rangitira. Ron's field time on Codfish Island and the Chathams amounted in sum to several years in his Wildlife Service career.

After leaving DOC in the early 1990s Ron was involved in a variety of projects. He spent five summers working for Project River Recovery in the Mackenzie Basin, monitored wildlife and flora in the Granville Forest, which is now part of public conservation land, and he was the Birds New Zealand Canterbury Regional Representative for three years. Throughout his life, he was well-known for his interest and detailed knowledge of weather patterns in NZ.

In recent years Ron became best known for his passionate belief in the continued existence of South Island Kākāpō, with the last official acknowledged sighting being in 1967. In 2010 Ron co-founded a charitable trust to provide funding for systematic searches and any sighting of South Island Kākāpō can be reported on the Trust's website: www.southislandkokako.org.nz

Ron's personal and professional investments in bird research and conservation had their origins in the efforts of an earlier generation of conservation-minded ornithologists in NZ. Their legacies consolidated the character of bird conservation as we know and pursue it today. Ron learned his trade and laboured alongside the visionary leaders of the time: Charles Fleming, R.A. Falla, Edgar Stead, Graham Turbott, Don Merton and Brian Bell, Ron's boss, whose own belief and tenacity made island translocations the signature feature of NZ conservation today.

Ron's distinctive contribution was his warmth, his good humour and his ceaseless generosity as a colleague and mentor. He had a commanding ability to discern new campaigns ahead. Conservation in NZ has benefitted immensely from this rare gift.



■ Ron Nilsson.

JILL WEST

Geoff Harrow obituary

Geoff Harrow (QSM) was an ornithological legend. He rediscovered where Hutton's Shearwaters Kaikōura Titi breed high above the snowline in the Seaward Kaikōura Ranges and put the species firmly back on the map.

The Geoff Harrow/Hutton's Shearwater story starts in 1964 when Geoff, who was a mere fledgling of 38 years, heard a whisper from a Kaikōura local, Ivan Hislop, that there were rare seabirds nesting high in the Seaward Kaikōura Ranges. A few months later, Geoff set off on his own and after a gruelling nine-hour mountain mission was high in the upper Kowhai River. The next morning while scouting about he found many burrows and three very rotten bird carcasses. He excitedly collected these knowing that he was onto something, as it was unusual to find seabirds nesting so high in the mountains. He sent them to the Dominion Museum (now Te Papa) in Wellington and a short time later received a telegram from the late Robert Falla that read: "All three of your specimens are Hutton's Shearwaters. Congratulations. R.M. Falla."

It would be fair to say that the news in this telegram changed Geoff's life forever. It was an exciting discovery that confirmed the location of the nesting colonies of Hutton's Shearwaters, a species previously only found washed up dead on beaches.

Geoff spent the next two decades mapping the (then) eight colonies and conducting research on the species; much of which is published in *Notornis*. During this time Geoff also explored and mapped the Shearwater Stream colony on Puhi Peaks Station, now owned and cared for by Nicky McArthur.

When the Department of Conservation (DOC) was formed in 1987, Geoff received support from a number of Wellington-based scientists and staff from the Kaikōura DOC office. This work continued his research and helped to begin understanding the ecology of Hutton's Shearwater.

1996 was to be a very important milestone in Geoff's Hutton's story. A young Englishman, Richard Cuthbert, had started corresponding with Geoff about the possibility of coming to New Zealand to do his PhD on the Hutton's Shearwater. Richard arrived and spent much of the next three years living on site at the remote Kowhai River shearwater colony. Throughout this time, Richard spent many hours with Geoff discussing his research and further unravelling many of the mysteries about Hutton's Shearwater ecology. Geoff and Richard became lifelong friends; "brothers" in fact, bonded by their mutual love of wild places and their beloved Hutton's Shearwaters. This period of research was a turning point in the Hutton's Shearwater story. Richard's findings set in place many of the conservation actions which help protect the species today.

The first and most important management initiative was planning to establish a new shearwater colony on the Kaikōura Peninsula. This project began in 2006 and was a collaboration between Te Rūnanga O Kaikōura, The Tukete Trust and DOC. Geoff gave tremendous support to this initiative and was there at every translocation of chicks from the mountains. These chicks were hand-fed until fledging as they imprinted on their new peninsula colony site.

Many Birds New Zealand members will recall working with Geoff as they assisted with the translocation and feeding of birds. Geoff generously funded the final two translocations in 2012 and 2013. This brought the total number of chicks translocated to the Kaikōura Peninsula colony to over 500 and making it the biggest translocation of seabirds anywhere in the world. This project is progressing well for a slow-breeding, burrow-nesting seabird and there are already "great-grandchildren" birds returning to this new colony site. Geoff was immensely proud of this project and it was during these "translocation years" that Geoff was awarded the NZ Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society's "Old Blue Award" for his extraordinary commitment to conservation.

The formation of the Hutton Shearwater Charitable Trust in 2008 turned the project around and really elevated the profile of this incredible seabird. The Trust's initial focus was to raise money for a state-of-the-art predator-proof fence around the



▣ Geoff Harrow with Hutton's Shearwater: Andrew Spencer/Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust.

new colony site. This was a huge undertaking and Geoff was instrumental in getting it underway and also assisted Lindsay Rowe in a mammoth fund-raising effort. They raised over \$300,000 in less than six months. Geoff was very proud of what the Trust has achieved.

In 2010 the Trust partnered with Oxford University on a ground-breaking study to determine the Hutton's Shearwaters migration patterns after they depart their breeding colonies at the end of summer. By placing tiny Geolocators on 20 birds, this three-year project unravelled one of the great mysteries of the natural world and something that Geoff had been wanting to answer for many years. The team found that the birds migrate across the Tasman Sea to Australian waters and most of them end up spending the winter off the north-west coast of Australia in the southern Indian Ocean.

In 2015, we held a wonderful celebration for Geoff in Kaikōura to acknowledge his 50 years of work with Hutton's Shearwaters. Two years later, in 2017, Geoff was awarded a Queens Service Medal for services to conservation and mountaineering. In addition to his ornithological endeavours, Geoff was a highly skilled and experienced mountaineer. He climbed every significant Peak in Arthurs Park National Park in a three month period in his late teens and went on to climb with Sir Edmund Hillary in the Himalayas.

In 2019, Geoff met Prince Charles (now King Charles III) on his visit to the Kaikōura Peninsula to see the work of the Hutton's Shearwater Trust at the new colony site. Geoff presented a kete of gifts to the future King and spent a considerable time chatting about conservation.

When I remember Geoff, there are a number of things that stand out about him. Firstly, his passion for understanding and protecting the natural world. Secondly, his bountiful and unstoppable energy. I have been very fortunate to have been on numerous trips into the Kōwhai mountain colony with Geoff over the past 17 years and have witnessed his incredible energy as he scrambled around the steep tussock faces and rocky tors. If we have half his energy when we get to our late eighties and early nineties, I think we will be very happy.

To say that the Hutton's Shearwater was a huge part of Geoff's life is an understatement. Geoff's discovery and lifelong work with this species is up there with the likes of other ornithological greats such as Dr Geoffrey Orbell, who rediscovered the Takahē and Don Merton who saved the Black Robin and other species.

We are all extremely grateful to Geoff for his lifetime of work in conserving the species. Geoff did this with incredible energy, determination, generosity, and a beautiful curiosity about the natural world. Geoff has left the world a much better place for us to enjoy and appreciate.

Geoff died peacefully at his home in Christchurch on 11th January 2023, aged 96. We are thinking of Lindsey, Geoff's wife and his children Paul, Belinda, and Mark at this time.

PHIL BRADFIELD



▲ Chatham Island Taiko off main Chatham Island (18/12): Tubenoses Project © H.Shirihai

▲ Stejneger's Petrel at sea out past the Poor Knights Islands (13/10): Aaron Skleton.



▲ Erect-crested Penguin, Curio Bay, Southland (31/1): Beth Chapman.



▲ Southern Giant Petrel white morph off Kaikoura (29/11): Will Parsons.



Bird News

Some sightings have not received official acceptance by Birds New Zealand's Records Appraisal Committee (1st September 2022 - 1st March 2023).

Hoary-headed Grebes have bred again at Lake Elterwater with 2 pairs each with 1 juvenile seen on 31/1 and 10/2. Two **Australian Chestnut-breasted Shelducks** were found on Campbell Island on 2/12, followed by 3 on Enderby Island on 6/12. Singletons were also seen at Te Anau oxidation ponds from 7-8/1 and at Oporua Spillway by Lake Wairarapa on 5/1. A female **Northern Pintail** made brief appearances at Tip Lagoon in Invercargill on 8/10 and 19/12, while the long-staying drake **Northern Shoveler** was seen again at Pegasus wetlands in Christchurch on 19/9.

DOC Dunedin reported a **King Penguin** ashore near the Matakura River mouth in Southland on 14-15/11 (see front cover photo). It was found ashore again at Toetoes Bay on 17-19/11 before DOC staff moved it to an undisclosed site. A **Gentoo Penguin** was reported at sea off the Fiordland coast on 22/11. A **Fiordland Crested Penguin/Tawaki** was taken into care on the Otago Peninsula on 1/12. Another was found ashore at Cape Palliser (Wairarapa) on 4/12. An **Erect-crested Penguin** and 2 **Tawaki** came ashore at Curio Bay on 31/1, with the former taken into care. An **Eastern Rockhopper Penguin** found ashore at Waimarama Beach in Hawke's Bay on 6/2 was also taken into care. An Erect-crested Penguin was at Ngawi Beach, Cape Palliser, on 6/2. Another **Tawaki** was ashore at Blackhead Beach, Otago, on 15/2, and another Erect-crested Penguin at Oamaru the same day.

A **Wandering Albatross sp.** was found grounded at the Little River Rail Trail by Lake Ellesmere on 24/1. Pelagic trips around the country reported some outstanding seabirds. A research trip out to Otago Canyons on 4/10 recorded 3-4 **Subantarctic Little**

Shearwaters, 15+ **Broad-billed Prions**, 5 **Black-bellied Storm Petrels**, and 1 **Grey-backed Storm Petrel**. A brilliant find was the **Stejneger's Petrel** seen on a pelagic trip from Tutukaka out past the Poor Knights Islands to 'The Petrel Station' on 13/10. The next trip there on 23/10 recorded 2 **Chatham Albatross**. A pelagic trip from Marsden Cove into Bream Bay on 31/10 recorded 1 **Black-winged Petrel**, 2 **Mottled Petrels** and 2 **Wilson's Storm Petrels**, and a Wellington pelagic trip out to Cook Canyon on 6/11 recorded 120 **Salvin's Albatross** and 100 **Westland Petrels**.

Further south, a Moeraki pelagic trip to the Otago Canyons on 12/11 recorded 1 **Campbell Albatross**, up to 35 **Wilson's Storm Petrels**, and 2 **Grey-backed Storm Petrels**. A repeat trip on 13/11 recorded 2 **Campbell Albatross**, up to 20 **Wilson's Storm Petrels**, 2 **Mottled Petrels**, and 1 **Arctic Tern**. Back up north, another 'Petrel Station' pelagic trip on 1/11 recorded 1 **Chatham Albatross**, 1 **Mottled Petrel** and 2 **South Polar Skuas**. The next trip on 17/11 recorded 1 **Wedge-tailed Shearwater**, 1 **Grey Petrel**, 2 **Black-winged Petrels**, 4 **Mottled Petrels** and 1 **Long-tailed Skua**.

A remarkable record was a **Chatham Island Taiko** (aka **Magenta Petrel**) filmed at sea at close range for 3 minutes off the southern tip of main Chatham Island on 18/12. Also remarkable was the list of rarities seen on a 'Petrel Station' pelagic trip on 10/12 which included 1 **Gould's Petrel**, 1 **White-naped Petrel**, 1 **Chatham Albatross**, 1 **South Polar Skua** and 1 **Long-tailed Skua**. An **Antarctic Fulmar** was seen on a Kaikoura pelagic trip on 31/10, followed by a white morph **Southern Giant Petrel** there on 29/11 and a **Chatham Albatross** on 6/2. The next pelagic trip out to 'The Petrel Station' on 14/1 recorded 10 **Black-winged Petrels** and 100 **New Zealand Storm Petrels** near the boat. A **White-naped Petrel** and a **Black-winged Petrel** livened up the proceedings on a Marsden Cove pelagic trip on 29/1, and the first Riverton pelagic trip on 11/12 started in style by recording



▲ Red-tailed Tropicbird, 90 Mile Beach, Far North (15/2): Aaron Skelton.



▲ Long-toed Stint, Lake Ellesmere (24/12): Adam Colley.



▲ Subantarctic Little Shearwater, Otago Canyons (4/10): Oscar Thomas.



▲ Hudsonian Godwit, Warrington Peninsula, Otago (4/11): Bradley Shields.

1 Broad-billed Prion, 1 Grey-backed Storm Petrel, 1 Brown Skua and 1 Long-tailed Skua. A Wedge-tailed Shearwater and a Black-winged Petrel put in appearances on a pelagic trip from Sandspit into the Hauraki Gulf on 5/2. A Wilson's Storm Petrel visited a small fishing boat in Rangaunu Harbour (Northland) on 19/12 and a Broad-billed Prion found ashore at Cascade Cove, Southland, on 16/12 revived and flew away.

An immature **White-tailed Tropicbird** was found grounded at Omokoroa golf course near Tauranga on 3/1, while another found in Russell on 6/1 was taken into care but succumbed overnight. A dead beach-wrecked **Red-tailed Tropicbird** was picked up at Tahuna Torea Reserve in Auckland on 6/2 and another was seen in flight at the Bluff on 90 Mile Beach on 15/2. Continuing the tropical theme, a **Great Frigatebird** was reported flying over near Collingwood on 30/1 and a frigatebird spp. over New Plymouth on 5/2.

A **Black-tailed Native Hen** reported in Murchison on 8/2 was a pleasant surprise, even more so given it had remained unreported there for about 4 months! In wader news there was a **Greater Sand Plover** at Lake Ellesmere on 8/1 and another at Awarua Bay (Southland) on 18/1. A **Black-tailed Godwit** was seen at Southern Marsh by Ahuriri Estuary, Napier, on 20/11. Another in near full breeding plumage at Rabbit Island, Waimea Inlet, on 26/12 made for a nice Boxing Day present. A **Hudsonian Godwit** turned up at Ambury shell islands on 14/9 and another was at Warrington Peninsula in Otago on 4/11. A **Little Whimbrel's** visit to the New River Estuary, Invercargill, on 12/2 was short-lived. A **Wandering Tattler** stopped in at Ocean Beach, Whangarei Heads, on 6/11, while an unusual inland record was a **Grey-tailed Tattler** on the Ruamahanga River south of Masterton on 12/12.

Another brilliant find was a **Long-toed Stint** with 15+ **Red-**

necked Stints at Lake Ellesmere on 24/12 that stayed to 20/1, allowing birders from near and far to add it to their list. A **Broad-billed Sandpiper** found at Mangere Bridge on 1/1 stayed to 6/2. Another unusual inland find was a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Lake Taharoa (Kai Iwi Lakes, 2-3/1). Also in Northland, a **Sanderling** was at Lincoln St Reserve, Mangawhai, 9-13/1. A **Red-necked Phalarope** found at Sewerage Pond behind Grovetown Lagoon walkway in Blenheim on 25/11 only stayed for 2 days.

Two South Polar Skuas and 1 Brown Skua were photographed at sea off the Southland coast on 30/10. Another South Polar Skua was seen at sea off Milford Sound on 4/12, and a **Pomarine Skua** at Pakawau Beach, Golden Bay, on 3/2. An extraordinary mainland sighting was 17 **Sooty Terns** flying over Ngunguru Sandspit (Northland) on 13/2 during Cyclone Gabrielle. A **Grey-backed Tern** was reported at South Head, Kaipara Harbour, along with 2 **Common Terns** and a flock of **White-fronted Terns** on 18/12. If accepted this will be the third NZ record.

A potential first NZ record was the **Common Gull-billed Tern** (*Gelochelidon nilotica affinis*) photographed in non-breeding plumage by Dave Howes and Aaron Skelton at Manukapua Big Sand Island in Kaipara Harbour on 22/1. The International Ornithological Congress (IOC) and BirdLife International recognise this as a separate species to the slightly larger Australian Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon macrotarsa*). Shortly after, 2 Gull-billed Tern sp. in non-breeding plumage were seen flying over Scott Point, 90 Mile Beach, on 28/1.

There was a surge in **White-winged Black Terns** sightings with single birds at: Waitangi Regional Park in Hawke's Bay (22/10; 6/11; 21/11; 3/12, 4/2 & 2 on 8/12); Rangaunu Harbour and Timaru Port (5/11); Tasman River delta (14/11; 8/12; 13/12); Waituna in Southland (11/11 & 2 on 15/2); Cass River near Lake Murray (24/11); upper Cass River (6/12); Tekapo River

▲ Mottled Petrel,
Otago Canyons(13/11):
Oscar Thomas



▲ White-winged Black
Tern, Pūkorokoro Miranda
(15/1): Michael Szabo.



▲ Common Gull-billed Tern,
Big Sand Island, Kaipara
(22/1): Aaron Skelton.



▲ Common Tern (adult), Plimmerton (5/2): Michael Szabo.



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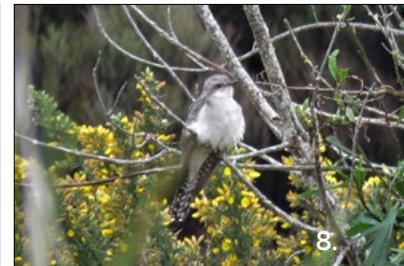
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▲ 1. Eastern Rockhopper Penguin, Waimarama Beach, Hawke's Bay (6/2): Julia Sorenson; 2. Red-necked Phalarope, Blenheim (25/11): Adam Colley; 3. Gould's Petrel at sea out past the Poor Knights Islands (10/12): Dave Howes; 4. Black-bellied Storm Petrel at the Otago Canyons (4/10): Oscar Thomas; 5. Broad-billed Prion at the Otago Canyons (4/10): Oscar Thomas; 6. White-tailed Tropicbird, Russell (6/1): Gilly Jackson; 7. Sooty Tern, Ngunguru Sandspit, Northland (13/2): Scott Brooks; 8. Pallid Cuckoo, Ringa Ringa Heights Golf Course (19/10): Phil Burns.

(28/11 carrying food, possibly nesting nearby); near Te Anau by Upukerora River (7/12); Lake Ruataniwha near Twizel (10/12); Wairau Lagoons Wader Roost (25/11); Clarence River in Molesworth (11/12); Aramoana Mole/Harbour entrance (22/1); and Weller's Rock on Otago Peninsula (7/2). One stayed at Pūkorokoro Miranda from 1/1 to 29/1, and 2 were seen at Karikari Beach (Far North) on 21/12, then 1 on 22/12.

Common Terns made a welcome return with single birds at: Waikanae Sandspit (7/11; 18-19/12; 7/1); Karikari Beach in the Far North (21/12; then 2 on 22/12); Port of Tauranga (26/11); Manawatu Estuary (14/11; 5/12; 2/1); Pukerua Bay (27/1); and near Taumutu, Lake Ellesmere (8/1). Two were seen at Plimmerton from 21/1 to 8/2 and 2 were at Pakawau Beach in Golden Bay on 3/2, with 1 staying to 6/2. An Arctic Tern was seen at the Otago Canyons on 13/11 and another south of Auckland Island on 1/12. An Antarctic Tern was reported at sea off Port Pegasus, Rakiura Stewart Island, on 26/1. Three Little Terns were at the entrance of Rangaunu Harbour (Far North) on 5/11, 1 at Ambury Park (Mangere) from 10/12 to 14/12, 1 at Birdlings Flat (Canterbury) on

7/1, 1 at Waikanae Sandspit from 1/12 to 10/2, and 5 at Big Sand Island north end on 13/1, followed by 12 on 22/1 and 7/2. There were also 9 NZ Fairy Terns at Big Sand Island on 22/1 and 7/2.

An unexpected visitor was a Kea seen flying over Mt Pleasant, Christchurch, on 6/2. A rare 'birdie' at Ringa Ringa Heights Golf Course on Rakiura Stewart Island was a Pallid Cuckoo that stayed from 19-21/10. Two Fork-tailed Swifts were seen zooming over Kowhai Bush in Kaikoura on 16/11 while another whizzed over Enderby Island on 6/12. Further north, 1 scorched over Pink Beach on Whangapaoroa Peninsula on 28/11 and 2 zipped over Tiritiri Matangi Island on 7/1. A solitary White-throated Needletail towered over Bluff Hill on 27/12 shortly before another was seen rocketing over Braggs Bay near Halfmoon Bay, Rakiura Stewart Island, on 7/1 - or was it the same bird? Finally, a Tree Martin was reported on the wing over Aniseed Valley near Nelson on 24/10.

Sources: eBird NZ, Unusual Bird Reports, BirdingNZ.net Forum, Regional Roundup, New Zealand Birders Facebook group, iNaturalist NZ.



▲ Auckland Branch Summer Picnic, Auckland Domain: Denise Poyner.



▲ South Auckland Branch Christmas walk, Waikato River wetlands, Aka Aka: Sue Frostick.

FAR NORTH

Kevin Matthews reports that a Wilson's Storm Petrel flew in and landed on his boat in Rangaunu Harbour on 19/12. He managed to catch and release it unharmed and then watched it feeding nearby. He saw 2 Gull-billed Terns in non-breeding plumage flying around over Scott Point while patrolling 90 Mile Beach on 28/1. There were circa 1,500 White-fronted Terns in multiple flocks between Scott Point and Hukatere, and over 1,000 SIPO. Heading out towards the Karikari Peninsula Islands in his boat on 10/2 he saw 2 Arctic Skuas chasing a Pycroft's Petrel. Later that day he visited Walker Island inside the entrance to Rangaunu Harbour at high tide where he counted c.2,500 Bar-tailed Godwits, 500 Red Knot and 25 Ruddy Turnstones, with many birds in breeding plumage. Three Australasian Bitterns were heard booming at Kaimaumau on the north-east coast of Rangaunu Harbour on 22/12 which was quite late in the season as they usually start booming there in August, peaking in October. - ISABELLA GODBERT

NORTHLAND

At our November meeting Su Sinclair told us all about her trip to the Cook Islands to help catch, colour band and conduct a population census of the Rarotonga Monarch or Kākerōri. This has been a fantastic conservation success story with the species brought back from the brink of extinction. Just 29 birds were counted on Rarotonga in 1989 but the latest census there shows that the population has reached at least 621 birds thanks to ongoing local community pest control work.

A group including some new young birders spent a day out counting the shorebirds at Ngunguru Sandspit on 12/11. A total of 29 species were there and they recorded the highest count of Bar-tailed Godwits for that site: 63. The previous record was 45 seen during the February 2022 survey.

In December we had our annual Christmas get together for a pot luck dinner which was an enjoyable evening for us all! Our first meeting back after the holidays was in February where Ilse Corkery told us about Fairy Prions and their unusual habit of co-sharing their burrow with Tuatara.

Scott Brooks has run several exciting pelagic trips out to 'The Petrel Station' past the Poor Knights Islands during the last quarter. A remarkable list of rare birds were seen on the 10/12 trip including a Stejneger's Petrel, a Gould's Petrel, a White-naped Petrel, a Chatham Albatross, a South Polar Skua and a Long-tailed Skua. On the January trip 100 NZ Storm Petrels and 250 Cook's Petrels were seen

flying around the boat. On the most recent trip in February, 84 Grey Ternlets were seen feeding on krill.

An interesting recent observation by Tony Beauchamp was the flocking of Welcome Swallows in quite large numbers during 2 weeks in January - up to 200 birds at a time in the evening just before dusk, congregating and then moving towards the coast.

- ILSE CORKERY

AUCKLAND

A wet and stormy summer in the Auckland region forced the cancellation of a few events including our December Ambury Park Guided Walk. Our first event of the year was our Annual Summer Picnic (21/1) in the Auckland Domain. A total of 20 members attended with birds seen including Kereru and Little Pied Shag. Our February meeting was an ornithological potpourri of members reports of birding in locations such as the Tongariro National Park, Queenstown, the Chatham Islands, Germany, and Washington State in the USA.

During November shorebird counts were undertaken in the many harbours in our region. A count at Mangawhai Harbour on 12/11 found 17 NZ Fairy Terns, 68 Caspian Terns and 155 Northern NZ Dotterels. A count of the Kaipara Harbour on 26/11 recorded 16,582 Bar-tailed Godwits, 5,933 Red Knots, 293 Ruddy Turnstones, 26 Pacific Golden Plovers, 2 Whimbrels, 2 Eastern Curlews, 1 Sanderling, 1 Red-necked Stint, 13 Little Terns and 8 NZ Fairy Terns.

Despite, the often-stormy weather, our official beach patrols have not found any large wrecks of birds. However, individual beach patrols of small beaches on the east coast have often found both Buller's and Fluttering shearwaters, while many local bird rehabilitators have had large numbers of underweight fledgling Grey-faced Petrels. BirdCare Aotearoa had 16 in their care on 5/2. A Karekare Beach patrol on 5/11 November found 1 White-headed Petrel, 2 Fairy Prions, 2 Hutton's Shearwaters and 2 Buller's Shearwaters. Another patrol on 3/12 found 6 birds of 4 species including 2 Short-tailed Shearwaters. Birds found on beach patrols of Muriwai South included 1 Cook's Petrel and 1 Black Petrel (14/1) and 3 Fluttering Shearwaters and 2 White-fronted Terns on 11/2.

Local sightings included a good number of vagrants and birds seen outside of their normal NZ range. A Broad-billed Sandpiper first seen by Noel Ward and Stuart Laurenson at Island Road in Mangere on 1/1 was a great way to start the new year. A Fork-tailed Swift

was seen by Morag Fordham and others over Tiritiri Matangi Island and by Bob Rigter over Shakespear Regional Park on 7/1. A Gull-billed Tern was reported by Dave Howes at Manukapua Big Sand Island in Kaipara Harbour on the 12/1. A Black-winged Petrel and a Wedge-tailed Shearwater were seen during a Hauraki Gulf pelagic trip on 5/2. Lastly, a freshly dead Red-tailed Tropicbird was found by Rowena West at Tahuna Torea Reserve in Glendowie on 6/2 and taken to Auckland Museum. With continuing unsettled weather, further vagrants are possible in the coming weeks. - IAN McLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

At our November meeting, Gillian Vaughan shared some interesting facts about feathers, describing the 6 types and explaining how feather colours are produced. In December some of our members gathered for a Christmas BBQ at Aka Aka, followed by a walk along the Waikato River wetlands.

Notable sightings have included a White-Winged Black Tern and 4 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at Pūkoro Mirandā on 30/1, the tern still being seen there in early February. A Shore Plover was seen at nearby Roy's Rest on 5/11, and another at Whitford on 24/11, and later at Omaha, Te Puru and Waiheke. Both birds had previously been translocated to Motutapu Island. Birds at Kidd's Shellbanks on 24/10 included a Hudsonian Godwit, 2 Greater Sand Plovers, 8 Whimbrels, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 49 Pacific Golden Plovers, 1 Far Eastern Curlew, over 4,000 Bar-tailed Godwits including juveniles and a bird flagged in Japan, 4,000 Red Knots, and 140 Ruddy Turnstones including 1 flagged bird. Five Whimbrels were also seen at Karioitahi Beach in December. At Ambury shell islands on 5/12, there were 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 375-400 breeding pairs of Black-Billed Gulls and 75 breeding pairs of White-Fronted Terns. At the end of December, there was a minimum of 200 Black-Billed Gull chicks, but during January a mystery illness struck down a large number of the juvenile birds. Auckland Council are now doing an investigation into the cause. Two pairs of Caspian Terns were also breeding in the area, and 1 chick was fledged. On 1/1 a Broad-Billed Sandpiper was sighted nearby at Traffic Light Bay that was still present on 6/2.

NZ Dotterels were seen nesting on all the shell islands, and various other coastal locations including Whitford, Hot Water Beach, Orua Bay, Hudson's Bay and Pokorua Gap, but with mixed success. From inland breeding sites, 7 pairs were reported from the airport, a chick successfully fledged on



Participants in the Gisborne Atlas Challenge, Tikapa Marae, Waitangi weekend: Stephen Legg.



Feral Emu photographed during the Gisborne Atlas Challenge by John Kyngdon.

St Kentigern College playing fields in December, and 3 juveniles were seen in a group of 13 birds on Pararekau Island in the Manukau Harbour on 14/1. Nests at Pavilion Drive, Pulman Park and Waiata Shores were unsuccessful. There were also a few recent sightings of NZ Dotterel which Adrian Riegen had flagged on Auckland's west coast in previous years - CHJ at Wattle Bay on 16/10, CHT at Big Bay on 10/11, and JAA and JAN at Karioitahi Beach on 26/12. Reports of beach-wrecked birds include Little Penguins and a probable Gibson's (Antipodean) Albatross from Hot Water Beach, and a Chatham Albatross at Opoutere Beach.

- SUE FROSTICK

WAIKATO

Our final meeting of 2022 was a talk on the 'Secrets of a Shorebird Surveyor' by our Regional Representative, R Bruce Postill. Bruce has extensive knowledge of shorebird surveys, and has surveyed shorebirds in China and the two Koreas, especially Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots. Because of the connection with Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre, the information gathered has helped in the retention of prime mudflat areas in these 3 countries. Other important survey sites for the Waikato Branch are Kawhia, Raglan and Aotea harbours which have been surveyed over many decades.

Royal Spoonbills are spreading around the Waikato, although they have been at Kawhia for many years. A hundred birds were recently recorded at Lake Kimihia, where breeding was observed for the first time this year. Another Waikato location where they have bred, though without success, is the Te Aroha wetland. The Waikato Banding Club which started several years ago has finally been able to band a few birds. The plan is to practice on common garden birds to provide valuable hands-on experience, and to gain knowledge of their survival and movement in the Waikato. The level three banders have gained valuable experience which will in due course allow them to train future banders.

Between 9th-12th November 2022, Manaaki Whenua and Waikato River Iwi/hapuu ran a kawau/shag survey from Karapiro to Port Waikato. DOC staff supported the survey with boat skippers and Waikato Branch members assisted with a big day of surveying lakes and wetlands around Huntly with major roosts found at Port Waikato (mouth of the Waikato River) and Lake Waikare.

The fifth Morepork/Ruru survey of Hamilton was held in early October. Over 40 volunteers surveyed 20 sites around various green parts of Hamilton. Ruru were heard at

19 of the sites, including 2 sites where they were not recorded in previous surveys. A Long-tailed Bat was also heard at one site.

- KEN WEDGWOOD

GISBORNE/WAIROA

Gisborne/Wairoa summer surveys: in early December Geoff and I stayed 3 nights at Mahia camping ground to do the wader counts and beach patrols covering the Mangawhio Lagoon, reef platforms down to Table Cape and beyond, and the length of the beach from Mahia to Opoutama. A visit to the Opoutama Wetland was rewarded with sightings of 2 Australasian Bitterns and a third bird heard. Three of us did wader counts at Te Wherowhero Lagoon on 16/12 and at Waipaoa River Mouth on 22/12. Notably (for our area) there was a huddle of at least 43 Ruddy Turnstones sheltering from the southerly wind at Table Cape and 3 Red Knots among the Bar-tailed Godwits at Te Wherowhero Lagoon. The numbers of nesting NZ Dotterel, Banded Dotterel and VOCs we counted on Mahia-Opoutama Beach came in handy to answer a recent query from the Wellington Forest and Bird Regional Manager for feedback to the Wairoa Star on unleashed dogs in this area.

On 15/12 we were invited by the Eastland Ports Infrastructure Manager and local Forest and Bird president and secretary to visit the port looking at their development of a Little Penguin management plan covering the Waikahua seawall and immediate surroundings at Kaiti Beach by building long-term habitat for the Kororā there. Thirty nest boxes have been installed.

The Gisborne Atlas Challenge to reach our remote and untargeted squares was postponed from November to Waitangi Weekend. Malcolm Rutherford, East Coast Atlas Coordinator, organised a stay at the hospitable Tikapa Marae beyond Ruatoria with funding from Toi Toi Wines New Zealand and invaluable help from Keegan Miskimmin in lieu of Dan Burgin from the National Atlas Team. Seventeen people attended of which 4 are Gisborne Branch members. It was very heartening to have 3 keen children among the group and also to be joined by new member John Kyngdon with his quick eye and super camera. 4WDs were needed to navigate the badly flood damaged roads and much was learned and achieved over a long sunny weekend. Very special thanks to Malcolm Rutherford for his enthusiasm and for this most enjoyable time. Unusual bird sightings included a Wedge-tailed Shearwater, a Reef Heron, Black-fronted Dotterel, Brown Quail and feral Emu.

- RAEWYNN FOREMAN

TARANAKI

On our field trip to Tarata and surrounds we atlasted up and down side roads, had an impromptu morning tea with a local farmer whose property contains a QEII covenant that we visited, and we saw a good assortment of birds including Shining Cuckoo, numerous Tui, Bellbird, feral Peafowl and Wild Turkey. Shining Cuckoos have been heard all around, including 1 at Rob Wheeler's Inglewood garden. A NZ Falcon has been seen at Lake Mangamahoe, one of the destinations for the 2023 AGM field trips, but there have been no recent reports of the 3 Kaka previously heard and seen around New Plymouth.

Tony Green called in at Turakina River estuary where he saw a large Australasian Bittern, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-fronted Dotterel, Banded Dotterel, and Ruddy Turnstone. Two bitterns at Mohakatio wetland in northern Taranaki were victims of vehicle collisions. One was still alive when picked up but died soon after. A few weeks later while returning home I stopped there and was fortunate to hear 1 booming. A few hundred metres further on, while watching a flock of 17 Royal Spoonbills, I heard another bittern booming in the scruffy growth beside the road so hopefully all is not lost. A few migratory waders have been seen around the coast including a flock of 14 Pacific Golden Plovers that made a brief stop at Waiongana before moving on, but 4-5 remain. Beach patrols have turned up few birds with nothing different.

There was a good turn-out for our December meeting. We now meet at the Enviro Hub next to Brooklands Zoo. The room is smaller but being cost-free made for a sensible move. Expect some interesting nocturnal atlas records, including a Weka found loitering around the south Taranaki town of Manaia. It is not known how the bird, possibly 1 of 2 that have arrived there.

Thirteen of us gathered at Waiongana for our annual 'Beach, Birds, and BBQ' gathering at Waiongana on a fine warm day. Those of us who wandered the beach were treated to views of Pacific Golden Plover, NZ Dotterel and Banded Dotterel, VOC, but unusually no Pied Stilts. At sea a flock of 18+ gannets were close inshore, diving from great heights, and at least 6 Buller's Shearwaters flew past, a first record for some. The pot luck dinner was a master class in the art of BBQ. An early morning 'Beach, Birds and BBQ' gathering has been proposed, if I could only get participants to turn up at 6:30am.

- PETER FRYER

**HAWKE'S BAY**

Branch members completed our summer wader census in November, which provided 1 of our most exciting sightings. A Black-tailed Godwit was spotted and photographed by a very keen-eyed Lynne Anderson at the Southern Marsh near Ahuriri Estuary. Other unusual finds included a Pomarine Skua photographed by Sarah Atley on Christmas Eve in Bay View and an Arctic Skua seen in Clive by RR Bernie Kelly on 2/1. The Scrapes at Ahuriri Estuary continue to provide notable shorebird sightings, including a Whimbrel and 15 Pacific Golden Plovers at the end of October, and 1 Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and a Red Knot on 11/12. A nesting colony of White-fronted Terns and Black-billed Gulls was at the Ngaruroro River mouth in mid-November, not far from where they nested at the Tutaekuri River mouth in c.2018.

At least 2 Long-tailed Cuckoos were seen at Blowhard Bush in January and February, at times being chased by smaller birds or chasing each other. Eastern Rosellas have also been heard and seen at Blowhard Bush several times over the past year, including 2 in February.

– *LYNNE ANDERSON & THALIA SACHTLEBEN*

WHANGANUI

The interest of local birders lately has been focused largely on the birds on the Whanganui, Whangaehu and Turakina estuaries (including Koitiata Lagoon). 'Our' flagged male Bar-tailed Godwit, AJD, having spent the first few weeks after his arrival on the Manawātū Estuary, sometime before 7/10 when he was first seen this season. He eventually returned to the Whanganui Estuary on 3/12, following a brief visit a month earlier. This follows the pattern of most of his earlier 14 summers since he was banded: a couple of months rest-and-recovery at Foxton Beach, then a move to the Whanganui estuary in early- to mid-December, where he stays until departing for his northern breeding ground in late March. One concerning note, however, is that the Darvic flag on his leg is showing signs of considerable wear both back and front where it is wrapped around his leg. It may fall off before AJD does, which would be a pity, given that he had been the focus of so much attention, and a book, by Paul Gibson (and other observers) during his time on the Whanganui River for the past 15 summers.

Monitoring the estuary for AJD's arrival, and afterwards, with Paul Gibson and Jim Norris in particular following his daily activities, resulted in sightings of several other interesting waders. A juvenile male Whimbrel arrived on 7/11, and was present almost daily, when checked, until 18/1. For much of this time he was in the company of 18–20 mostly juvenile Bar-tailed Godwits. Their initial naivety of the threats posed by people and dogs, and their light regard for low overflying gulls, apparently transferred itself to the Whimbrel. As a result, many photographers, both locally and from further afield, managed to get some fine photographs of this rare visitor. He seemed to specialise on feeding on crabs. Along with the godwits, he occasionally used the Whangaehu Estuary's sandspit as a high-tide roost when Whanganui River levels were high, leaving no space for waders to roost there undisturbed at high tide. When Jim Norris searched the Whangaehu Estuary for these birds, he found a Pectoral Sandpiper and

later, with Paul Gibson, a Ruddy Turnstone. A couple of Ruddy Turnstones were also recorded on Koitiata Lagoon, along with confirmed breeding by pairs of Black-fronted Dotterel and Banded Dotterel.

Away from the coast, Jim Norris confirmed that the Nankeen Night-Heron at Upokongaro are nesting, with at least 1 nest having 1 or more small chicks (hatched night-heron eggs shells found nearby). Jim's dedicated observations of these birds, helped by Paul Gibson, Michael O'Shea and others, is building a fuller picture of this species and its behaviour locally.

– *PETER FROST*

WAIRARAPA

August put on a bright sunny day for a trip to Riversdale Beach where we were shocked at the erosion around the estuary from floods and the ocean. The available dotterel breeding habitat has been much degraded and is now quite at risk from flooding as well as the usual vehicle and dog problems. One can only hope dotterels are seeking more secure locations up and down the coast. We went for a long beach walk north from the river mouth. There were not many birds on the beach but plenty in the pine-tree verges including Bellbirds, Tui, Chaffinch and Dunnock. We also drove north on the (private) road to view some great reef habitat and inhabitants.

Our September trip was to the Tauherenikau Delta and Bartons Lagoon. The highlight was hearing 2 different Australasian Bitterns booming quite close but they stayed hidden. A family of 3 young White-faced Herons were out and about with parents. On a pine tree, stacked 1 above the other, were a Paradise Shelduck, White-faced Herons, and a Royal Spoonbill on top. All up we saw 37 species including NZ Dabchick, Australasian Shoveler, Black-fronted Dotterel, Grey Teal, Little Shag, Black Shag and Little Black Shag. Ten of us were back at Pigeon Bush in October to admire Colin Shore's work and help with tree planting. There was time for a bush walk with associated Atlas list and a well-caked picnic lunch.

Our November trip was to Mataikona and thereabouts, particularly to look for nesting dotterels and Reef Herons. Just north of the Mataikona River lagoon is a back beach where we spotted 3 NZ Dotterels as well as Pied Stilts, Variable Oystercatchers and Spur-winged Plover, all of which had probably been nesting at this well-protected site. On the reefs south of Mataikona we were rewarded by some excellent views of a pair of Reef Herons, probably an adult and a juvenile. We observed the adult spreading its wings to shade the glare as it hunted in tidal ponds. Back at Whakataki Beach we found a pair of nesting Banded Dotterel and a pair of NZ Dotterel with 3 young chicks. It was great to see some them successfully breeding with so many hazards around. A most successful outing.

– *OLIVER DRUCE*

WELLINGTON

Similar to this time last summer, the Wellington region has recorded several unusual terns, although there have been no 'mega' rarities as yet. At least 4 different Common Terns were photographed at Plimmerton, Pukerua Bay and Waikanae Sandspit between November and February, a Little Tern was regular at Waikanae Sandspit

with the White-fronted Tern flock, and several Black-fronted Terns have made brief stops at Plimmerton and Waikanae. Two pairs of NZ Dotterel nested at Waikanae Sandspit with 1 pair producing 2 chicks. Circa 140 pairs of White-fronted Terns also bred there over summer, although a few chicks succumbed during Cyclone Gabrielle.

A very showy family of Spotless Crakes at Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve have kept birders and photographers entertained recently. The Pauatahanui Inlet bird survey continues to be a highly successful monitoring programme, now in its 5th decade. We are also preparing a repeat survey of Matiu/Somes Island. Stay tuned for further exciting updates! Finally, our region held its usual members night in February with a great variety of talks covering topics such as the ongoing Pauatahanui Inlet survey and the recent breeding success of Titi on Kāpiti Island and Mana Island, Fluttering Shearwaters on Matiu/Somes Island, Takahē on Mana Island, and various other species on the west coast. Once again, our annual members night was a great success and was a celebration of the diversity in our region.

– *JOHANNES FISCHER*

NELSON

Our October guest speaker was Ron Moorhouse who gave a very entertaining talk on Kaka reintroduction to Abel Tasman National Park. Ron had managed Kakapo recovery for many years before joining DOC and becoming involved with the Kaka reintroduction project. He showed us a great video of the release of Kaka in 2018 from an acclimation aviary that had been built at Bark Bay. There was a very small remnant population present in Abel Tasman NP, however it was likely that these were all male birds. Females are predated at the nesting sites and so have much lower survival rates. A total of 35 Kaka have now been released into Abel Tasman NP with 25 still alive, along with 13 of their radio-tagged chicks, so things are definitely looking promising.

In November Josh Kemp spoke to us about "Why Kea numbers plummeted in Nelson Lakes National Park" shortly after Elliott & Kemp declared the population 'stable'. In a bid to understand why, Kemp et al. (2022) followed 20–30 radio tagged Kea through the 2019–2021 predator irruption cascade in unmanaged upland valleys between Nelson Lakes and Arthurs Pass. They witnessed a catastrophic kill-off of 60% of adult Kea during 2020 and 2021, as a mast-fuelled mouse plague ended with a crash, suddenly leaving Stoats and feral cats with no rodent prey.

Our November field trip to Lake Matiri on 11/12 was to search for Great Crested Grebes while atlas along the way. December's meeting was a barbecue with over 20 members gathering at the home of David and Vicky Melville. Some good news from Brightwater near Richmond in December was that a pair of NZ Dabchicks had bred on a private pond, producing 2 young chicks. Small nesting colonies of Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns were spotted at Tapawera on the Motueka River with Banded Dotterels and Pied Stilts also present. Gravel works on the flood-prone section of the river there had created valuable nesting areas. When the nesting colony was discovered, work was suspended by



Tasman District Council until March 2023. At the end of January, members organised a very successful trip to Maud Island in Marlborough Sounds where they saw Australasian Gannets, Sooty Shearwaters, King Shags, Spotted Shags and White-fronted Terns. - PAUL GRIFFITHS

MARLBOROUGH

In November we carried out wader counts at Lake Grassmere. Members split into two groups with one walking around the evaporation ponds while the other walked around the southern side of the lake counting waders. Highlights of the lake walk included 5 Pacific Golden Plovers, 27 Banded Dotterels, 4 godwits and 1 Red Knot.

Prior to Christmas we had an outing to Boon's Valley. Located only 10 minutes from Picton, Boon's Valley is the site of a restoration project named Wild Waikawa. Nige and Mish, the owners of the land, are aiming to restore over 200 hectares of native bush back to its former glory by trapping, weeding and replanting eco-sourced natives. Three members attended and we spent the day with Nige and Mish helping to check traps, pull out wilding pines and - of course - atlasing! The day was overcast but with plenty of birds to be seen and heard including NZ Tomtit, Brown Creeper, Rifleman, Shining Cuckoo and Long-tailed Cuckoo.

Our January field trip was to the Havelock Mole. We set off in the light drizzle but still saw good number of Royal Spoonbills, oystercatchers (SIPO and VOC), Little Black Shags and a Spotted Shag. We decided to test our luck with the rain, continuing on to Mahakipawa Arm estuary to see if we could get any cryptic species that had been reported there lately. While we didn't get any Banded Rail or Marsh Crake, we were rewarded with a good view of a Fernbird that was a first record for the Atlas in this area.

A Red-necked Phalarope was spotted by Bill Cash at Grovetown Lagoons at the end of November and hung around for a few days which was just long enough for others to travel from out of town to see it. One Eurasian Whimbrel and at least 18 Ruddy Turnstones were present at Cape Campbell along with lots of nesting gulls and terns. There have been reports of Kaka showing up in unusual places in Marlborough including 1 seen at Pollard Park, 1 flying over Springlands and 1 in a small patch of regenerating bush near Ward Beach. Unfortunately, the Glossy Ibises don't appear to have bred at the same location on the island at the Blenheim Waste Treatment Plant but still the odd bird has been seen on the island and elsewhere around the region. - PAT CROWE

CANTERBURY

Although our monthly meetings and field trips were on hold over December and January, Canterbury members have been busy getting out and about birding over summer. A major highlight over the past few months has been a Long-toed Stint present at Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere, which was found by Fraser Gurney on 24/12. Only 2 NZ records of this species have been accepted previously, so this will be a third. The bird was seen through late December and January around the Jarvis Road area until 20/1. A variety of other wader species were present alongside it, Marsh Sandpiper and Greater Sand Plover being the most noteworthy. Elsewhere

around the lake, a Little Tern has been seen roosting with a flock of White-fronted Terns at Birdlings Flat, while a Common Tern was seen at the lake outlet. Hopefully some of these species will stick around for the annual survey of Lake Ellesmere in February!

At Travis Wetlands, a Cattle Egret was spotted in late November. Grahame Bell has noted that this is the first one seen in that area since the 2010/2011 earthquakes. Other birds seen at the wetlands recently include a Little Owl, which is regularly being spotted, a Marsh Crake, and Cape Barren Geese. This is also the second year that a Royal Spoonbill colony has been present at Travis Wetlands. This colony joins other known spoonbill breeding sites around Christchurch, including the Kaiapoi treatment ponds and the Bromley oxidation ponds. Andrew Crossland has reported that recent counts suggested a third of the country's spoonbills could be found in Christchurch. Elsewhere, a good variety of bush birds continue to be seen by the Hawdon Shelter and around the Hawdon Valley more generally. Reports from this area so far this year have included Rifleman, Brown Creeper, Yellow-crowned Kakariki, Orange-fronted Kakariki, and Mohua. - ELEANOR GUNBY

OTAGO

We were saddened to hear of the passing of author and artist Audrey Eagle who was an active member in Otago from the time of her arrival in the region in 1996.

It has been a dry and warm summer around Otago and while no monthly Atlas field trips occurred, members have been busy. Otago's penultimate Atlas spring coverage crept up to 84.2% of squares having some coverage with species increasing from 119 to 128 in the last 3 weeks of the season. As the end of summer approaches 89.4% of squares have some coverage with 138 species recorded. Our regional recorder continues to remind us that there is still plenty of opportunity to visit un-surveyed squares. Our monthly field trips will resume on 11/2.

Records of interest have included a Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguin at Nugget Point, White Herons at several sites from coastal to Central Otago, a Little Egret at Aramoana, Wrybill and Red Knot at Cabbage Point, and Wrybill, Hudsonian Godwit, and Ruddy Turnstone at Warrington. Three VOCs were seen far inland at Tarras. Three Red-crowned Kakariki were seen at Papatowai and Who were recorded at Blue Pools and upper W Matukituki. Cryptic wetland birds featured Marsh Crake at Glenorchy, Lake Hayes, Moke Lake (Central Otago), Tahakopa Valley and Tautuku Estuary (Catlins), and Spotless Crake in the Fleming wetland (Catlins). A leucistic Blackbird was back in Dunedin and a dead Grey-backed Storm Petrel found inland at Lake Hawea was sent to Te Papa for their collection.

Our summer wader count on 6/11 recorded 2,297 Bar-tailed Godwits, circa 200 higher than the previous 2 summer counts. They were followed by SIPO (544) and Pied Stilt (98). In early November the research team cannon-netted and tagged over 20 Bar-tailed Godwits at Cabbage Point and Warrington, joined by some local members with knowledge of the sites and the birds' movements to inform netting efforts. The wetland weekend around Tautuku (Birds New Zealand with Forest &

Bird) was a success with booming Australasian Bittern and Marsh Crake recorded. The 6th season of the Mopanui SI Robin project came to an end with 21 volunteers having taken part. This season was notable for the high nest failures with only 2 of 10 nests confirmed as fledging successfully.

Our bird quiz night was a celebration to end the year on, and to top it off some of our Otago members and familiar local sites featured in an article featuring the NZ Bird Atlas in NZ Geographic magazine. Our 2023 programme of activities is already filling up.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

SOUTHLAND

A new wetland development near Waituna Lagoon (next to the main access road) is worth a stop if you are in Southland. It has repeatedly turned up Sharp-tailed and Pectoral sandpipers along with good numbers of more common waders and waterfowl. On 14/11 DOC Dunedin reported via eBird that a King Penguin, a rare visitor to NZ, had come ashore near the Maitara River Mouth and on 31/1 Beth Chapman reported via Facebook that an Erect-crested Penguin and 2 Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguins had come ashore at Curio Bay. White-winged Black Terns have been regular visitors to Southland with Anja Kohler recording a bird at the Upukeroa River Mouth (where she recorded a Whiskered Tern in 2021). This highlights the value of spending a lot of time at a seemingly ordinary site. They were also recorded at Te Wae Lagoon and Waituna Lagoon in January. Little Terns are also being more frequently seen in Southland with 1 recorded at Te Wae and 1 at Waituna Lagoon in January, while up to 6 were recorded repeatedly over the summer at the Invercargill Estuary. While common around mainland Southland, 2 adult Black-fronted Terns were seen out of their normal range at the salmon farms in Big Glory Bay, Rakiura Stewart Island, in January. Also out of their normal range were Royal Spoonbills seen at Mill Creek on Stewart Island and Te Anau Downs.

On 6th November, Southland members joined the wader banding group and Otago members to put satellite tags on Bar-tailed Godwits at Cabbage Point on Hinahina Estuary near Pounaweia to continue adding to our knowledge of this amazing species. Southland hasn't seen the variety of vagrant waders this summer that it has in recent years, but Terek and Curlew sandpipers are present at Awarua Bay along with a Greater Sand Plover. A White-throated Needletail was seen by Sean Jacques flying above Bluff Hill in late December, with another seen at Halfmoon Bay several days later. Rakiura Stewart Island kept up its run for turning up rare species with Matt Jones recording a Pallid Cuckoo at the golf course in October. Kit Hutzler organised a pelagic trip out of Riverton on 11/12 which cruised past Codfish Island/Whenua Hou before heading west to deep water. A good range of species and good numbers of birds were seen including 1 Long-tailed Skua, 1 Broad-billed Prion and a surprising number of Cook's Petrels, but no Mottled Petrels. Another trip is scheduled in February 2023. - PETE McCLELLAND

See our regional newsletters here:

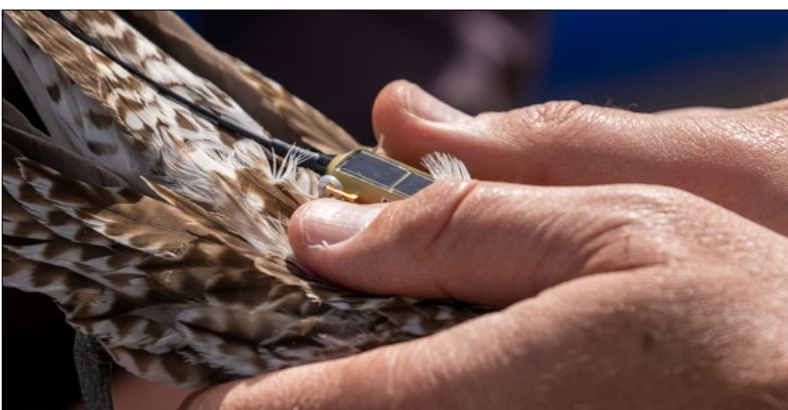
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Attaching satellite transmitters to Bar-tailed Godwits

On 6th November, Southland and Otago members joined members of the wader banding group to catch Bar-tailed Godwits for the purpose of attaching satellite tags to them at Cabbage Point on Hinahina Estuary near Pounaweia, Otago. Many of us have seen online tracking maps of Bar-tailed Godwits navigating their way to Alaska and back to Aotearoa New Zealand on their annual migration, courtesy of the wonderful technology of solar-powered satellite transmitters. Fitting these miniature transmitters to the godwits is the culmination of well-planned capture and handling by world experts in this field. This is a collaborative research project between Birds New Zealand, Massey University, and the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Germany, to better understand the ecology of Bar-tailed Godwits and contribute to conservation management.

I was fortunate to observe them in action at Cabbage Point where I took these photographs. The cannon-netting was complete within three seconds. Hiding nearby, the experts raced straight out to carefully extract the birds from the net while their supporters raced over with the blue holding bins. The birds were placed in the bins with minders checking on their welfare while the experts prepared to process the birds. The experts measured and weighed the birds, checked them for feather moult and photographed their wings, took blood samples, and then banded the birds and attached the satellite transmitters. The birds were released shortly afterwards. The amazing expert handling made the whole process minimally traumatic for the birds.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GLENDA REES



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