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Otago Region Newsletter 3/2023

March 2023

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



Ornithological Snippets

Counts of 55 and 68 **Banded Dotterel** on the Old Man & Old Woman Ranges respectively on 15 March were impressive, while a late **Wrybill** was still on breeding grounds at Makarora/Wilkin confluence on 27 February. A **Hudsonian Godwit** was first seen at Kaikorai Lagoon Estuary from 4 March.

A **Fiordland Crested-Penguin** has been seen from 15 March. There have been several inshore **Wandering Albatross**, with birds at Allans Beach on 28 February, and also at Taiaroa Head, and others at the latter location on 2 and 19 March.

An **Australasian Bittern** has been seen and photographed on a farm near Balclutha. A **White Heron** was at Sullivan's Dam 9 March, with 2 at Tomahawk Lagoon on the 18. A possible **Nankeen Kestrel** was reported from Oteake Conservation Park in early March. Finally, **Rifleman** have been reported recently from Scotts Beach, Lake Hawea.



Hudsonian Godwit

Photos: Bradley Shields

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

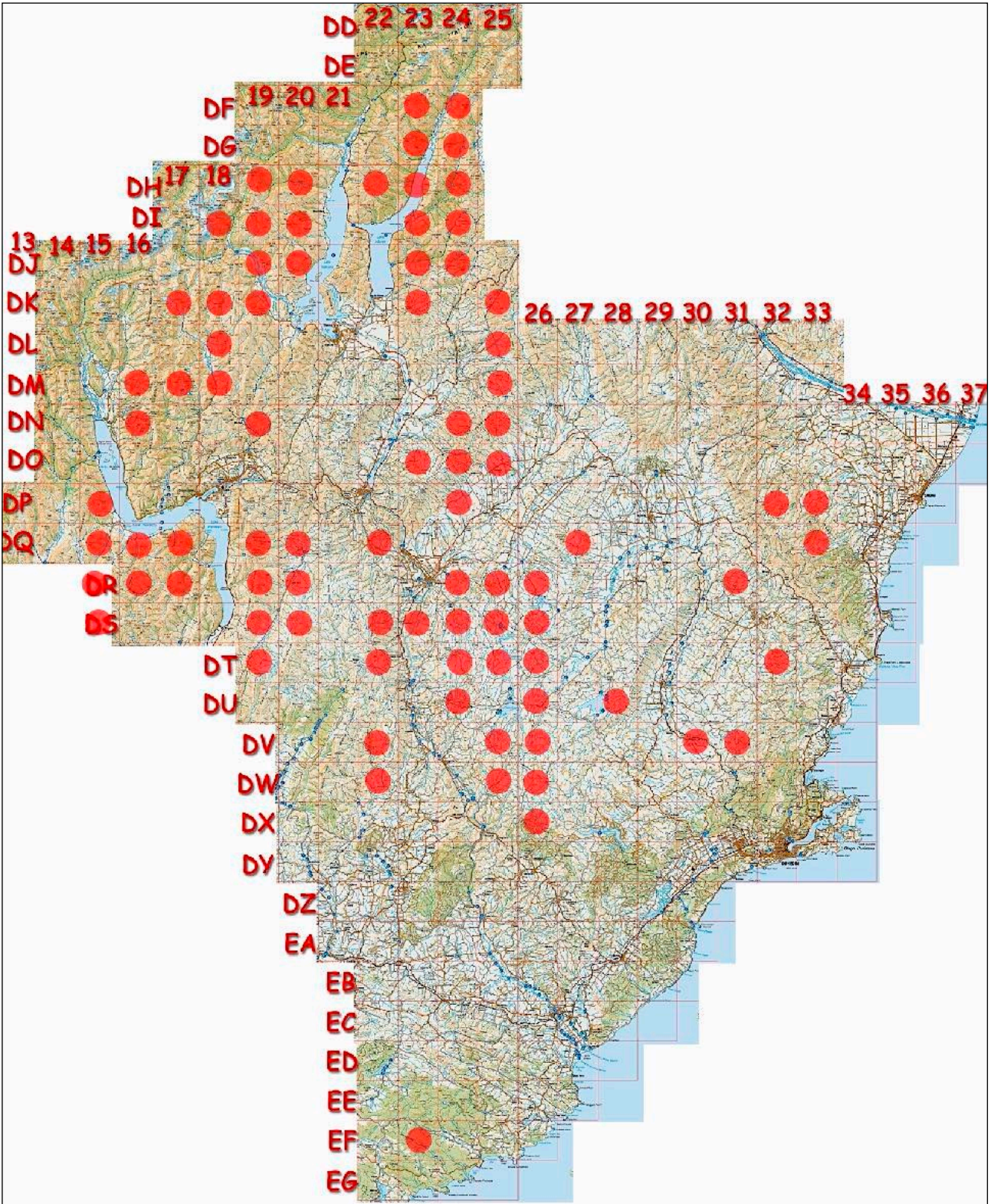
eBird News

NZ Bird Atlas

After a very productive summer of fieldwork (we now have “only” 36 squares in Otago without any coverage for the season) we are now into our penultimate Autumn. This season is lagging behind however, mainly because we have effectively got only 2½ seasons of coverage so far (most of the first season was lost to covid) and naturally most of the squares with no effort are relatively hard to reach. I have produced a map, showing squares where more effort is particularly needed; it’s potentially a bit intimidating, because of the number of blanks, but also shows the opportunities available. A higher quality version will be emailed to members. Remember that these are the least-covered squares, but effort in any square is still valuable.

Also be aware that squares that appear to be well-covered may still have gaps as regards habitats and species. Downloading the seasonal KML files to Maps.Me will show where checklists have been submitted from, and hence where gaps may be. These are available from the Supporting Materials section on the Atlas website. Let me know if you have any problems uploading these to your device.

In addition, nocturnal counts are in short supply, with only 12 Dunedin City squares having nocturnal Autumn coverage. Darker evenings make this the ideal time to get out, and as an extra incentive Little Owls, at least, become more vocal at this time of year.



NZ Bird Atlas Otago Region

The red dots indicate the squares requiring more visits during Autumn.

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

BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Helpers needed for Tomahawk Lagoon Birdwatching on Sunday 16th April, 10am - noon

Our contribution to the Wild Dunedin Festival of Nature will again be the always popular birdwatching event at Tomahawk Lagoon. It is on **Sunday 16 April starting at 10am** and going to noon.

We need a team of enthusiastic birdwatchers to interact with the public and set up scopes to show them birds close-up. You don't need to be an ornithological expert just be able to tell the difference between a stilt and an oystercatcher, a juvenile and adult black-backed gull, and paradise ducks and mallards. If we are lucky, as in other years, we may see a kotuku or spoonbill.



So if you are available to help, please let me know and come on down on Sunday 16 at 10. It's a lot of fun.

Thanks, Mary nzmaryt@gmail.com or txt 021 02980504

Otago Region Student Conference Support Award, 2023

Congratulations to Manaia Pearmain-Fenton who was awarded a grant towards travel to the NZ Birds Conference in New Plymouth at King's Birthday Weekend to present her paper on the "Dispersal patterns of a translocated South Island Robin/kakaruai population out of a fenced ecosanctuary." At our June meeting Manaia will also be talking to us more about her research on the breeding behaviour of our robins.

Birding on Rakiura Stewart Island

A summer highlight was a late December trip to Port Pegasus. Hosted by Rodney Russ on the MV Strannik, I was one of 8 passengers with 4 crew who travelled from Golden Bay to Port Pegasus and back between Dec 23-31 2022. Being new to birding and the atlas project, I was keen to practice and to log any squares that might have only a few reports. I was also nervous about not being able to identify many birds and was grateful that the captain and first mate were willing helpers. I went on one of Oscar Thomas' pelagic trips last June and took the opportunity to watch again his presentation to the club on identifying sea birds – that was useful preparation.

Our first major stop was Diprose Bay, in the Northern Arm of Port Pegasus, a place with a lot of history. We walked an old tin mine track to Trig D – the first mate had seen dotterel on the tops a few weeks before, but we didn't see or hear any. It was very sobering to see cat scat on the way down from Trig D. A highlight was seeing the old sign to the kakapo reserve on the Trig (see photo).

Next we anchored at Disappointment Cove for a few days (which definitely did not disappoint) and were treated to kingfisher, red crowned parakeet, kaka, bellbird, fantail, tomtits, blackbird, song thrush, and long tailed cuckoo. We did not see any penguins, except for a few in and

around Paterson Inlet. There were quite a few large sea lions though, that were very curious whenever we went kayaking or swimming.

I came back with many atlas and e-bird questions – thanks Mary for helping me review the checklists before submitting them! For example, I saw lots of very fresh kiwi sign at multiple sites: beak poke holes, footprints and scat, but never saw one. Should this kind of sign or evidence be reported? The answer was only to report actually seeing or hearing a bird (I did hear a kiwi one night). Other questions were: how to record a cormorant that I couldn't identify (answer use sp.); also, I heard a lot of kakariki/parakeet but only saw red crowned – did that mean all those heard would be red crowned?

In total, 40 checklists were completed and more than 30 species logged. The highlights for me were the red crowned parakeets, Southern Royal albatross, Wandering albatross, Black Shag, Sooty Shearwaters, and a great northern petrel (which the captain pointed out as we made passage).

The soft call of a morepork carrying over the water to the boat under a starry calm night was also unforgettable.

Joy Liddicoat

Chatham Islands ahoy

The Chathams: New Zealand, but not New Zealand. A different time zone, and the first place in the world to see the rising sun. Twelve Birds NZ travellers from across the motu spent a week there in January, led by the multi-talented and encyclopaedic Lloyd Esler, who has an ongoing love affair with the archipelago, and so is perfectly placed to organise all necessary access to private land and accommodation (believe me; you need that).

Travelling to the Chathams is like travelling back in time (if there was wifi and broadband fifty years ago); although there are 650 residents, often there is no sign of people. Waitangi, the main town, has one hotel (often open), one store (sometimes open), one café (not open), one bank (not open), and two petrol pumps. And a beautiful museum (recently opened), with extensive information about the history and wildlife of the Chathams.



The old sign to the kakapo reserve



Whale vertebra

The landscape is barren, with large tracts of often uncared-for farmland, lone wind-twisted akeake trees (the salt wind is constant), and Australasian harriers lifting and swooping over the paddocks. The air is moist and mild, misty and showery, with the land peaty and swampy in the north; hilly and drier in the south. Several shallow lakes in the north are home to black swans, pūkeko, black shags and grey/mallard ducks, and the massive Te Whanga lagoon is a source of seemingly unlimited numbers of fossilised sharks' teeth, like stony black rose thorns amongst the seaweed, jellyfish, sea urchin spines and coarse damp sand.

There are small areas of conserved bush: once cleared it's a lot of work to re-establish bush, because of the need for wind protection. There are so many almost-familiar plants: flax (but with shorter, broader leaves), kawakawa (but giant, with no leaf-miner holes), lancewood (but with a different juvenile form), akeake (but a different species from NZ akeake, and the world's largest tree-daisy), kopi trees (known in NZ as karaka and introduced by the Moriori as an important food source), bright yellow rautini (the "Chatham Island Christmas tree") and the ubiquitous Chatham Island forget-me-not.

Bumping over the unsealed 'State Highway 1', we saw masked lapwings, reluctantly giving way to our van, and many buff weka, pale and bold, poking around on the foreshore or in amongst the scrubby brush. Introduced from the South Island in 1905, there are now over 50,000 of these birds, so they are not protected as in NZ. They actually predate eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds, as well as feeding voraciously on native insects.

The beaches were long, wild, disappearing into mist, with Chatham Island pipits flickering across the sand, seals in the distance heaving out of the waves onto the beach, flocks of black-



Chatham Island oystercatcher

backed gulls lazily lifting off as we approached, and Chatham Island oystercatchers (the world's rarest oystercatcher) hurrying furtively away as though we'd caught them in the act of doing something illegal. There were fallen moons of jellyfish, and even the broken propellor of a whale vertebra that was carried, trophy-like, back to the motel where it sat on the verandah for official photographs. On one walk we were lucky to have a low flyover by a brown

skua, floating through rivers of air, white wing flashes gleaming.

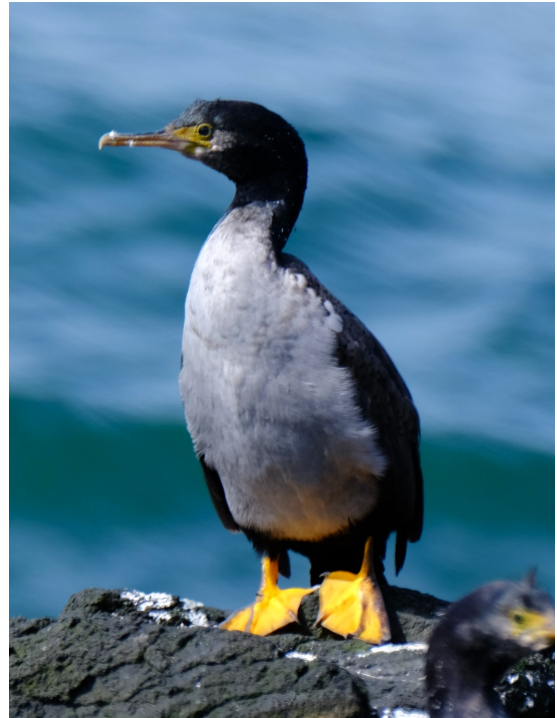
In the south in Awatotara Bush there were batches of wood pigeons, named parea, each about 20% heavier than our kērerū. They were dark lumps at the very top of a massive stand of pines, and then they were flying, heavy and purple, and then...surprisingly... they were hopping and sidling around on the farmland.

We were lucky to have a day trip out to Pitt Island; as the plane was broken, we had to catch a fishing vessel for a one-hour chunderous (in the words of Will Perry) trip across a stretch of what appeared to be two oceans violently disagreeing about the direction they should be going in. We were followed by albatross – were they Buller's Mollymawks or Chatham Island

albatross? – and accompanied by dipping prions – were they fairy prions or Chatham Island fulmar prions? We couldn't tell, because the heaving sea made binocular use difficult, and besides, some of us were holding on tight with both hands and blinking salt spray out of our eyes. And trying not to throw up. Flowerpot Bay was a welcome, if blurry, sight.



Chatham Island Shag



Pitt Island Shag

On Pitt Island we learned the difference between Pitt Island and Chatham Shags (greyer colour, and lime green instead of orange caruncles on the face, especially around breeding season – which it wasn't). We saw South East (Rangatira) Island just over 'there', and were fortunate to see a NZ Shore Plover (pop. 250) scuttering on the rocky shore, one of a pair that were refugees from South East Island, where thousands of broad-billed prions and white-faced storm petrels have put up the price of real estate.

Caravan Bush on Pitt Island was home to Chatham Island fantails (fat, with white and black tail feathers), koko (Chatham Island tūi), and Chatham petrels in a nesting box. These boxes, set in the ground, are an attempt to give the petrels an alternative to the busy and stressful metropolis of South East Island. There was a confiding Chatham Island warbler, 30% heavier than the grey warbler, and with a larger bill, just sitting in a kopi tree in a very relaxed manner.

The award for the biggest birds of the trip, however, had to go to a mob of emu, untidy and curious, tiny surprised heads balanced on hosepipe necks above shaggy beanbag bodies.



They were escapees from an emu farm, which was subsequently abandoned, and now there are several hundred of them living very happily on Chatham Island.

Lloyd runs trips to the Chatham Islands sometimes several times a year, so if you have the opportunity to go there with him, do take it. You will definitely have a memorable experience. He tends to advertise his trips through BirdsNZ, so watch out for an email in your inbox.

Kath Danaher

Photos: Kath Danaher and Will Perry

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

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

Oamaru Penguin Symposium 2023



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

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

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

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

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

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

Update

It is now possible to register and pay online via our website:

<https://www.oamarupenguinsymposium.com/>

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The 8th Wild Dunedin Festival is Coming in April

The Wild Dunedin team are thrilled to announce that our popular Festival is on again in the school holidays 14 - 23 April.

This year the Festival is focusing on whenua/soil with open gardens, composting workshops, guests Kath Irvine from Edible Backyard and Jim O’Gorman from Kakanui aka the Dirt Doctor. The big event 7X7 Wild Talks on 14 April brings together a range of experts on soil related topics.

Exciting news for tamariki living at Port Chalmers, Waitati and Waikouaiti is a visit by the Marine Studies Centre’s Aqua Van to the libraries in those locations. Thanks to the generosity of Harbour Fish, there will be sessions covering the rocky shore and how soil can affect marine life, and the always popular touch tank. Bookings for these sessions are essential.

Kids go free at Orokonui Ecosanctuary, Tūhura Otago Museum are holding a Penguin Day and Bug Day, and Blue Penguins Pukekura, Royal Albatross Centre, Monarch Wildlife Cruises and Tours, Penguin Place and Larnach Castle have deals. Monarch are also running a two-hour Ocean Explorers Cruise on 15 April. Dive Otago are running a snorkelling session in a kelp forest for ages 8+ and Resistance Climbing Gym have great deals during the Festival.

Suzy Cato will be entertaining tamariki with music sessions at Toitū and Tūhura Otago Museum and she’ll also make an appearance at the very popular Wildlife ER.

The popular Birds NZ birdwatching event at Tomahawk Lagoon is at 10am on Sunday 16 April. Thanks to Mary and team for organising this!

If anyone would like to volunteer for the Festival or if you know someone who would like to be a volunteer, please contact Suzanne Middleton smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz or 0226018579.

The online programme is on wilddunedin.nz and you can book online, and print programmes are available at libraries. Become a friend on wilddunedin.nz and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



Birding trip to Tasmania

Are you interested in a small-group guided tour in December of the endemic birds and mammals of Tasmania? We are trying to get some Kiwis together for a trip. Here's the itinerary:

	<i>Mon 4 Dec 2023</i>	<i>Optional - Arrive Hobart</i>	<i>Hobart (own expense)</i>
1	<i>Tue 5 Dec 2023</i>	<i>Optional extra day- Melaleuca flight</i> Start of tour with dinner and orientation	Hobart
2	<i>Wed 6 Dec 2023</i>	Maria Island excursion - to Eaglehawk Neck.	Eaglehawk Neck
3	<i>Thu 7 Dec 2023</i>	Pelagic birding.	Eaglehawk Neck
4	<i>Fri 8 Dec 2023</i>	Tasman Peninsula to Bruny Island.	Bruny Island
5	<i>Sat 9 Dec 2023</i>	Full day Bruny Island.	Bruny Island
6	<i>Sun 10 Dec 2023</i>	Bruny Island, Hobart to Mt Field area.	Mt Field area
7	<i>Mon 11 Dec 2023</i>	Mt Field NP and Styx	Mt Field area
8	<i>Tue 12 Dec 2023</i>	Mt Field area to Cradle Mountain area.	Cradle Mountain area
9	<i>Wed 13 Dec 2023</i>	Cradle Mountain area.	Cradle Mountain area
10	<i>Thu 14 Dec 2023</i>	Cradle to Launceston and depart.	-

Here's a link with more information on this tour (albeit with different dates). <https://www.inalanaturetours.com.au/australia-tasmania/tasmania-endemic-birds-and-mammals-tour-15-24-feb-2024>

The price would be AUD\$ 6,125 per person twin share. Single supplement: AUD\$1,100 (or price with pre-tour Melaleuca trip: AUD\$ 6,775 per person twin share. Single supplement: AUD\$1,100). NB: Pre-tour excursion only available if joining main tour.

This price is contingent on us getting 6 people (and we already have 2!).

Are you interested? Please express your interest by emailing:

Dr Tonia Cochran: Inala@inalanaturetours.com.au

Copy to Kath Danaher: kathdanaher@gmail.com

This is not a commitment: just an expression of interest to see if we can get the numbers to run the trip.

Cheers

Kath

Thousands of birds die at important wetland, from deadly disease caused by pollution

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/486277/thousands-of-birds-die-at-important-wetland-from-deadly-disease-caused-by-pollution>

Programme 2023

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held on the 4th Tuesday at 7.30pm in the Valley Project Community Rooms, 262 North Road, NEV. Just past the primary school, with a parking area in front. Look for the NZ Falcon Mural.

We will try to zoom the talks live for those unable to attend. We welcome our members from Central Otago area and others who can't get to Dunedin, and members not so comfortable with attending meetings at this time. You can join the meetings by Zoom link.

A new Zoom link for meetings

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83476387704?pwd=Vy9Fd2VEZk4zSnF6Z05pVnljZjBhdz0>

The meeting passcode is: 523492

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

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

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

Contributions for inclusion in the next newsletter should reach the editor by **17 April**.
sodlin@gmail.com

Disclaimer

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