



Birds New Zealand
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Otago Region Newsletter 4/2023

April 2023

Face masks are now an individual choice.

However, if you feel unwell, please stay home out of consideration for others.



Ornithological Snippets

600 **Canada Goose** were counted on a Maniototo pond on 23 March. A late report of a **Shining Cuckoo** was from Dunedin Botanic Gardens 8 March. A **Hudsonian Godwit** at Aramoana on 17 April was presumably the bird seen at Kaikorai Lagoon during March

A **South Polar Skua** was seen east of Taiaroa Head on 4 March, while a late **Black-fronted Tern** was at Mount Aspiring Road 31 March. An **Erect-crested Penguin** was taken in to care at Oamaru 22 March. The Royal Cam at Taiaroa Head picked up a **Leach's Storm-Petrel** on 13 & 15 March. A **Great Shearwater** was photographed off Taiaroa Head on 23 March. A single **Little Black Shag** was at Karitane on 20 March, while **Stewart Island Shag** numbered 3600 at Oamaru on 30.

An **Australasian Bittern** was photographed at Warepa, near Balclutha, on 19 March, and had apparently been seen nearby about 6 months earlier. 2 **Little Egret** were reported from Hoopers Inlet 22 March, and single **Reef Herons** were seen at Tomahawk Beach on 25 March, Harington Point Road on 26, and Shag Point on 2 April. 6 **Cattle Egrets** at Wellers Rock on 17 April were the first of the year.

Finally a **Red-crowned Parakeet** hybrid was seen in the Rongahere Gorge (Blue

Mountains) on 24 March.

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

eBird News

I have been reminded recently of a couple of issues regarding Date and Effort information. Firstly, the distance entered if you retrace your steps should be the unique distance, rather than the total distance. For example, on an out-and-back count the total distance recorded by the app (or manually) should be divided by two. Also, when plotting your location, you should use the approximate mid point of your track (unless you are using an existing nearby location). Further information can be found at <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48000950859-guide-to-ebird-protocols>, or else take the eBird Essentials course, which can be found under "Help"> "Get started with eBird".

I've mentioned previously the various ways in which the Atlas Effort Map can be used for planning fieldwork. Using the map, and the various filters, some squares will appear to be well-covered while still having gaps that need to be filled. One way to find these gaps is to use the KML files in the Supporting Materials section of the Atlas website. These are available for each of the four seasons, and show all locations where checklists have been compiled. Please get in touch if you need any help downloading these files.

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

BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Wanted: Birds NZ members to wear new [bird] shoes

Less eye-catching subtitle: new Regional Rep and other helpers needed

In July this year Mary is stepping down as our Regional Rep after 17 (yes 17!) years in the role. She will leave large shoes to fill.....or more accurately lots of shoes, because Mary has been doing an awful lot to keep the Otago branch of Birds NZ running smoothly over the years.

To help keep our branch functioning well so that our members can continue to enjoy the activities we currently do, we are looking for people to take over some of Mary's responsibilities – to wear a pair of bird shoes or two.

Broadly speaking, the Regional Rep liaises with other Birds NZ groups as well as acting as the main point for communications with our branch. In addition, Mary has organised and chaired the monthly meetings and ensures information about upcoming trips and past events are sent out. Other people are already assisting with many tasks and an advisory committee has been established to support the Regional Rep.

Please have a look at the list of responsibilities that Mary has provided below. If any of them sound like something you are able to help with or if you would like to know more details, then please email George Pickerell (gpickerell@outlook.com) or have a chat at one of the monthly meetings. You don't necessarily have to be based in Dunedin, and there is also the opportunity for role sharing or splitting up the roles further.

Regional Rep Role:

- Liaising with Birds NZ Council, other RRs, Regional Recorder, national and regional treasurers
- Welcoming and communicating with members and potential members (RR has access to Membership database and birds.otago@birds.nz.org.nz email address.)
- Archiving data from regional projects and arranging for analysis and publication
- Arranging for local newsletter and liaising with editor (currently Sue Odlin edits and produces our newsletter and Hamish Spencer distributes e-copies)
- Arranging for news items to be sent to Birds NZ magazine (currently Franny Cunningham is our reporter)

Organising monthly meetings:

- Booking venue
- Opening up and setting up audio-visuals
- Chairing meeting
- Organising tea/coffee and biscuits at meeting

Organising speakers:

- Contacting and confirming speakers for monthly meetings
- Passing on list of speakers to newsletter
- Liaising with speakers before meeting

Organising / promoting fieldtrips:

Currently Richard Schofield organises Atlas fieldtrips

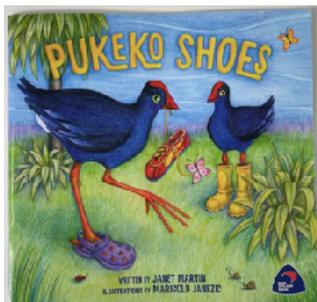
Organising / overseeing long-term projects:

Currently 5 long term projects that are coordinated by other members

Organising / overseeing / promoting public birding events:

Currently annual public events at Botanic Gardens (organised by Suzanne Middleton) and Tomahawk Lagoon

You don't even really have to wear shoes, but in case you were wondering what bird shoes might look like, then the following are for you:



Field Trip to Pleasant River Estuary on Global Big Day, Saturday 13th May

This is an estuary that we have not visited before and the planning is underway to obtain access through private property, so this is a great chance to see what birds are in the area. Full details will be emailed to members before the event. We will meet at XXXXXXXX to leave by 9am and carpool as much as possible. Remember to bring lunch and refreshments, warm clothes, raincoat, and sturdy waterproof boots as some areas may be boggy. We may be expanding our wader surveys to cover this estuary so this is an excellent recce. If we have time we might head to Trotter's Gorge after lunch to get some bush birds for the Global Big Day. Let Mary know if you are interested in coming on the trip nzmaryt@gmail.com txt 02102980504

If you are unable to join the field trip, why not head to a nearby birding hotspot and enter all your bird records on eBird (full checklists of at least 5 minute counts, please) towards to total for the Otago Region.



Flooding in the upper estuary, March 2023 Image Vernon Finch

Bird watching at Tomahawk Lagoon – Wild Dunedin Festival

10am – 12pm, Sunday 16 April 2023

About 40 people came to the Tomahawk Lagoon for our Wild Dunedin festival event: *Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching*. We mounted five or six scopes for the public to view the birds of the lagoon. Everyone seemed to really enjoy it, especially the children. The weather came to the party by putting on a brilliant sunny day, although the strong winds made the water a bit choppy. The taupata trees made a nice shelter for us against the gusts, while still allowing good viewing of the birds.

We had pied stilts, shovelers, gulls, black swans, and variable oystercatchers “on display” in front of the road. The scopes allowed us to showcase shags, scaup and pukeko that were

further in the distance. A few white-faced herons and paradise shelducks flew overhead, and we hoped they would join our event, but they did not land. The hybrid pied/black stilt was a highlight of the morning. The VOCs doing a few bouts of 'piping' display, the stilts feeding avidly and a display of filter feeding by the shoveler showed bird behaviours off very well.

Thanks to everyone who volunteered their time for this event. We had several people show an interest in our group, so we may see some new faces at our next meeting.

Beth Wishart



Images from Sunday's lagoon watching by Mary and Bruce

Exhibition Opening ~ The Reed Gallery, Dunedin Public Library



The Reed Gallery exhibition, entitled “For the love of birds: the artistic depiction and classification of New Zealand birds,” and opens on 11 May.

The displays will showcase a selection of books from the Reed/McNab Collections, featuring 20th century bird illustration by Lily Daff, Elaine Power, Molly Falla, Mollie Miller Atkinson, Bruce Harvey, Ray Ching, Paul Martinson, Derek Onley, Don Binney, Peter Scaife, etc. A selection of 20th century illustrated bird identification guides are included, alongside some early published taxonomic works by Victorian-era scientists including Buller, Hutton, and George R. Gray. The 1970s facsimile large folio edition of Gould’s *Birds of Australia* (which includes several NZ birds) is a key feature, alongside a comprehensive run of editions of *Buller’s*

Birds, featuring the unsurpassed illustrations of Keulemans – the rare first edition of 1873, the monumental second edition of 1888, the Supplement of 1905, plus the subsequent Whitcombe & Tombs (1967), and Te Papa (2012) facsimile editions.

An informal opening event will be held in the Reed Gallery Floor 3 of the Dunedin City Library beginning at 5.30pm on 11 May; our Derek Onley will be the speaker at the opening. Birds NZ have been extended an invitation for some of us to attend the opening, so if you would like to attend please let Mary know by 7th May at the latest so we can let them know numbers (nzmaryt@gmail.com or txt 02102980504).

NZ Marine Studies Centre in Portobello



The next seminar at the NZ Marine Studies Centre in Portobello is scheduled for Tuesday May 16th at 5pm. Dr Johannes Fischer (DOC and the Wellington Regional Representative for Birds NZ) will be talking about translocating the critically endangered kuaka/Whenua Hou diving petrel. Everyone is welcome.

Photo: Thomas Burns/DOC

Leach's Storm Petrel

A little tidbit for the newsletter about a small significant and bizarre record. On the morning of March 13th at 1:50am a small bird appeared on the Royal Cam flitting around the chick. The call heard 50sec in identifies it to be a Leach's Storm Petrel.

Footage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWDVh9-B52A>

It was also seen again two days later closer to 3am by avid nocturnal video birders. I'll upload the sightings to eBird via the Otago OSNZ account. For context of the significance here are the past NZ records:

New Zealand records

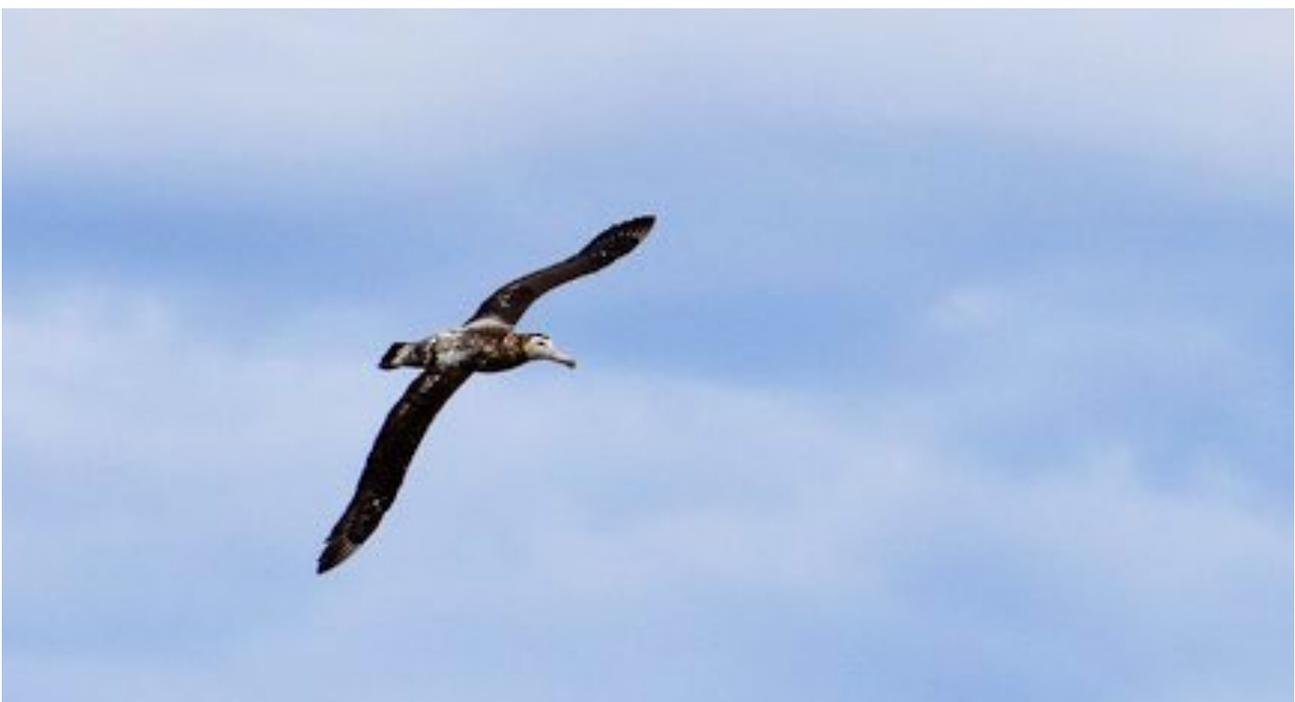
Three birds have been washed ashore dead: Muriwai Beach, Auckland (August 1922), Dargaville Beach (August 1978), and Ninety Mile Beach (October 1998). Another was blown inland and found dead at Turangaomoana, near Waharoa on the Hauraki Plains in April 1978. Two live birds apparently prospecting for nest sites were found on Rabbit Island, Chatham Islands in November 1980, and a pair were found on an egg in a burrow near the summit of Rangatira Island, Chatham Islands, in February 2018, but one was killed by a skua soon after.



Oscar Thomas

I was born under a Wandering Star

As their name suggests, Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* get about a bit so it wasn't that surprising that a couple or so have turned up around Taiaroa Head in the last few months. After all, a few pairs of the New Zealand version have bred on Campbell Island for many years and have colonised the Chathams in a minor fashion more recently; presumably wandering from their main breeding grounds on the Antipodes and Auckland Islands.



So from an ID point of view, what are we to make of this that was flying around the Taiaroa carpark on 19 March?

eBird checklist S131327801 says it's a:

"2nd cycle female, based on predominately dark brown plumage with mostly white scapulars (and scattered upperwing feathers). Different individual from one observed by Oscar Thomas on 28/02/23. Seen flying to the south, up over the Royal Albatross Centre carpark."

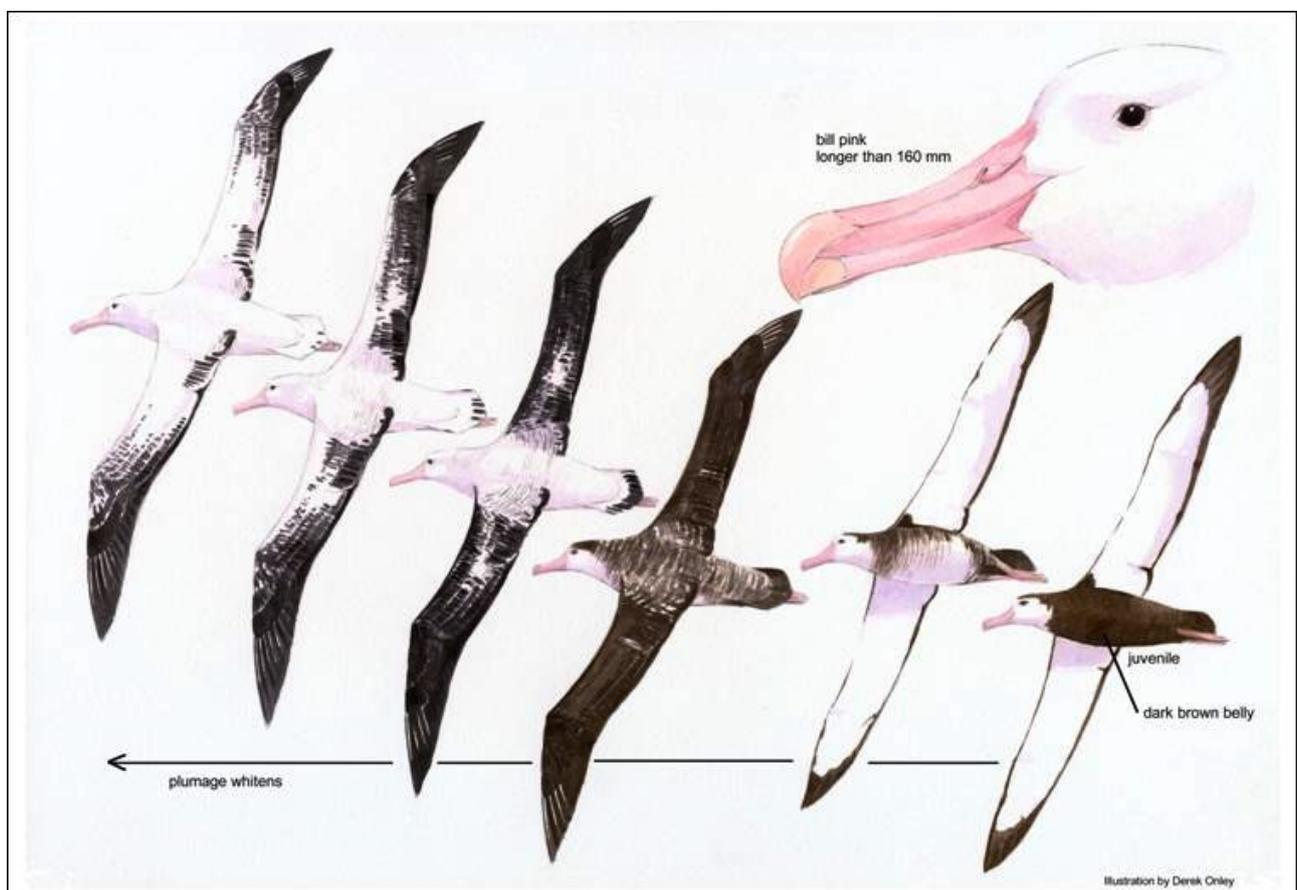
Not sure who wrote this as it's attributed to OSNZ Otago. But really? That precise? But maybe I'm being a little cynical? Perhaps it had a band and the marvels of modern digi cameras zapped on to the number? Or maybe they caught it and measured it? Sorry. Certainly being cynical now. But I do have to say

There's no way you could be that definite about its subspecies or its sex from these photos. Or indeed from its location. The only way you can determine sex is by measurements or breeding site behaviour.

And as for plumage, all Wandering Albatrosses fledge with brown body and upper-wings and become progressively whiter as they age. See illustration painted for the International Fishers Forum in Hawaii way back when genetic analysis was in its infancy.

The bird in question looks much like the 2nd and 3rd from the right and could therefore be a male or female *antipodensis*, *gibsoni*, even *dabbenena* or *exulans**

Exulans' bills are longer and heavier and with a fair bit of practice you might be able to use this to tell them apart from the rest, though maybe only if they were alongside one another? True the bird in question's bill doesn't does not look that large but then again the difference between *exulans*' ranges and the rest is a mere 5mm.



True also from location it is, well, possibly, maybe more likely to be one of the NZ subsp? However Ebird doesn't allow you to identify a bird by location. Except possibly in certain circumstances, for example when breeding? And even then.....

In the greater scheme of things, especially in these fraught times, it doesn't really matter that much but please, let's just call these birds Wandering Albatrosses, hope they are not hanging round our own species' neck like the one in the Ancient Mariner and enjoy them flying round Taiaroa Head. You never know they may even breed there and you can sneak in over the fence and take a little blood, analyse it and ascertain the subsp. Or end up with more questions.

*By the way I'm not up with the latest taxonomy. In our 2007 Helm Field Guide Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World. Paul Scofield and I, actually I blame Paul, gave *exulans*, Snowy; *dabbenena*, Tristan; and *antipodensis* New Zealand species status but demurred at separating *antipodensis* Antipodes from *gibsoni*, Auckland Islands.

Derek Onley

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.

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

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

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Birders Are Taking To The Sky To Survey Endangered Natives

Friday, 24 February 2023, 2:52 pm

Press Release: [Birds New Zealand](#)

Bird experts are taking to the sky to survey endangered natives

This weekend, helicopters will fly citizen scientists to isolated Otago peaks in search of pīwauwau/New Zealand rock wrens and more.



The New Zealand Bird Atlas is underway and aims to gather vital data on bird distribution and abundance across the entire country. This 5-year scheme is Birds New Zealand's flagship project.

This weekend's survey is special because it focuses on the Bird of the Year, the pīwauwau/New Zealand rock wren and because sponsorship from Toi Toi Wines is funding the flights to difficult-to-access areas in Southland.

Pete McClelland, a regional representative for Birds New Zealand, says being airlifted is one of the things he's looking forward to most.

"Because of the support for flights, we're able to reach places where birds have never been surveyed before.

"We'll work in two subgroups. Experienced alpine people make up one group that will go into the most rugged areas. Other volunteers will walk through valleys and areas that suit their physical skills."

Kevin Joyce, Founder and owner of Toi Toi Wines, says his family is passionate about both wine and the great New Zealand outdoors.

"Nature inspires us, and we're fortunate that birdsong surrounds us daily. We're proud to have supported many initiatives to help native birdlife thrive across New Zealand.

"Our sponsorship of the Bird Atlas means we can help to survey backcountry parts of New Zealand. It's such a valuable citizen science project."

As well as sponsorship from Toi Toi Wines, support from the community has meant hopes for the survey are high.

"Local farmers have been fantastic at giving us access. And our volunteers are so dedicated. We can see how much they care about our birdlife; they're looking forward to seeing what we find," says Pete.

Technology means researchers can learn a lot more. In the past, surveys have only checked whether species are present. Now, biologists can extrapolate the findings so they can understand population numbers and movement.

The data will be used by the public sector, such as the Department of Conservation and by advocacy groups, such as Forest and Bird New Zealand. It will support improved bird conservation and research for years to come.

This weekend's survey will be the first snapshot of the status of our bird species for twenty years. It will build on the legacy of two previous Bird Atlas projects run by Birds New Zealand in the 1970s and the turn of the millennium.

This period of data collection runs from 1 June 2019 to 31 May 2024. Citizen scientists are encouraged to enter their bird observations day and night into the New Zealand Bird Atlas eBird portal.

Bruce McKinlay, president of Birds New Zealand, says, "As the NZ Bird Atlas enters its last year, it's important that we can access remote parts of New Zealand.

"The Eyre Mountains are remote, so the partnership with Toi Toi Wines is crucial in enabling Birds NZ members to access the area. Surveying the Eyre Mountains will provide up-to-date information on the distribution of the Nationally Endangered pīwauwau/New Zealand rock wren and help lift the survey's coverage overall."

The survey is timely because New Zealand is in a period of rapid change. Two previous Atlas schemes showed that many of our endemic and native birds have suffered. Birds retrenched into the more remote backcountry areas, often because of predators such as stoats, rats, cats, possums and mustelids and other introduced mammalian species.

<https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/SC2302/S00036/birders-are-taking-to-the-sky-to-survey-endangered-natives.htm>

Eyre Mountains ~ New Zealand Bird Atlas and Rock Wren Survey 25 - 26 February 2023

Undertaken by Southland and Otago branches of Birds NZ/ OSNZ

Sponsored by Toi Toi Wines/ Heliworks

A report prepared by Pete McClelland, Dawn Palmer, Sean Jacques, Joe Bliss is now available.

A condensed version of the report will be published in the newsletter next month.

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

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, Sunday 2	Winter Wader count. High tide 14.50pm, 2m. (Back-up day 29th July about noon). To join a counting group please contact Maree mareej@kinect.co.nz or txt 0276609446
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
September, Tuesday 26	Amy Adams Management of a critically endangered population of Fairy Terns in Victoria
October, Tuesday 24	Hamish Spencer Birding in Colombia
November, Tuesday 28	Abby Smith will compère the annual Quiz Night

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.

Some dates for field trips (dates may be subject to change and details still to be announced)

Saturday 13 May Pleasant River and Shag River estuaries (also Global Big Day).

Saturday 17 June Atlassing trip to Mt Watkins area

Sunday 30 July Town Belt and 5MBC with AAPES university students

Sunday 10 September Guided Bird watching walks, Dunedin Botanic Garden

Sunday 29 October (or 5 Nov) 5MBC training day for members of the public; Town Belt Bird Count Trail; in conjunction with City Sanctuary and DCC.

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 **15 May**
sodlin@gmail.com

Disclaimer

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