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Otago Region Newsletter 5/2023

May 2023

Face masks are now an individual choice.

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



Ornithological Snippets

A **Cape Barren Goose** near Glendhu Bay met an untimely end, when it was shot there on 13 May, while on the opening day of the duck-shooting season a pair of Black Swans were nest-building in Balclutha. A **Great Crested Grebe** was seen near the near West Eweburn Dam 28 April.

A **NZ Pigeon** was seen feeding young in the Dunedin Botanic Gardens on 27 April, and **South Island Pied Oystercatchers** were seen heading inland from Balclutha on 28 April & 5 May. The **Hudsonian Godwit** previously seen at Kaikorai Estuary and Aramoana was relocated at Pleasant River Estuary on 13 May.

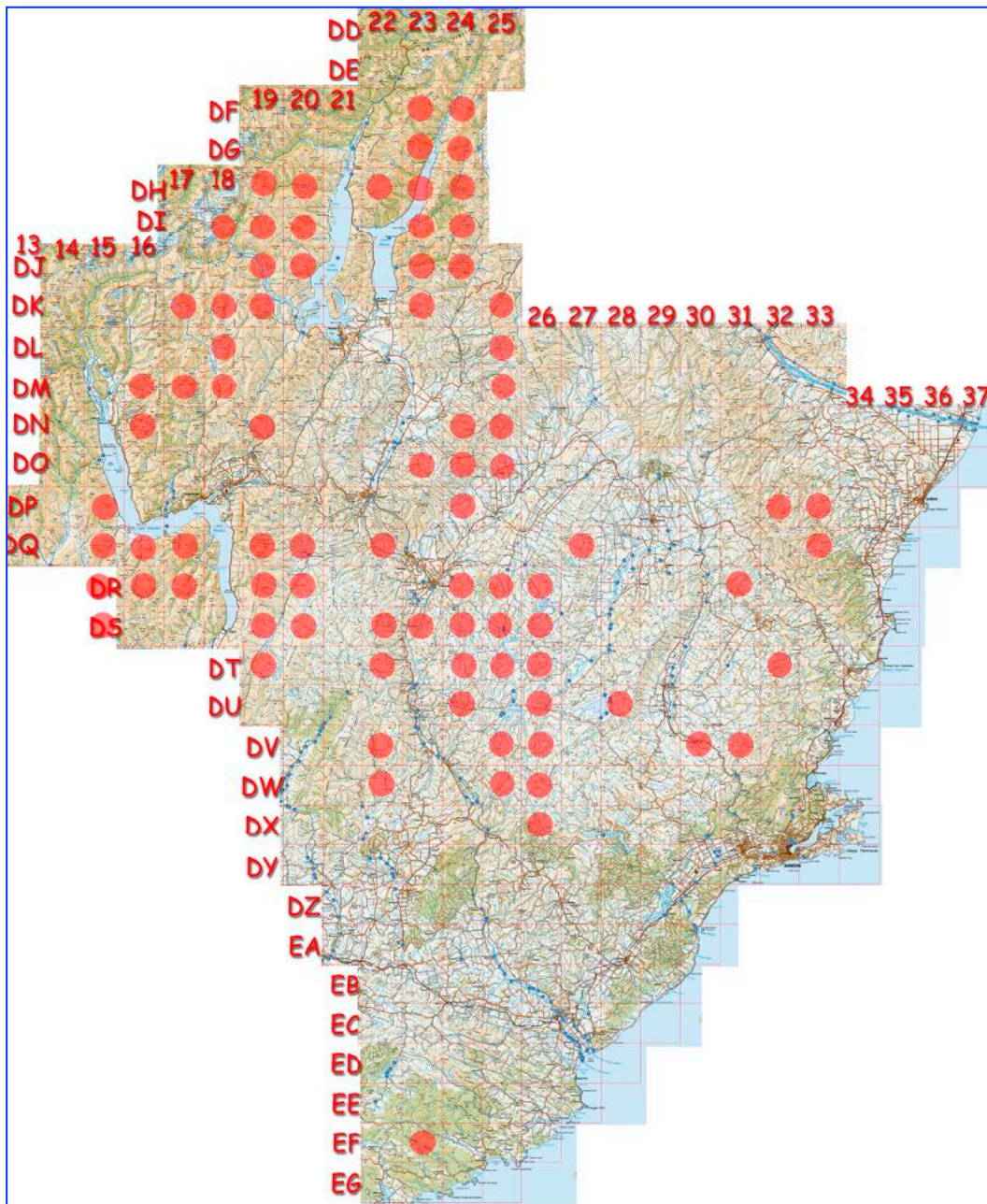
A fall of seabirds, mainly **Sooty Shearwaters** and **Mottled Petrels**, on 10 May centred around Garston in Southland, also involved birds found as far afield as Lake Hawea and Clydevale. An **Australasian Bittern** was seen near Papatowai 8 or 9 May, and 4 **Cattle Egret** put in an appearance on Inchclutha on 14 May, after a 5 year gap.

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

eBird News

We are rapidly approaching the final winter season of Atlas fieldwork, and as it stands there are still 107 squares in Otago without any coverage! Naturally these are predominantly in less-accessible areas, and this number doesn't include those that have been visited only briefly. As for autumn, I have produced a map showing those squares which need to be prioritised – please let me know if you would like a high-resolution version.

As mentioned elsewhere, the June field trip will be to the Mt Watkins area, organised by Maureen Howard. In addition, I am hoping to arrange trips over the winter to other areas, weather permitting and of necessity at short notice. If you would like to be involved in these trips, please let me know and I will keep you informed.



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.

<p>Regional Rep Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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@birdsNZ.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 Cunninghame is our reporter)
<p>Organising monthly meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booking venue • Opening up and setting up audio-visuals • Chairing meeting • Organising tea/coffee and biscuits at meeting
<p>Organising speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting and confirming speakers for monthly meetings • Passing on list of speakers to newsletter • Liaising with speakers before meeting
<p>Organising / promoting fieldtrips: Currently Richard Schofield organises Atlas fieldtrips</p>

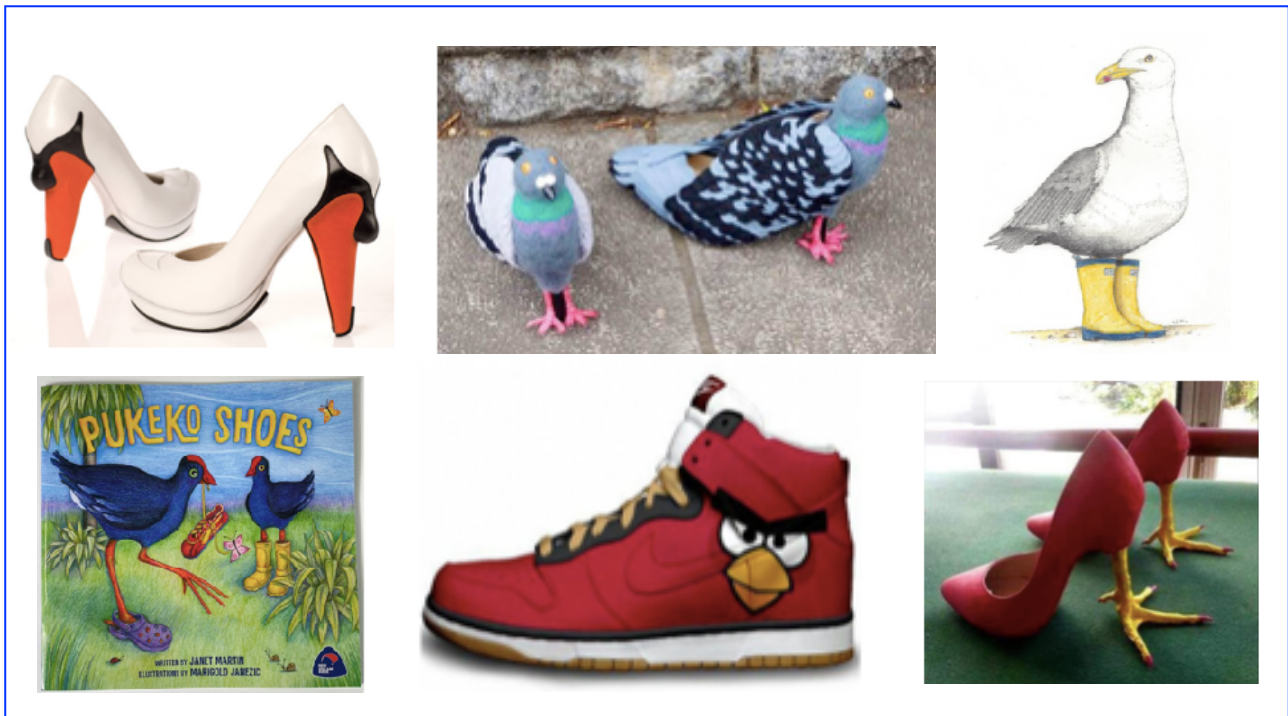
Organising / overseeing long-term projects:

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:



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.

Wader Count

Volunteers wanted for wader count on **Sunday July 2**. High tide (2M) at Dunedin is at 2.50pm.

In case of bad weather the reserve day is Saturday July 29 when high tide (1.84M) is at 12.38pm.

All members are most welcome to participate.

Please contact Maree Johnstone email: mareej@kinect.co.nz, phone 027 6609446 to be assigned to a team.

Atlassing Trip to Mount Watkin Area - Saturday 17 June



Are you keen to explore (or re-explore) Mount Watkin/Hikaroroa reserve and survey the birds there? Hikaroroa is located inland from Waikouaiti, on the east side of the North Branch of the Waikouaiti River. This is a great opportunity to visit this area, because although the reserve belongs to the DCC - you can't just pop along on a weekend. It's been necessary to obtain a key to the gates and to tell local hunters when we are coming.

Kelvin Lloyd says kānuka can be found on the upper slopes, broadleaf and podocarps in the gully and 'really nice' old growth podocarp by the Waikouaiti river. If we are lucky we can expect to find a healthy population of rifleman amongst the forest birds, as well as kārearea in this area. To come, please contact Maureen on mo4planet@gmail.com or txt 021 206 3593. Planned date: Saturday 17th June. Meet on Dukes Street by the pond to leave by 9am please.

Maureen Howard



Field trip to Pleasant River Estuary – Saturday, 13 May



As a relatively new member of Birds NZ this was my first field trip. I understand that there were others for whom it was also their first such experience. 19 people came on the expedition.

The thought of exploring an area previously not visited by Birds NZ added to the interest.

Mary made the introductions in the Bunnings carpark, organised the carpooling and made sure we had our directions where to go before setting off.



We arrived at the estuary. A round of further introductions and the serious birding started. My first impression was of a relatively large group of individuals who had their own approach to the task in hand. Scopes came out and were set up on tripods, binoculars strung around the neck and some, including myself, with cameras. A number took on the all important task of creating the e-bird list of species.

For those of us first timers we should not have had any concerns. The experienced birders were there to identify birds and were happy to share their knowledge. We spread out mostly into smaller groups and wandered down the track towards the mouth of the estuary and a sand spit. A flock of bar-tailed godwits attracted much attention as did a much larger flock of grey teal. There were also SIPO, various shags, stilts, gulls, Caspian terns and a number of other species including goldfinches and skylarks all identified and counted.



The big excitement for me was when a Hudsonian godwit was spotted amongst the Bar-tailed godwits. Having never knowingly seen one before it had to be one of the highlights especially being able to go fairly close and photograph it. I will now know to look for the clearly defined white rump and black barred tail when I see godwits in flight. According to my bird book the Hudsonian is of similar size to that of the bar-tailed godwit. This one appeared noticeably smaller.

We stopped for a leisurely lunch overlooking the estuary. Notwithstanding the birdwatching continued.

From there we moved further back up the estuary with one group heading down one side and another walking down a track on the other side. A number of banded dotterels, kingfishers and others were added to the list.

After some discussion it was decided that Trotter gorge was the next place to visit. It was probably at that point I realised the importance to the group of Global Big Day. Whilst the main group headed away from the estuary, Richard, Oscar and Ben walked over to check out a pond just further up the road, parting with instructions that I should pick them up in five minutes time. A number of Australasian shovelers and other ducks were added to the list. Next stop the treatment pond on Jacks Road heading out of Palmerston. Mallard, pukeko and more shovelers were added.



Grey warblers, fantails, blackbirds, thrushes, harrier, tui and bellbirds were spotted and recorded at Trotter gorge. The highlight here for me however was the large flock of brown creepers who with a little bit of encouragement came down closer to us. Always on the move foraging they did not present easy targets for the photographers.

As the trip came to a close one group wanted to visit Katiki Point only another 15 minutes up the coast. We hoped to add the yellow eyed penguin to the list. Unfortunately that was not to be the case. Buller's and White-capped mollymawks, large flocks of red-billed gulls and rock pigeons, amongst others, were seen.

There was still one stop to make at the reservoir just before Katiki beach in the hope of spotting an Australasian grebe previously seen there. It was not sighted but a number of shags were.

There were many aspects of this trip which made it so interesting, educational and enjoyable. Importantly the weather also played its part.

A great day with great company. I am sure that my thanks to all the experienced birders who so enthusiastically shared their knowledge and corrected my errors of identification will be supported by all the others coming out on their first field trip.

A special thanks to Mary who not only organised a great day out but was always there to give support.

Species list for 13th May and Global Big Day (Mary Thompson from eBird)

From my count we saw 55 species at the Pleasant River Estuary, including 'our' Hudsonian godwit. This sighting gives us the information that that Otago birds do use many of our lagoons as it has been sighted at Warrington, Aramoana, Kaikorai and now Pleasant River. The other interesting sighting by Richard was of a banded dotterel (YY,YR). Nick Beckwith checked with banding colleagues and discovered it was a female banded on her nest at the Cass River delta on 19 October 2020 (this is part of the study of migration within NZ, so our sighting is important). For the whole expedition we saw 60 species and for Global Big Day with contributions from others around Otago, 66 species were submitted to eBird.

Kit Girling

New Zealand Bird Atlas and Rock Wren Survey, 25 - 26 February 2023

Rock Wrens



The Department of Conservation (DOC) last undertook a Rock Wren survey in the Eyre Mts in 2006/2007. That survey searched much of the suitable habitat in the southern Eyre Mt areas – generally large boulder fields in the alpine zone. That survey found birds at 43 sites roughly clustered in to 6 groups. However, the spacing of birds within the groups varied significantly. classified as Threatened – Nationally Endangered with an estimated population of mature individuals ranging between 1000 – 5000.

Rock Wren in the Bowels of the Earth Joseph Bliss

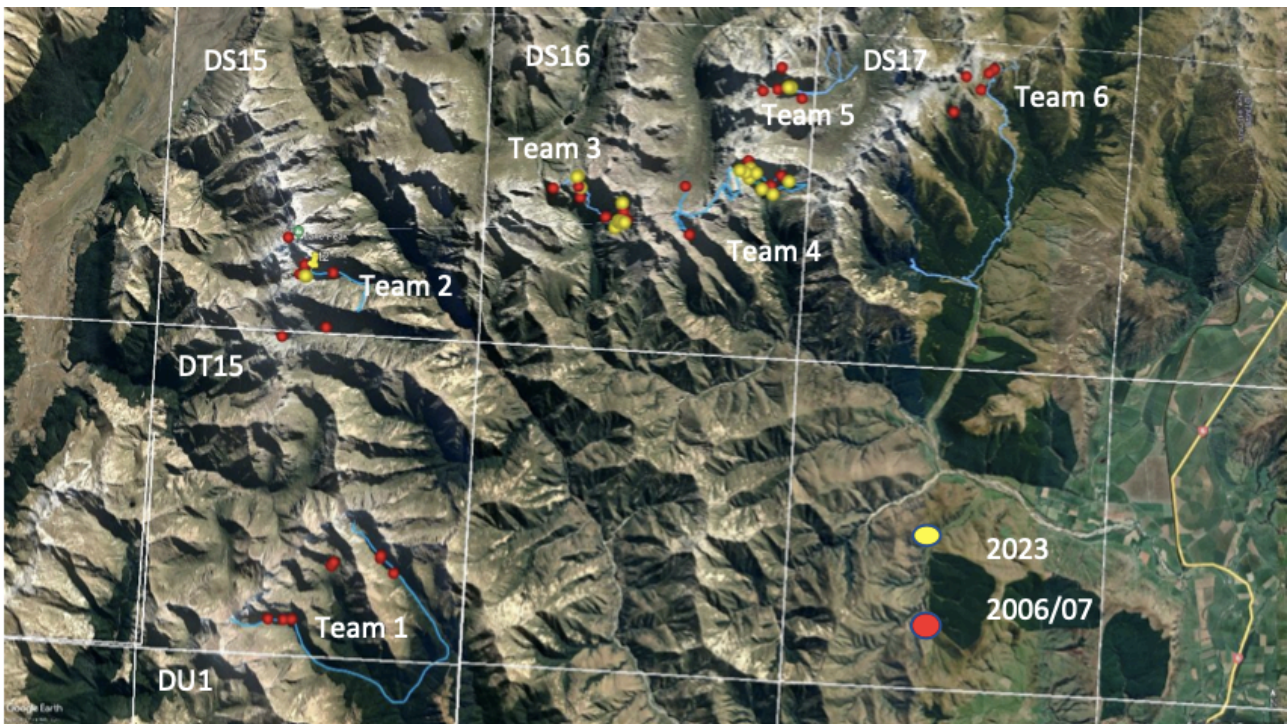


Six Otago members joined thirteen Southland members to survey on the weekend of 25 and 26 February 2023. These were split into 2 general groups – alpine, who had to gain access to their sites by helicopter, and lowland. The lowland teams walked or relied on 4WD to reach their sites.

Georgina Pickerell searching for birds, Eyre Creek
Petrina Duncan

Southland branch of OSNZ approached the managers of the Toi Toi Wines fund about the branch supplementing the fund to support a joint atlas/ Rock Wren survey in the Eyre Mts as this required the use of helicopters to access the alpine area in this under-surveyed region.

The remote, alpine environment of the rock wren habitat required alpine teams to be flown in and then retrieved the following day. The distribution of the sites across the high peaks scattered through the middle of the Eyre Mountains resulted in helicopter costs exceeding the combined budgets but fortunately Heliworks/ Action Helicopters, who are based in Queenstown, subsidised the trip to make the cost fit within the available funds. This was especially important as on the day of pick-up low cloud required significantly more flying time than expected.



Rock Wren sites from 2006/07 and 2023 surveys and alpine atlassing routes taken (blue)

The six alpine teams were deployed into one of the six historical Rock Wren cluster sites. The lowland teams were focused on areas that either hadn't been surveyed or were greatly underrepresented within the current atlas survey efforts. All teams were instructed to do as much atlas surveying as possible and to record travelling checklists when moving for as long as they could sustain the focus on atlassing. Checklists were recorded using travelling counts

which aimed to capture observations while walking, these were generally truncated into efforts of up to 1km and / no more than 1-hour or undertaken as stationary counts from specific locations.

New lists were started when the surveyors entered a new habitat type. Nocturnal lists were also encouraged among team members.

Survey checklists were recorded using the eBird phone app and uploaded when mobile coverage became available.

The six teams working in Rock Wren habitat targeted as many of the sites where Rock Wren were recorded in 2006/ 07 as safely possible, checking other suitable habitat as they travelled between sites in the area. They recorded waypoints and habitat descriptions where Rock Wren were found as well as atlas checklists at these sites and when searching the surrounding alpine habitats.



Surveying Rock Wren habitat near Helen Peaks Megan Bogisch

The field work was timed to replicate as closely as possible the original 2006-07 project, to coincide with when Rock Wren numbers would be at their highest post breeding, and as many suitable, skilled and enthusiastic surveyors were available. The original survey was undertaken by one person (Jono More) with good helicopter support and this project was designed to replicate as closely as possible his search effort using multiple people over a more confined period. All checklists were collated into NZ Bird Atlas Trip Report which showcases the collective achievement of the atlassing expedition, <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/tripreport/108939>.

A summary of preliminary results indicates a total of at least 35 birds at 22 sites were observed, grid references were recorded using a handheld GPS. This compares with the 2006/07 surveys which found a total of 86 rock wren at 43 sites with each search effort extended over a period of about 3 or 4 days. The data also suggests that the localised density of Rock Wren recorded in the 2023 survey may be higher than that recorded in the 2006/07 surveys.

The 2023 teams were able to revisit (within about 200m), 25 of the 43 2006/07 sites. Twenty-three Rock Wren were reconfirmed at or near 12 of these sites.

Interestingly a stoat was recorded near Symmetry Peaks in 2007 and stoat tracks were also found in snow high in The Bowels of the Earth catchment during the 2023 survey.

Other birds recorded

During the February 2023 atlas expedition more than 300 bird lists were compiled in 16 different Atlas squares taking some of the squares from being among the lowest visited areas to being well represented in the surveyed areas of New Zealand.

In addition to the continued, if range reduced, presence of Rock Wrens, a single Kea (threatened: nationally endangered) was heard, and eastern Falcons (Threatened: Nationally Vulnerable) were recorded in 5 checklists. A single Caspian tern (Threatened: Nationally Vulnerable) was recorded in the mid-Eyre Creek catchment. NZ Pipits (At-Risk: Declining) were recorded in 26 checklists. Black Shag (At-Risk: Relict) were recorded more frequently (12 checklists) than Little Pied Shag (At-Risk: Relict), in 3 checklists.

Good populations of Riflemen were found at 22 sites in the forests of the Kiwi Burn, Irthing Stream and Firewood Creek, South Island Robin were recorded in 7 checklists within the beech forests of the Kiwi Burn, Oreti River area and Irthing Stream.

Nocturnal surveys recorded four Ruru/ Morepork at two sites including one at the Jane Peak camp site in the alpine zone and three near the Kiwi Burn hut.



View over the farmland south of the Eyre Mountains taken by Glenda Rees

Sandfly Sooty Shearwater News

Grant Maslowski with his thermal imaging camera counted thirteen blue penguins landing at the east end of Sandfly Bay Beach between 6pm and 7 on the 8th of May. It seems they have had a good season.

Banding Titi

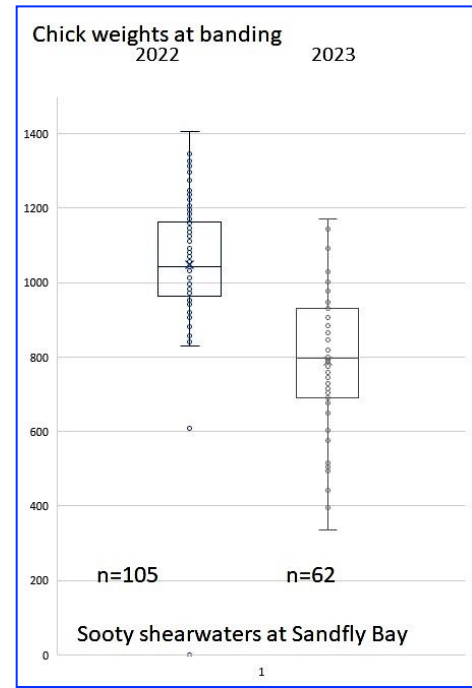
The Dunedin Forest and Bird 'Bring Back the Seabirds' project wound up this month with the extra trapping to protect the sooty shearwater chicks followed by their banding. About half the number chicks were active in the colony compared with the last two years, so a very different season. This is illustrated in the attached chart.

About one quarter of these chicks were below 600 grams, so have poor prospects. These were not PIT tagged.

Two were found dead from starvation outside their burrows.

On 8th May, the last night we banded, there were still at least twenty birds exercising their wings but most were already banded. Only five birds were added to the banding tally. I predict that they will be all gone after the forecast spell of bad weather runs out on Friday. Although the last activity was recorded by a trail camera before dawn 14th May of a banded titi.

Feathers were collected for Brendon Dunphy's stable isotope study. It will be interesting to see how the isotope ratios compare with the last two years and between the poor and plump birds this year.



Sad picture of a starving chick venturing out in daytime. Found dead below 20 April.



A chick in its prime. Some were up to the weights of the past two years



Trimmed down ready to go

Many 'Birds' people assisted, with Oscar, Ela , Erin Drummond, Katie Gray and Grant Maslowski adding to their banding experience under my supervision.

Other sites

Katigi Rosalie reported complete failure.

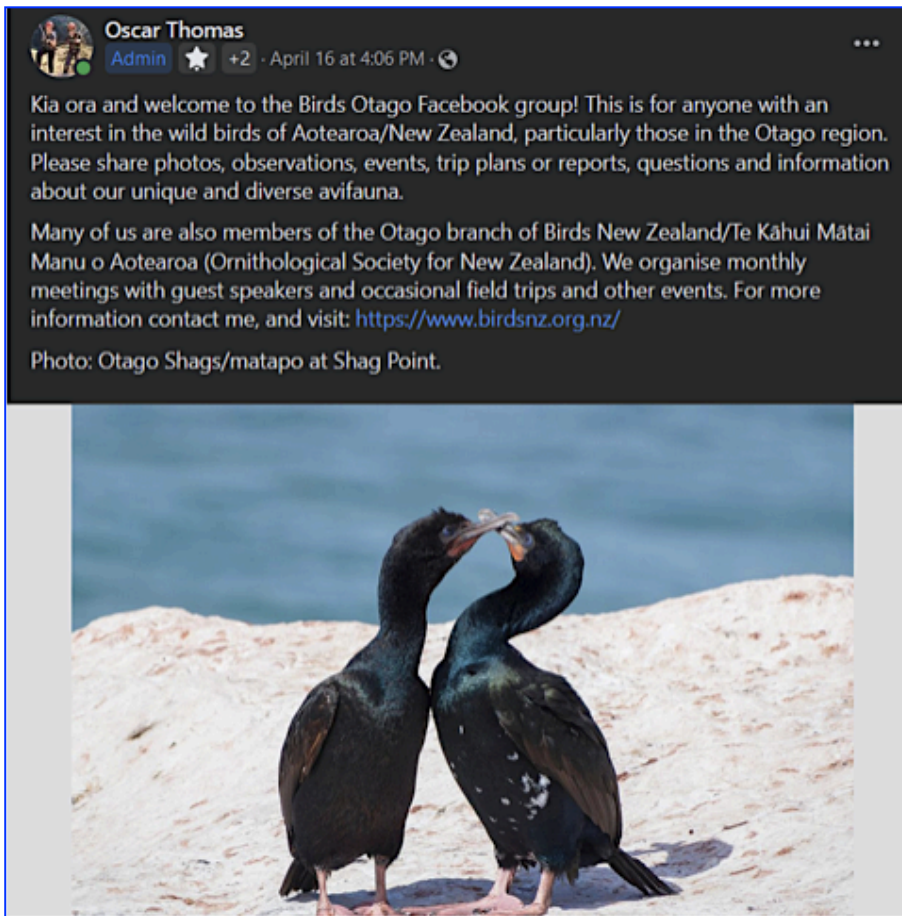
Long Point Gavin reported seeing some down but not live chicks and lots of predators in the trail camera logs.

Stoney Bay, Banks Peninsula Reported their cliff top colony had risen from two pairs to sixty pairs with thirty chicks fledged this season. Multiple calamities have struck the fence - Christchurch earthquake, recent slips.

The results of the storm of 10 May were widely reported with many sooty shearwaters turning up in northern Southland along with mottled petrels. Nine of them made their way to the Wildlife Hospital Dunedin for rest and release on the St Clair cliffs

Graeme Loh

Birds Otago Facebook page



Members are welcome to join the new Birds Otago Facebook group at this link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/>

Alongside the monthly newsletter, it is a way of sharing information and events for the Otago Branch of Birds New Zealand to encourage more young people to become involved :)

Pleasant River

The Birds NZ outing to Pleasant River Estuary for the eBird Global Big Day was a great success, with exclusive access to certain parts of it. It was fantastic to see so many keen birders and good birds, and what a surprise to discover the long-staying Hudsonian godwit mingling with a flock of 30 Bar-tailed godwits/kuaka, 20km up the coast from where it was present last month. This is the fourth site in 11 months the bird has visited, and it stood out as the only one in breeding plumage with its brick red underside and jet black underwings.



Hudsonian Godwit with Bar-tailed Godwits



Hudsonian Godwit (far right) with Bar-tailed Godwits in flight

The young black and pied shags gave us a run for our money with identification attempts, and up to 20 banded dotterel/pohowera were another highlight including a leg-banded individual.



Brown creeper/pipipi at Trotter's Gorge

We also visited Trotter's Gorge and enjoyed a pair of tomtits/ngirungiru along with a massive feeding flock of pipipi/brown creepers, then some of us moved on to Katiki Point where we unfortunately dipped on hoiho/Yellow-eyed Penguin but picked up on a few more seabird species including a toroa/Buller's Albatross close inshore.



Black Shag Juvenile

Pied shag juvenile

Comparison of typical juvenile Black shag and Pied shag

The Black shag is larger with a heavier bill and bright green iris. They always have yellow skin around the base of the bill and throat whereas Pied shags only have a small yellow patch in front of the eye. As juveniles both birds have mottled black and white plumage but Black shags typically have darker necks and underparts. Pied shags can appear almost fully black at this age, should always have some white feathers on the neck and underparts, apart from black 'trouser legs'.

According to eBird as of 14 May, Otago is on 66 species for the Global Big Day which is a fantastic effort.

Oscar Thomas

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

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 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 **19 June**
sodlin@gmail.com

Disclaimer

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