

**THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND INC.**  
**ANNUAL REPORT ON BEHALF OF COUNCIL FOR 2022.**

It is my privilege to present this report on behalf of the Council to the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Birds New Zealand).

It has been a good year to be President of the Society. We have been focused on supporting the implementation of the NZ Bird Atlas Project, continuing to advance our Society strategy, continuing with development of Phase III of the Society's website, and dealing with the impact of COVID-19. This has included particular emphasis on development of systems to minimise risks to the health and safety of members during field work.

### **Deceased Members**

During the period of this report, I have been notified of the deaths of the following members:

- Michael Bradley (Canterbury)
- Simon Chamberlin (Auckland)
- Ray Clough (Auckland)
- Barry Donovan (Christchurch)
- Audrey Eagle (Otago)
- Jim Eagles (South Auckland)
- Geoff Harrow (Canterbury)
- Murray Jeffries (Hawkes Bay)
- Ted Kitching (South Auckland)
- Sheelagh Leary (Wellington)
- Sid Lovell (Auckland)
- Ron Nilsson (Canterbury)

If members are aware of others, they should be brought to my attention.

### **Council meetings**

During 2022, Council met four times; three via Zoom and once at the Christchurch Conference. Much of the business transacted has been summarised in my Columns in *Birds New Zealand*. Ongoing themes in our work have been: managing the Society's finances; oversight of the redevelopment of the final stage of the Society's website; continuing to monitor the impact of COVID on Society activities; reviewing implementation of health and safety practices in the society; expanding the range of publication types being hosted by the Society through the occasional and historical publications; and monitoring the implementation of a communications, membership and fundraising project to build the Society's profile and membership, which will be rolled out over the next three years.

Strategically over the next years our priorities remain: continuing to maintain careful oversight of Society finances; the rolling out of the Society's membership recruitment and awareness project; drafting a revised Constitution for the Society that meets the requirements of the new Incorporated Societies Act; filling vacancies on Council and in the Regions and of course, maintaining high standards of practise in the science of ornithology. Council was pleased to note that as at May 2023 the Society has 1,295 current members, which is an increase by 91 members compared to May 2022.

### **Health and Safety**

Regions continue to run safe and enjoyable field activities. Based on the Regional Representatives reports, last year the Society ran 158 field trips and there were only four reported incidents. These did not lead to injury, were reported promptly and our systems and procedures were updated.

### **Partners**

Society activities and our ability to build our projects have been supported by our ongoing relationships with T-Gear Charitable Trust and Toi Toi Wines. Additionally we have long term commercial relationships with Pivotal Press, Swarovski Optiks and Heritage Expeditions. The website development company Xequals has continued to support the Society's activities through development work on our website, supporting the completion of the digitisation of the Beach Patrol Scheme, and always being on hand to answer queries and resolve technical issues as they arise. I acknowledge the support from these partners and look forward to building further relationships with them.

We have continued to cooperate as an active Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand. The New Zealand Bird Atlas has also benefited from the contribution of Department of Conservation 'Tier one' monitoring data which has provided vast amounts of bird census data from the NZ backcountry. I'm also pleased to be able to acknowledge the ongoing partnership the Society has with the George Mason Charitable Trust, who support the David Medway Scholarship, and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society who through the J S Watson Trust, we cooperatively manage the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research Fund with.

### **Publications**

Craig Symes reports that post-COVID-19 effects seem to have had limited effect on processing or posed editorial challenges for *Notornis*. The journal continues to attract and publish important ornithological manuscripts on birds in New Zealand and the south Pacific. Pivotal Press, Wellington, has continued to print the journal.

Craig notes that while every effort is made to maintain up to date processing, the return of papers that require corrections remains out of his control and this can lead to delays in publication. Craig notes that in general, the process of sourcing willing (and suitable) reviewers runs smoothly, although some specialist papers require extra effort. The facility of Occasional Publications was launched last year and has attracted enquiries since the launch of the 5th Edition of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*. During the year Paul Sagar resigned as Associate Editor of *Notornis*. I wish to acknowledge Paul's careful work over many years to support the editorial process.

Michael Szabo has had another successful year as editor of our quarterly magazine *Birds New Zealand*. Heritage Expeditions and Swarovski Optik continue to be regular advertisers in the magazine. A new advertiser, Australian birdwatching company Northern Territory Bird Specialists has booked a half page and quarter page advertisement in 2022, and have since booked two half page and quarter page advertisement for 2023.

Michael continues to liaise with Solomons Tourism in 2022. They offered to host a fifth visit

from a new Birds New Zealand representative in April 2023, the first such visit since 2019 due to COVID restrictions there.

### **Social media**

The Birds New Zealand Facebook page continues to grow and now has over 11,250 followers. Facebook made major changes to its service and algorithm in 2022. One significant change has been in the way that posts can be shared or sent to other Facebook pages and groups. Michael Szabo also reports that due to these changes our ability to review the usage data over a year is restricted.

### **Membership Secretary**

Koshy Yohannan has continued to bed into his role as Society Membership Secretary. As part of the change he has moved the Post Office Box from Foxton to Dunedin, revised the role description and updated welcome letters and donor thank you letters. The Membership Secretary continues to take the lead on ensuring that lapsed and/or non-renewed memberships are culled from the Membership data. This makes reporting on membership numbers a dynamic business and it requires care to be able to accurately compare figures across years. The Society's investment in the updated membership database has resulted in more flexibility in communicating with members, conference registrations, and allows tailoring of members' preferences on what publications they receive.

### **New Zealand Bird Atlas**

The New Zealand Bird Atlas Team based at Wildlife Management International in Blenheim has continued to champion the New Zealand Bird Atlas. June 2022 marked moving into the fourth year of this project. Dan Burgin reports that the project now has 342 000 checklists; there are 3093 squares or 95.7% with some data. During the year 83 grid squares were surveyed for the first time, mostly as part of the DOC tier one monitoring programme. In total the NZ Bird Atlas has recorded 298 species, an increase of 10 compared to last year. This massive project has been possible due to 1427 participants who have continued to work hard to supply data across the country. This is an increase of 277 compared to last year. It is a challenge for Council to convert more of these contributors into members. We have discussed this with Cornell University and will continue to pursue this.

A particularly exciting part of the Atlas project in 2022 was launching a new partnership with Toi Toi wines to provide sponsorship for targeted visits to under-surveyed parts of the country. This was to start with a post-conference trip to Westland in June 2022. Unfortunately, this was cancelled due to a storm warning. However since then trips to the East Coast and Southland have been completed and more are planned. This AGM marks the beginning of the final year of this nationally important project. I encourage you all to look at the resources being developed by Dan and his team and find un-surveyed squares and make these the priority for the next 12 months.

### **Beach Patrol Scheme**

A major project for the Society, completed in 2022 was the digitisation of the Beach Patrol Scheme database and the launch of a user-friendly design and a modern new look for it on the Birds New Zealand website. Observers can submit records through the Birds New Zealand website from their home computer. The benefits of this improved approach are two-fold; information can be submitted by observers to the database shortly after following each Beach

Patrol (this is in contrast to much delayed submission when the old scanned card-sheet system was used), and the new digital process is much less expensive to implement.

The basic data requirements for submissions remain the same (Information about species, numbers, stage of bird maturity, freshness and distances walked) but in order to increase the scientific value of observations most questions must now be answered. Additionally, new questions include observations of birds caught on fishing lines and that were shot. Photos of dead birds can be uploaded in order to support the identification of specimens.

The objectives of the Scheme and the role description for the Beach Patrol Convenor were revised and signed off by Council. The number of submissions and the total distance patrolled were greater in 2022 than in 2021, possibly a beneficial effect of the new website-based data submission system. Four dead birds were found tangled in fishing lines – a southern black-backed gull, Australian gannet, little penguin and a light-mantled sooty albatross. A first-time Beach Patrol Scheme record in 2022 was a Matsudaira's Storm petrel (at Muriwai, 27/5/22). Finally, there were two notable beach wrecks in 2022. In April and May many dead little penguins were found on Northland beaches and in July and August unusually high numbers of fluttering shearwaters were found dead on Wellington beaches. Ian Armitage and Lloyd Esler are acknowledged for their efforts to develop and maintain the Beach Patrol Scheme.

### **Moult Scheme**

Micah Scholer is excited to report that the first scientific paper using data from the moult recording scheme has been submitted to *Notornis*. The paper describes the timing and extent of silvereye primary moult and compares the results to other species in the genus *Zosterops*.

Micah also reports engagement with groups such as Predator Free New Zealand to help prepare an educational blog informing the public about the importance of moult in the avian life cycle and how humans can help birds during this vulnerable time. Additionally, he's been teaching local banders in the Rotorua area about how to use moult as a tool for ageing birds in the hand.

Unfortunately this energy and effort is not being supported by the submission of moult records. During 2022, only a handful of moult records were submitted. Future work to coordinate submissions with the DOC Banding database FALCON is required to ensure that records are captured across New Zealand.

### **Nest Recording Scheme**

Roger Sharp reports only light usage during the year. He notes that he is receiving more records by email and more photos to go with the record cards.

During 2022 records were submitted for song thrush, kererū, crested grebes, black swan and greylag goose. Additionally an extensive 3-year summary of colony nest sites at Upukerora River, Southland, including records for black fronted terns and black-billed gulls was submitted. Roger notes that over the past 5 years, the number of records received has decreased year on year, with 2022 being the exception. This is creating a problem with the dataset, as we can no longer provide continuous records to show trends in bird numbers and outcomes.

### **Banding Liaison**

John Stewart reports a significant amount of activity being carried out by Society Members as part of the Society Wildlife Act Authority. During 2022; eight new projects were approved bringing the total to 21 projects. Projects were critically evaluated using criteria developed by the Scientific Committee before being approved to proceed. Two applications were declined as they did not fit the criteria. Reports have been received from the on-going projects and these have been used to submit the mandatory report to the DOC Permissions Team Leader at Hamilton.

The process relating to the renewal of our Authority for a further ten years has been initiated with DOC. John will need the support of the project leads in this process with DOC to show the value of Birds New Zealand Wildlife Act Authority.

John has also been active as a member of the DOC Banding Advisory Committee, in the last year he has assessed 51 applications from banders for certification at various levels.

### **Checklist Committee**

The first half of 2022 was an extremely busy and important year for the Checklist Committee. The publication of the 5<sup>th</sup> edition *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*, during the 2022 AGM and Conference in Christchurch was a significant event for the Society and I pay my respects to the Checklist Committee: Natalie Forsdick, Brian Gill, Colin Miskelly (Convener), Ricardo Palma, Nic Rawlence and Alan Tennyson for their efforts.

The checklist was published electronically in HTML and PDF formats. A separate report explaining changes since the 2010 (4<sup>th</sup> edition) checklist was also published, in PDF format. In addition to these two documents (and the web version of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*), the Checklist Committee also published two down-loadable databases, one providing taxonomic and conservation status information for all the birds listed in the checklist, and the other providing a comprehensive list of alternative English, Māori and Moriori names for New Zealand birds.

These documents are available at: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/society-publications/occasional-publications/>

Dr Brian Gill chose to step down from the Checklist Committee after the 5<sup>th</sup> edition checklist was published. I acknowledge the work that Brian has now committed to two checklists of the birds of New Zealand; this is a remarkable contribution to our work.

### **Records Appraisal Committee**

The online Unusual Bird Report (UBR; <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/rare-birds/>) reporting system continues to be the main source of reports received. The database provides almost immediate feedback on UBR submissions and decisions, as well as a searchable database of all submissions and decisions dating back to the 1960s. It includes hyperlinks to publications referring to individual UBRs, and to New Zealand Birds Online species pages.

A total of 123 UBRs was received in 2022, and assessed between March 2022 and February 2023. This is the second largest number of submissions received by the committee in a single year (124 were received in 2018). Of these 123 UBRs, 109 (89%) were accepted by the committee. Three new species were added to the New Zealand list (black tern, black naped tern, and Matsudaira's storm petrel).

The RAC kept within deadlines during 2022 and response letters were typically sent out 3-5 months after UBRs were received. The current RAC membership is: Andrew Crossland, Elizabeth (Biz) Bell (Secretary), Colin Miskelly (Convener), Ian Saville, Ian Southey and Alan Tennyson. Additionally, Paul Sagar is a co-opted member of the committee, and provides independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. I thank all members of the Records Appraisal Committee for their work and commitment to this committee.

A paper reporting on the 210 RAC decisions from 2021–22 has been accepted for publication in *Notornis*, and will appear in the June 2023 issue.

### **Web Support**

The web support work undertaken by Roger Sharp supports the MembershipWorks system which is the Society's administrative database, and the work of the Executive Officer and the Membership Secretary.

This past year has seen reduction in the amount of membership work in the Web support role. Requests from members for help this year relate to logon onto the system due to password errors, and also with people trying to register their attendance at the conference. Roger has also been available to help new Regional Representatives obtain access to their region's email by redirecting the region mail. Very much a behind the scenes role Roger plays an important role in keeping our website, email communications working; thank you.

### **Scientific Committee**

The Scientific Committee continues its major work of reviewing the research proposals for the many schemes the Society administers. In particular, their advice is requested to review the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, the David Medway Scholarship, the Marj Davis Scholarship, and the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research fund. Advice was also provided on several Projects Assistance applications submitted by Society members. The quality of these assessments is comprehensive and thorough.

In addition to all this, in the last year the committee worked on a revision of the criteria for funding in response to a request from our partners to support projects with a clear conservation benefit to birds. Graeme Taylor presented a summary of past work to the New Zealand Bird Conference in Christchurch in 2022, highlighting the scientific research supported by the Birds New Zealand research fund over the past 5 years. I acknowledge the work of the Committee members: Ilse Corkery, Terry Greene, Rod Hay, Kevin Parker, Graeme Taylor (Convener), Matt Rayner, and Paul Sagar. The current team's strengths are seabirds, waders, forest birds and Pacific Islands ornithology.

The work of the Scientific Committee can be seen in the summary of projects funded. In the 2022 year eleven Birds New Zealand Research Fund projects were funded. These projects covered seabirds (4), passerines (2), shorebirds/gulls (2), raptors, kiwi and rails (one each).

Graeme Taylor also represents the Society on the World Seabird Union which, Graeme reports has been a bit quieter in the past year as the committees took a breather after organising the virtual World Seabird Conference in 2021. A key focus of the past 12 months has been developing a strategic plan for seabirds to build collaboration between agencies and individuals studying these species, which include two of the most threatened bird groups; albatrosses and gadfly petrels. Other successful activities undertaken have been the World Seabird Twitter conferences (now up to #WSTC8) and people uploading videos of

their research onto the Seabirds.net platform.

### **Regional Representatives**

I wish to acknowledge Ilse Corkery, Mary Thompson and Peter Frost who have all stood down as their respective regions' representatives. In the case of Mary this has been seventeen years of dedicated leadership in Otago. The region is busy and productive and this is due to Mary's leadership. As I say every year, the annual reports that the Regional Representatives prepare to summarise the year's activities are a fascinating summary of a range of projects and activities throughout New Zealand. The reports from 2022 are no exception and they show a Society that is busy and at work throughout New Zealand.

Regional Representatives are an essential network for Council to understand the expectations of the membership and to ensure that matters are raised and debated with and by Council. The Society cannot function without the ongoing commitment and hard work of the Regional Representatives. On behalf of Council, I thank you all.

### **Thank you**

The Society is a success because many members put their hands up and offer skills and time to make things happen. In addition to all the Convenors and Regional Representatives it is the members who get out there with cameras, notebooks and apps and observe, argue as to the right total number and record. Additional to this is the efforts of the Society's Executive Officer, Ingrid Hutzler. Throughout 2022, Ingrid kept supporting Regional Representatives, scheme convenors and Council with prompt and thoughtful responses to emails and queries. In addition to this Ingrid as EO leads the management of the Society's various funds, grants and sponsorships, keeping the website content up-to-date, and assisting with conference arrangements. I also acknowledge the ongoing support and work of Council. They have all contributed to supporting the work of Council and ensured that we have robust discussions and have quality decisions as a result. I particularly wish to acknowledge the Society's Secretary Lynne Anderson who is standing down after four years of highly professional service to the Society. Lynne -Thank you.

Thank you to you all.

Bruce McKinlay  
President.