

BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

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BIRDS

NEW ZEALAND

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Remutaka Kiwi-Nui success

The Remutaka Conservation Trust reported in May that Kiwi-Nui/North Island Brown Kiwi can now be heard calling all the way from the eastern banks of the Ōrongorongo River to the outskirts of Wainuiomata in Lower Hutt, including in the Wainuiomata water catchment area where a new Puketaha Ecosanctuary mainland island is proposed. Kiwi-Nui were released into the area in 2006 and 2009. Based on the sound recorder monitoring network in the area, the Trust estimates the number of Kiwi-Nui there to be over 200 birds with a minimum of 40 breeding pairs - and growing!

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COVER IMAGE

Nankeen Night-heron/Umu Kotuku, Whanganui.
Photo by Ormond Torr/New Zealand Birds Online:
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From the President's Desk

Council Meeting

At its March meeting, Council reviewed further work on responding to the changes in the new Incorporated Societies Act and will be providing a detailed summary of this for the upcoming AGM in New Plymouth. The Society will be focused on responding to the required changes and we do not intend to change the objectives and powers of the Society unless required for legal reasons. As part of this the membership structure will not be changed and the regional structure will remain. We expect to present a draft revised Constitution to members in October 2023 with a formal discussion and hopefully approval at the 2024 AGM. As previously reported, to respond to the increased traffic to the Society's website and the amount of data stored online, Council approved a change to a medium performance webserver.

The Society currently has a few vacancies. You will have all received an email advising of the retirement of the Society's Secretary Lynne Anderson. We currently have a vacancy for a Councillor to replace Josie Galbraith and a Secretary to replace Lynne. If you wish to step up for either of these roles, please contact me or a Councillor.

Online Publications

The new pages on the Society's website for historical publications and occasional publications are starting to show their worth. Council has a list of historical publications which we will progressively work through to scan and upload to the webpage. The most recent addition to this page is Barrie Heather's 1966 classic, *A Biology of Birds - with particular reference to New Zealand birds*. Interest from specialist researchers on submitting occasional publications continues with the recent submission of: *A bird in the hand: A banders guide to ageing and sexing commonly caught birds in New Zealand* completed by Mike Bell and C Blue Bell-Bhuiyan. This is undergoing review prior to publication.

Catching up with Regional Representatives

I attended the online Zoom meeting of Regional Representatives which Auckland RR Ian McLean convened in late February. It was a real pleasure to catch up with some of the hardest working members of the Society and hear how things were happening around the country. Topics covered included the reviewing of *eBird* records, conference organising and safety on field trips. I also briefed the meeting on insurance matters and procedures around the execution of contracts.

New Zealand Bird Atlas Project

Dan Burgin has led a successful application to the Department of Conservation for a 30% discount on fees for Backcountry Huts and Campsite passes, and a 25% discount on Great Walk Huts and Campsites, and Sole Occupancy facilities. This is to support the New Zealand Bird Atlas project and will support members getting into backcountry locations. These discounts will last for the rest of the year and Dan will be posting details on the Atlas webpage and the Society's website on how to take advantage of them.

Our partnership with Toi Toi Wines continues with successful atlas expeditions being completed in Gisborne, Southland, and Northland in the first half of 2023. In Gisborne over Waitangi weekend, an expedition covered 30 Atlas squares with 69 species being recorded (see page 16). The Southland expedition in late February was helicopter-supported and explored the Eyre Mountains (see page 10). A particular aim of this expedition

was to reconfirm the presence of Rock Wrens in the Eyre Mountains. The expedition was a success as they recorded at least 35 Rock Wrens at 22 sites there; a really good result. You can read their trip reports with *eBird* checklists here:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/nz-bird-atlas-expeditions/>

2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund

The 2022 summary report has been prepared by the Society's Executive Officer, Ingrid Hutzler, and is now available on the website. In 2022, the Fund supported ten research projects covering work on a wide range of species from North Island Brown Kiwi and Weka to NZ Storm Petrel and Chatham Petrel. The research work supported by this fund occurs because of the ongoing generous support of the T-Gear Trust, which I would like to acknowledge as a highly valued partner of the Society.

2024 Field Camp for Young Birders

Otago Regional Representative Mary Thompson has been working with Rachel Hufton of the Aspiring Biodiversity Trust to hold a Field Camp for Young Birders at Makarora in January 2024. More details will be posted in forthcoming newsletters and on the website, but I have now seen the draft programme and I'm jealous. Makarora is a long journey but once you get there the range of ornithological activities is huge and Rachel has covered a lot of them in her programme (see page 19).

Solomon Islands

For those of you that follow social media, you might have noticed my travels in the Solomon Islands over a week in late April. I'm now playing catchup, but as a guest of Tourism Solomons I had a very quick introduction to the many birds of this part of Melanesia. The forest bird communities there are raucous compared to NZ forests, with lorries and parakeets frequently calling out from the top of the canopy. The boat transfers between islands were also interesting with shearwaters and terns in large groups seen regularly. I'm now writing up an illustrated article about my visit, but I can thoroughly recommend a birdwatching trip to the Solomon Islands as it is completely different: <https://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/>

Finally, by the time you read this the Society's 2023 Annual Conference and AGM in New Plymouth will be over and we will all have returned home. I'm looking forward to catching up with you all. It will be an AGM with an element of sadness for me as it will mark the retirement of the Society's Secretary, Lynne Anderson. The Society is successful as a volunteer-based organisation because of people like Lynne, who has been a most efficient and effective Secretary, and I have received great support from her over the last four years. Thank you, Lynne.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT



View of Kolombangara from Gizo, Solomon Islands: Bruce McKinlay.

2023 NZ Garden Bird Survey

Birds New Zealand members are once again asked to contribute to the annual Garden Bird Survey. Just choose any day between 24th June and 2nd July 2023 and spend an hour watching the birds in your garden. For each species, record the highest number you see or hear at any one time. The survey is led by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research and the instructions are here: <https://gardenbirds survey.landcareresearch.co.nz/>

Garden Bird Survey summary 2012–22

Manaaki Whenua has distilled data gathered by New Zealanders from almost 44,000 garden survey submissions received since 2012. Kererū counts show an 83% increase nationally over the last 10 years, but only 10% over the last 5 years. Piwakawaka (NZ Fantail) counts were up 55% nationally over 10 years. There was a shallow increase in Tūi counts nationally in the long term (30%) and short term (9%), with regional long-term trends showing a rapid increase in Canterbury (266%) and moderate increases in Taranaki (59%) and the West Coast (61%). Silvereye (Tauhou) data show this species' long-term slow decline nationally is now 12% compared to 10% last year. Korimako (Bellbird) numbers showed little change nationally over the past 5 years. There has been little change to Myna counts nationally, but their counts continue to show a rapid increase in Wellington over both 10-year (193%) and 5-year periods (248%) and they now show a rapid increase in Manawatū-Whanganui (49%), a moderate increase in Gisborne (30%), and a shallow increase in Taranaki (12%) over 5 years.

Starling counts declined nationally over the long and short term (13%, 5%). For the first time Chaffinch counts nationally showed a moderate decline over the short term (20%). Song Thrush and House Sparrow numbers nationally showed little change.

Making a donation

Birds New Zealand is working to ensure a better future for birds, but we also need your help. We are a registered charity (CC 41020) which means tax credits are available for donations made in NZ. You can donate in two ways:

* Deposit funds into our bank account: 02-0290-0164715-00

* or make a credit card payment online: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/donate/make-a-donation/#!form/Donation>

Demystifying bird mark-capture

At the recent Oamaru Penguin Symposium, the Banding Office gave a presentation to demystify the requirements of capturing and marking birds. The Certification System assesses the competency of operators and is required in addition to permission (Wildlife Act Authority). Best Practice Manuals and Standard Operating Procedures provide written guidelines. If these are not in place for a particular activity, separate Animal Ethics approval is needed. Finally, all associated data need to be stored in a central repository (FALCON Bird Banding System) under a registered project that outlines the purpose of capturing and marking birds. For more info email bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz

Leaving a Gift in your will

Leaving a Gift 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 for our birds. 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, bonds, shares, 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



▲ Orange-fronted Parakeet, Hawdon Valley: Adam Colley.

Orange-fronted Parakeets re-established in Arthur's Pass National Park

Last summer the first Orange-fronted Parakeet/Kākāriki Karaka chicks hatched and fledged in the Hawdon Valley in Arthur's Pass National Park since 2015. Seventy-three were released into the Hawdon Valley last breeding season, with most birds pairing up and breeding. With only 360 individuals left in the wild of this critically endangered species, news like this gives new hope for the species recovering. The most recent release saw 19 birds introduced to the valley on 1 April. Earlier releases took place in November and December 2022 and January 2023. The releases were part of the recovery programme for the species, run in partnership by Ngāi Tahu and the Department of Conservation. The birds released were bred in captivity at Isaac Conservation & Wildlife Trust, Orana Wildlife Park, and Auckland Zoo.

New Members

Welcome to: Eleanor Price; Claire Webb; Glenn Aguilar; Susan Jackson (Auckland); Pam Aitken; Darren Chinnery; Matthew Mcdougall (Bay of Plenty); Ken Hughey; Glenis Kydd; John Dunlop; Alison Johnston; Holly Thompson; Miach Pomare; Ben Ackerley (Canterbury); Robbie Darby (Hawkes Bay); Giuliana Ferrari (Manawatu); Sue Henley; Michelle Clark (Marlborough); Hammond Lakisa (Nelson); Janina Carla Nakajima Castro; Guthrie Wakelin; Helen Fairlamb; Te Arawhetu Waipoua; Pascale Lubbe; Finn Stoneman; Andrew Vikhert; Yanyan Bai; Ben Carson (Otago); Annemieke Kregting (South Auckland); Miranda Wells (Taranaki); Shane Robinson (Waikato); Joel Gilbertson (Wairarapa); Monique Warring; Shannon Ritter; Murray Douglas; Stephen Antony (Wellington); Richard G Nichol (West Coast).

Donations

We thank the following for their donations: Ian Armitage, Eddie Bright, Elizabeth Taylor, Stephen Sharp, Marshall Clark, Nicky Churton, Sue Henley, Kiri Langvad, Kerry Walshe, Jonathan Klawitter, Darren Chinnery, Sian Luckie, Lara Gilks, G. Blair McLeod.



▣ *Kumimanu fordycei* illustration by Simone Giovanardi.

Largest-known fossil penguin species described from NZ

Recent NZ fossil discoveries have revealed a remarkably diverse assemblage of early penguins. A new study published by a global team including Alan Tennyson of Te Papa describes nine new penguin specimens from the late Paleocene (55.5–59.5 million years ago) Moeraki Formation in the South Island (*Largest-known fossil penguin provides insight into the early evolution of sphenisciform body size and flipper anatomy*. *Journal of Paleontology*, Feb 2023).

The largest specimen is a new species, *Kumimanu fordycei*, which may have been the largest penguin species that ever lived, with mean estimates of a live body mass in the range of 148kg to 159kg. A second new species, *Petradyptes stonehousei*, represented by five specimens was slightly larger than the Emperor Penguin. Two small bones represent an additional smaller unnamed penguin species.

The massive size and placement of *Kumimanu fordycei* close to the root of the penguin evolutionary tree provide additional support for a scenario in which penguins reached the upper limit of their body size very early in their evolutionary history, while still retaining numerous features of the flipper.

Twenty protected seabirds killed on single fishing trip

A commercial fishing vessel killed 20 protected New Zealand seabirds in a single fishing trip, according to a news report published by Stuff in February 2023. The vessel was fishing for Southern Bluefin Tuna (itself an endangered species) in May 2022. The crew had reportedly used the legally required mandatory measures intended to reduce seabird deaths, but an on-board observer reported that the vessel's crew had failed to meet the legal requirements while fishing. Eight White-chinned Petrels, three Grey Petrels, three Buller's Albatross, one Southern Royal Albatross, one Westland Petrel, and two White-capped Albatross got tangled up in the vessel's longlines and drowned.

Each of the seabird species killed is listed as vulnerable, threatened, at risk, or from a declining population. A month before that, another commercial fishing vessel targeting Southern Bluefin Tuna reportedly killed 18 White-chinned Petrels and Buller's Albatross over a four-day period.

Orange-fronted Parakeets thrive on Blumine Island

DOC reported in March 2023 that Ōruawairua/Blumine Island in Marlborough Sounds now has a population of around 90 Orange-fronted Parakeets (OFPs). The last translocation there was in 2012, with a group of OFPs that had relatively diverse genetics. Now, one of the key priorities for the work on the island is to translocate eggs to captive-rearing facilities where the newly-hatched chicks can grow up to become new breeders. It is hoped that this will inject more diversity into the captive breeding programme. A more diverse captive population means the OFPs used in future releases to the mainland are more likely to thrive and establish a healthy population.



▣ 'Ninihi' in nest cavity: Jake Osborne.

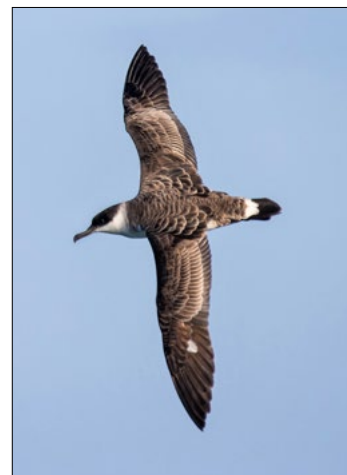
Understanding Kākāpō egg trait variation and viability

One of the barriers to Kākāpō recovery is that their eggs have an unusually high rate of hatching failure. Many of these failed eggs are undeveloped, with no visible embryo, and were previously thought to be infertile. We know that while some eggs are infertile, most contain microscopic fertilised embryos that died only a few days into development. We do not currently know why early embryo deaths are so common in Kākāpō, nor whether infertile eggs and embryo deaths are caused by the same factors. With assistance from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2021 this project aimed to further illuminate why Kākāpō eggs fail by determining the fertility status of unhatched eggs from the 2022 breeding season. Ultimately, these data will help us identify the environmental and individual causes of poor fertilisation and developmental problems in Kākāpō.

Although not as productive as 2019, the 2022 breeding season was a successful year for Kākāpō and the recovery programme, with a total of 142 eggs laid across Whenua Hou/Codfish Island, Anchor Island, and Te Kākahu-o-Tamatea/Chalky Island. Of these, only 60 eggs hatched (42%), a lower fraction than in 2019, but chick survival was exceptional: 55 fledged. The remaining 82 eggs either died as visible embryos (17, 12%) or did not develop (65, 46%); these undeveloped eggs were the focus of this project. For the 2022 breeding season we decided to preserve the undeveloped eggs for laboratory analysis by freezing them whole. Compared to preserving yolks in formalin, freezing allows for genetic material from any embryos to be isolated, without obstructing the goal of assessing egg fertility. Freezing eggs whole was also an easier sampling process during fieldwork on the Kākāpō islands. We successfully froze all 65 undeveloped eggs for later analysis: 30 from Whenua Hou, 26 from Anchor Island, 9 from Te Kākahu-o-Tamatea. We are working with leading experts on egg fertility in the UK to transport and analyse the undeveloped eggs. At present the laboratory work to assess fertility has not been completed, but we expect to publish these results later in 2023.

Dr JAMES SAVAGE

▣ Birds New Zealand Otago member Oscar Thomas hit the jackpot on 23rd March when he found and photographed this rare Great Shearwater during a Monarch Wildlife Cruises boat trip off the Otago Peninsula. "Today was a great lesson on how to stay composed as a tour guide in front of 37 paying passengers, but it wasn't hard for them to share my excitement either. This was the 13th record of Great Shearwater for New Zealand by my count, a species usually found in the Atlantic Ocean," he said.





▲ Left: male and female engaged in neck crossing, a behaviour that forms part of the Kiwi-Nui mating display. Right: group of three birds in a mating display. All birds had transmitters, but only some can be seen (orange arrow). F = female; M = male.



▲ Rangitāhua Kermadec Red-crowned Kākāriki, Macauley Island: Alan Tennyson/NZ Birds Online.

Hormonal and behavioural aspects of sex role reversal in Kiwi-Nui

Birds are known for their strong sexual dimorphism and males that are particularly eye-catching, from bright feathers to loud calls to enigmatic dances and nest building. These traits serve the purpose of securing a mate through demonstrating physical health, prowess and sets of skills that are vital in the species in question.

Most female birds, in contrast, sit in the nest and take care of their offspring, which requires them to look and behave in a way as to not be detected. The Kiwi-Nui/North Island Brown Kiwi is a species that is known to take this dynamic and invert it. Females are significantly larger than males in body size and have disproportionately longer bills, while males serve as primary egg incubators. Despite these indicators of inverse sexual dimorphism and parental behaviour in Kiwi-Nui, little research has investigated the inversion of sexual behaviours that would be expected to be found alongside these traits.

We have conducted Kiwi-Nui research on an island in the Hauraki Gulf for 19 years. We analysed 56 videos of Kiwi-Nui interactions collected between 2014 and 2015. From that data, 18 videos contained interactions between an identifiable male and female. Previous anecdotal observations and notes in papers presented showed how kiwi engage in a chase-and-tussle style interaction between each other, but did not provide context. Our analyses of our videos confirmed that these interactions happen a) between male and female birds and b) happen only within the breeding season (images above) and we propose that these are mating displays.

The behaviours observed include: bird following another bird (beak on back); grunting; grabbing at feathers; pulsing on feet; pivoting; tight circle chases; necks crossed; chest shoving; beak movement in front of face; kicking; bird falls; shoving bird from the side (beak over back); tapping other bird with beak.

Our results indicate that these behaviours are sexual in nature due to the timing and sex of the individuals involved. Observations of females leading the way in some of these interactions support the over-arching theory that Kiwi-Nui females have what humans would consider masculinised behaviour. This project would not have been possible without the generous support of the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2021. A giant thank you also goes to all the volunteers who make data collection possible, and to Katherine Strang for sharing her video footage with us.

CAITLIN McLEAD, MSc STUDENT, MASSEY UNIVERISTY PMR

50 more Kiwi-Nui for the capital

Fifty Kiwi-Nui/North Island Brown Kiwi were released into the wild in Makara hill country near Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington in May, sourced from Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari in Waikato. Capital Kiwi Project founder Paul Ward said the project represented a change in the way conservation is being done in terms of repopulating kiwi, and demonstrates that the future of conservation is in genuine partnerships between iwi, landowners, and local communities. The Capital Kiwi Project is a community initiative which works across 24,000 hectares to restore a large wild kiwi population in the south and west of Wellington. The area contains around 4,500 stoat traps, the largest such network in the country.

Reconstructing an accurate evolutionary history of kākāriki

Prioritising species conservation and over-stretched government funding is built on an accurate understanding of evolutionary relationships and taxonomy. Kākāriki (*Cyanoramphus* spp.) are spread throughout the Aotearoa New Zealand region, including the Rangitāhua Kermadec, Subantarctic and Rēkohu Chatham islands. While some kākāriki are of less conservation concern, the Kākāriki Karaka/Orange-fronted Parakeet (*C. malherbi*) is nationally critical and the subject of intense conservation efforts. Likewise, the nationally endangered Forbes' Parakeet (*C. forbesi*) would have become extinct through hybridisation with the Chatham Islands Red-crowned Parakeet (*C. novaezelandiae chathamensis*) if not for the efforts of DOC.

The evolution and taxonomy of kākāriki was seemingly resolved over 20 years ago. That work established, for example, that Forbes' and Orange-fronted parakeets are distinct from the Yellow-crowned Parakeet (*C. auriceps*), and a number of insular island populations of Red-crowned Parakeet (*nominata* *C. novaezelandiae*) were actually distinct species (e.g. Norfolk Island Parakeet *C. cookii*).

Birds, especially parrots, are known to have gene duplications within the mitochondrial genome, including the control region (CR). These duplications range from nearly identical to differing from the original sequences by as much as 80%. Contrary to previous assertions of a single CR in kākāriki (ie, no duplication), our preliminary modern and ancient DNA data indicate kakariki do in fact have a duplicated CR. The vital questions are, what is the nature of the duplication, how divergent are the two CRs, and has a mix-up of two divergent CRs been used previously to infer kākāriki evolution and taxonomy? Answering these questions could have serious implications for the conservation management of kākāriki.

We used funding from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2021 to characterise the CR duplications within kākāriki, and have started to reconstruct the accurate evolutionary history (and taxonomy) of *Cyanoramphus* using whole mitochondrial genomes and nuclear genotyping-by-sequencing (GBS). Our research has confirmed that a mix-up of two markedly divergent CRs was previously used to infer kākāriki evolution.

Using thousands of blood samples that we sourced from numerous collections, we have managed to assign robust metadata (eg. species, location) to several hundred samples. Our preliminary GBS data of nearly one hundred individuals covering the majority of kākāriki taxa shows most island populations are genetically distinct (eg. Reischek's Parakeet *C. hochstetteri*) but evolutionary relationships between taxa are likely to change. The situation on mainland NZ is more complicated, clouded by hybridisation. This has highlighted where we need to focus future research efforts to tease apart this story. Additional sampling by collaborators over the next year, including from Rangitāhua Kermadec Islands with Ngāti Kuri and Auckland Museum, will fill out the picture. Our ongoing research will provide vital data to help inform evidence-based conservation management of these important NZ taonga. We look forward to being able to provide a full update in the near-future on the biological heritage of kākāriki.

DR NIC RAWLENCE, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO



▲ Map of Upolu showing the survey route.



▲ New Caledonian Storm Petrel, NSW coast, Coral Sea, 1/5/22: Kye Turnbull.

Search for *Fregetta lineata* off Samoa

The Pacific Island Bird Conservation & Research Fund 2022 granted funds to charter a fishing vessel to survey at sea off Samoa on 2–3 November 2022 for the critically endangered New Caledonian Storm Petrel (*Fregetta lineata*).

We used fish oil as chum to attract seabirds to the vessel for identification purposes and photos, and recorded all species seen. We also helped upskill Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment and Samoa Conservation Society staff in seabird survey methodology and seabird identification.

We circumnavigated Upolu (see map) with chumming stations at two key locations, and counted and identified all seabirds within 300m either side of the bow. Species seen were:

Resident (*confirmed breeding Samoa*): Great Frigatebird (GRFB) – 6 (5 over Apolima Island); Red-footed Booby (RFBO) – 27 (seen at sea), also on nests on Apolima (not counted); Brown Booby (BRBO) – 35; Masked Booby (MABO) – 1; White-tailed Tropicbird (WTTB) – 10; Black Noddy (BLNO) – 48; Brown Noddy (BRNO) – 232; White Tern (WTTE) – 215; Bridled Tern (BRTE) – 17. Possibly breeding Samoa: Tropical Shearwater (TRSH) – 3 (Subsequent to survey, likely breeding); Wedge-tailed Shearwater (WTSH) – 58.

Visitors: Sooty Shearwater (SOSH) (NZ) – 6; Buller's Shearwater (BUSH) (NZ) – 3; Flesh-footed Shearwater (FFSH) (NZ) – 2; Mottled Petrel (MOPE) (NZ) – 10+; Black-winged Petrel (BWPE) (NZ) – 1; Unidentified petrels (PESP) – 3.

Our two-day survey did not turn up any storm petrels. We saw several Tropical Shearwaters along the southwest coast of Upolu, a species that has subsequently been found high up on Upolu (February 2023). First, a grounded bird at 600m asl in an urban area above Apia, and then subsequently, with calls detected in the same area suggesting this species at least is breeding on Upolu. With Tahiti Petrels confirmed breeding on American Samoa, which is 70km south-east of Upolu, it was a little surprising that we did not encounter any. Expedition members were: Chris Gaskin (NNZST), Karen Baird (SPREP), Vatapuia Maiava (MNRE), Aloma Black (SCS) and skipper Greg Hopping and crew Taatua (Troppo Fishing Adventures).

CHRIS GASKIN, NORTHERN NEW ZEALAND SEABIRD TRUST



▲ Pakahā in the hand: Alan Tennyson/NZ Birds Online.

Pakahā population on Long Island

Our goal was to start an annual survey of a Pakahā/Fluttering Shearwater translocation source-site on Long Island in Marlborough Sounds that has been used for multiple translocations to other islands since 1991. The colony there is on a steep cliff-face with loose terrain. To date, 157 artificial burrow boxes have been installed (2007, 2022) to improve translocation efforts and help monitor the population.

We planned to plot transects across the colony to determine natural burrow occupancy and compare occupancy rates with the artificial burrows. An October 2022 trip was planned during the optimal egg incubation period. Unfortunately, bad weather caused landslides at the colony site. An assessment after the slips was done in August 2022 which found 10% of the artificial burrows had been destroyed. Luckily, occupancy of the burrows during that time was low. In September 2022, we returned to fix and move dislodged boxes, and clear out nesting chambers.

Funding from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Project Assistance Fund enabled some Marlborough and Wellington members to travel there in October 2022 to conduct an artificial burrow occupancy rate survey, post damage. Another goal was to use mark-recapture to see if any previously translocated birds had returned to Long Island to breed. The banding of birds also provided a training opportunity for two members.

Artificial burrow occupancy has increased from 31% (2021/2022) to 44% (2022/2023). Despite a 10% loss in artificial burrows due to the slips, this is a marked increase. Natural burrows also occur among the artificial burrows throughout the colony and it is estimated that a significant portion of these were lost due to the slip as well. Birds trying to return to their destroyed natural burrows may have utilised the readily available artificial burrows, thereby increasing the occupancy rate. This was demonstrated when two out of the four boxes moved in September 2022 already had an incubating bird in them. There has also been some evidence of a delay in the breeding season, which caused 11 empty burrows in October 2022 (7%) to produce evidence of breeding during the January check. Of those, only 55% hatched into chicks.

The fragility of seabird colonies is an important factor when undertaking any long-term population assessment, and conducting transects across this terrain could be detrimental. Therefore, the decision was made to focus on artificial occupancy rates, rather than a comparison with natural burrows to minimise disturbance and dislodgement of further burrows.

We wish to thank the Marlborough Birds New Zealand members that volunteered their time for this trip, and Birds New Zealand for financial support to help enable this trip to occur.

Trip personnel: Keegan Miskimmin, Shane Cotter, Dan Burgin, Samantha Ray, Sara Larcombe, Bridie Kitchin.

Matiu/Somes Pakahā breeding success

Project Manager Shane Cotter reports that 34 chicks fledged from the Pakahā/Fluttering Shearwater colony on Matiu/Somes Island in Wellington Harbour last breeding season. A pair of Common Diving Petrels there also hatched and fledged a chick. The project started with the transfer of 237 Pakahā chicks from Long Island in the Marlborough Sounds to artificial burrows installed at Matiu/Somes Island 2012-2014.



2023 survey team photo: Darren Markin.



One of the 15 NZ Dabchicks seen: Darren Markin.

2023 South Kaipara Lakes NZ Dabchick survey

Every year on 25th April, Birds New Zealand Auckland members join with South Kaipara Landcare to do this survey. It was started in the late 1960s by Sylvia Reed (a previous OSNZ Auckland regional representative) and now covers 11 dune lakes and ponds between Muriwai and South Kaipara Peninsula.

We met at Shelly Beach at 9am to form up into 11 survey teams before heading to our respective sites. This year we had 27 participants comprising Auckland branch members, local landowners, South Kaipara residents, and Te Pukenga/Unitec students. All but one of the lakes are on private land so each owner was contacted in advance for permission to access their land.

We recorded a total of 15 NZ Dabchicks/Wewea at Waller's Ponds (4), South Head Lake (2), Marie Neverman Reserve (6) and Lake Kereta (3), more than twice the seven birds recorded by our 2022 survey, and a total of six Australasian Grebes, one more than recorded by our 2022 survey. Also notable were 2 Matuku/Australasian Bitterns and 44 Parera/Grey Ducks.

After completing our counts, we all met at a local resident's place for lunch, courtesy of South Kaipara Landcare – what's not to like about sandwiches and home-made scones with hot drinks to wash it all down! We are forever grateful to Susan for allowing us to meet at her place. Thanks to all participants, Gwenda Pulham for sharing her knowledge of past surveys, and South Kaipara Landcare for their long-standing collaboration.

DENISE POYNER, SURVEY ORGANISER



Nankeen Night-heron chick circa 18-days-old with a parent in *Macrocarpa* nest: Jim Norris.



Nankeen Night-heron chick, circa 45-days-old in the café garden: Jim Norris.

Nankeen Night-heron nesting colony at Upokongaro

The first observable Nankeen Night-heron/Umu Kotuku nests found in NZ have been reported in various birding forums. The following is a summary of the successes and failures of this important NZ nesting colony. In December 2022, a group of three breeding pairs of Nankeen Night-herons started building a group of five nests in a well-used roost tree, a Holm Oak that grows above the former carport of the 'Behind The Door On 4' café, Upokongaro. Two nests were abandoned and the other three produced three, one, and two chicks respectively, that have either fledged, or are almost ready to fledge. The youngest of the first three was not seen to fledge before it disappeared. The older two fledged successfully and were last seen flying down the Upokongaro Stream towards the Whanganui River on 14th March 2023. In the second and third productive nests in the Holm Oak, all three chicks are testing their wings in the manner that was seen prior to fledging by the earlier chicks.

A sixth nest was built in a nearby *Macrocarpa*, a known roost for a fourth pair of adults. On 5th February, this pair was seen mating by visitors from the USA (Michael O'Shea, *pers. com*) and the next day Michael O'Shea saw them starting to build a nest. The nest was constructed in the side of the tree facing the café garden tables, so progress could be watched by café clients as they drank their coffee. A group of local birders and bird photographers, Paul Gibson, Michael O'Shea, Ormond Torr, Peter Frost plus several others (some from as far as Lower Hutt and Auckland) were able to study the progress of this nest in comfort, without disturbing the nesting pair. The fortuitous siting of this *Macrocarpa* nest allowed continuous study of its progress. We were able to observe nest building, incubation, nest modifications, incubation changeovers, hatching, regurgitation of food and chick-feeding.

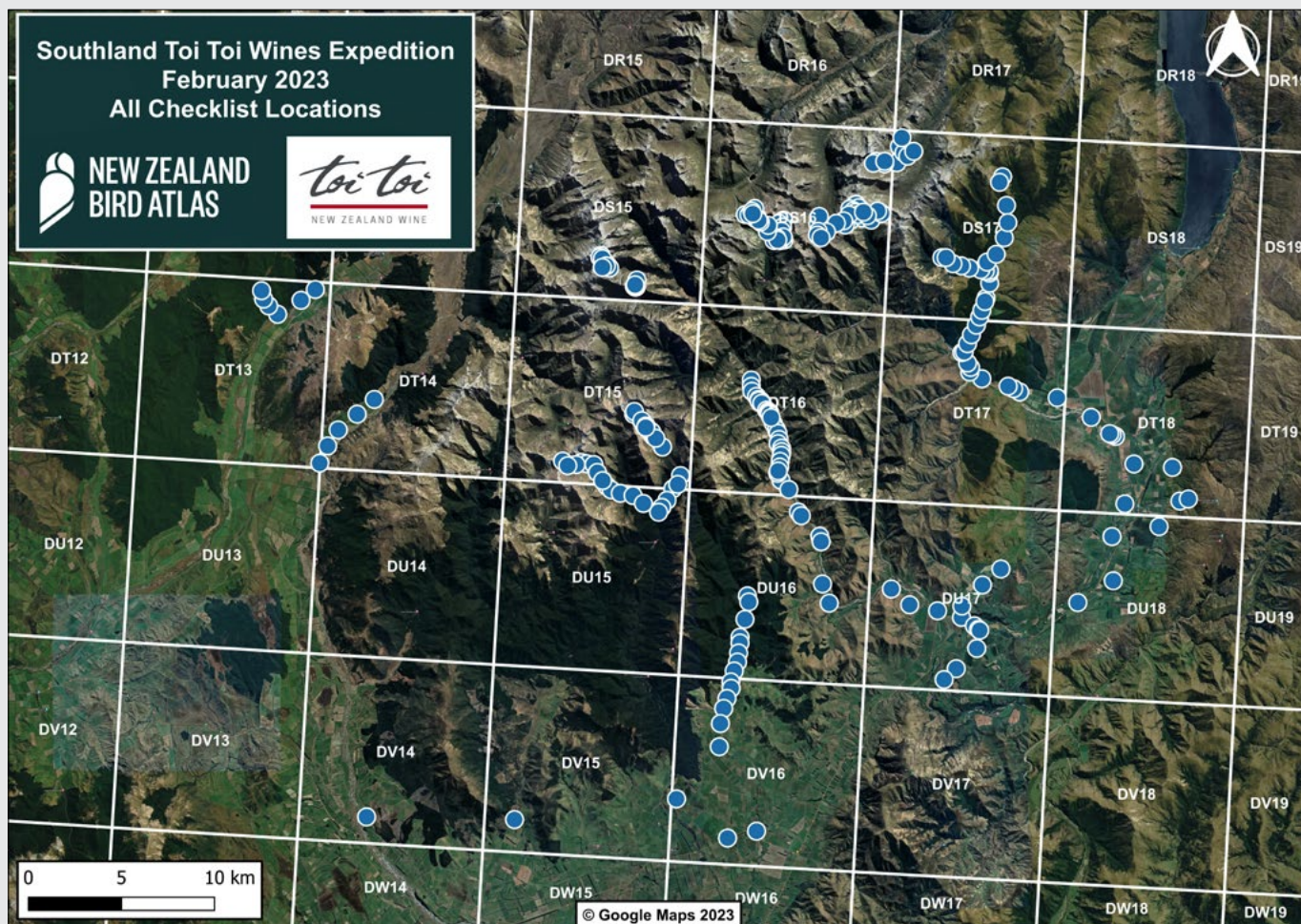
The parents appeared to abandon the youngster and it foraged alone among the plants and shrubs, apparently with little fear of people. Although it regularly flew back up to its nest, or the tree top, it was not seen again with its parents after 29th March. We were concerned it did not appear to be in good condition compared with previous fledglings and it might be vulnerable to predators as it was spending so much time foraging on the ground. It was seen being approached by a black cat, but it charged the cat aggressively and it was the cat that retreated in haste. (Nicole, *pers. com*). It might not be so successful if attacked by a stoat or weasel.

This juvenile has not been seen since 24th April, which is concerning and we fear it has met an unfortunate end. We will continue to monitor this colony, and look forward to next breeding season.

Link to a longer article with more photos:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Whanganui-Newsletter-2303.pdf>

JIM NORRIS



Taka Ra Haka Eyre Mountains Atlas expedition – in search of Rock Wrens

Nineteen keen Southland and Otago Birds New Zealand members gathered on the last weekend of February to survey birds in the alpine and valley habitats of the Eyre Mountains/Taka Ra Haka Conservation Park for the New Zealand Bird Atlas project. The main target species there was the endangered Piwauwau/Rock Wren, winner of Forest and Bird's 2022 *Bird of the Year* poll.

This extensive 65,000-hectare protected area south-east of Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu in Southland was chosen for the expedition because it was under-represented in the Atlas project. The Birds New Zealand Southland Branch received \$5000 in funding from Toi Toi Wines to help survey the area, supplemented by funds from the Southland Branch and Heliworks in Queenstown, which subsidised the flying costs to make the work achievable.

Ten teams surveyed a variety of alpine scree, rock fields, bluffs, subalpine shrubland, grey shrubland, and beech forest habitats, as well as riparian areas along rivers, streams and creeks, and farmland areas in the wider Oreti and Mataura River catchments.

Weather conditions were calm and sunny on the day that six of the teams were flown into the alpine area by helicopter to carry out their Atlas surveys, which included re-surveying as many of the sites where Piwauwau/Rock Wrens were found during a 2006-07 survey. There had only been a single Piwauwau/Rock Wren sighting reported there since that last survey.

The other four teams spread out at lower altitudes walking and driving to target under-represented Atlas squares. All the teams also over-nighted in the field which gave them the opportunity

to carry out nocturnal surveys. After coordinating the survey teams and expedition logistics, the planning team were greatly relieved that the weather turned out to be conducive, and that all the survey teams safely got into and out of the field.

A total of 305 separate *eBird* checklist counts were logged at 17 grid squares over the two days and a total of 41 bird species recorded. In total, 21 Piwauwau/Rock Wrens were found at 12 sites by four of the six alpine teams. The two teams at the north-east and south-west ends of the alpine survey area (see map) didn't find any Piwauwau/Rock Wrens, possibly indicating a reduction in the species' range or a reflection of time spent carrying out more widespread atlasing efforts around the historical sightings.

In addition, two Kea were heard calling which was pleasantly surprising as it is a species that was thought to have disappeared from the Eyre Mountains/Taka Ra Haka, which was once a stronghold for Kea. New Zealand Falcons/Karearea were also heard calling along with good numbers of Rifleman in some of the forested areas and, somewhat surprisingly, a single South Island Robin was recorded – another species not recorded there in recent years. A lone Ruru/Morepork was also heard calling at one of the alpine camp sites

The weather being mostly bright and sunny helped to make it a pleasant weekend of atlasing. Dawn Palmer, who surveyed one of the alpine areas, says that a highlight for her was a special encounter with a Bellbird. "I was surprised to see Dunnocks up at about 1300-metres above sea level among the boulders,



Anna Harris photo by Joseph Bliss.

Dracophyllum and Snow Totara where I had really hoped to find Rock Wren and more NZ Pipits, but the most memorable sighting was a male Bellbird in the Silver Beech forest of Firewood Creek. It was relentless in its singing. The song seemed a bit different to the usual repertoire. As we watched and listened, more Bellbirds started to gather around it until there was at least eight flitting through the trees overhead. Females and possibly juveniles emerged from the surrounding forest, silhouetted at times but moving quickly through the trees above while the male sang in the middle of the growing gathering. We watched for ages and recorded the song – now attached to the checklist.”

“The finger of mixed Silver and Mountain beech forest in Firewood Creek is now partially surrounded by a Douglas Fir plantation but it supported most of the small native birds one could expect there so it was wonderful to see and hear them. That was also the only site I recorded NZ Falcon; its distinctive call heard over the canopy just seemed to cap the moment off so well,” says Dawn

Southland member Glenda Rees was part of a team that surveyed grid squares in the lower areas. She says she recalls how a passing local farmer stopped to ask them if they were okay. “Her face lit up when we explained what we were doing and she said she would go home and look up the NZ Bird Atlas online, so I’m sure she is a potential new atlaser! She also told us that she had recently seen a Tui on her property for the first time ever. Then, while we were talking, two NZ Falcons flew overhead.”

“A highlight for me was when a male NZ Tomtit entertained us while we were having lunch. This wee bird was a delight, curious as though it had never seen humans before. For that Atlas square over the weekend, I think we doubled the previous number of checklists and the number of atlasers,” says Glenda.

Kevin Joyce is Founder and owner of Toi Toi Wines. He says that his family is passionate about 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 NZ Bird Atlas means we can help to survey backcountry parts of New Zealand. It’s such a valuable citizen science project.”

Acting Southland Regional Representative Pete McClelland says, “Local farmers were fantastic in giving us access, and our volunteers were so dedicated. We can see how much they care about our birdlife.”

He says that in the past, surveys like this only checked whether certain species were present or not. “Now, biologists can extrapolate the findings so they can understand population numbers and movements. The data collected will be used by the Department of Conservation and conservation advocacy groups, such as Forest and Bird, and will support improved bird conservation and research for years to come.”

“As the project enters its last year, it’s important that we can access remote parts of New Zealand,” says Birds New Zealand President Bruce McKinlay. “The Eyre Mountains are remote, so the partnership with Toi Toi Wines was crucial in enabling our members to access the area. The Eyre Mountains Atlas expedition has provided up-to-date information on the distribution of the Piwauwau/Rock Wren and will help lift Atlas coverage overall.”

Lastly, thanks to all the Birds New Zealand members who participated in the project, especially the planning team who put in many hours of work, along with sponsors Toi Toi Wines and Heliworks, and the adjoining landowners who supported the expedition.

You can see all 305 expedition checklists here:

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/tripreport/108939?view=checklists>

EYRE MOUNTAINS ATLAS EXPEDITION TEAM
(DAWN PALMER, PETE McLELLAND, SEAN JACQUES & JOE BLISS)



▲ NZ Tomtit: Glenda Rees.



▲ New Zealand Falcon: Les Feasey/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Rock Wren: Joseph Bliss.



▲ Bellbird: Greg McKenzie/
NZ Birds Online.

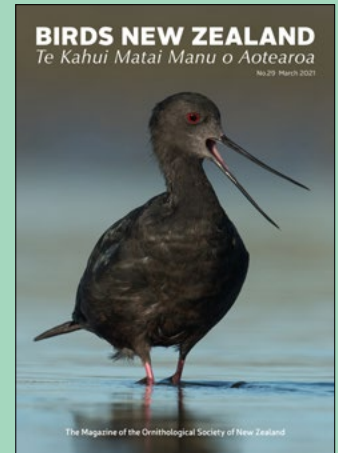
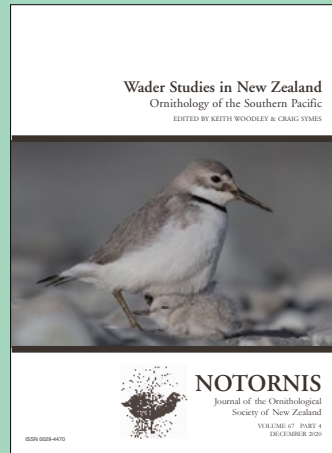


▲ L-R: Anna Harris, Katie Ward-Allen, Mike Hargraves,
Pete McClelland and Joseph Bliss: Dawn Palmer.



▲ L-R: Mike Hargraves, Katie Ward-Allen, pilot Phil Rive.
Photo by Dawn Palmer.

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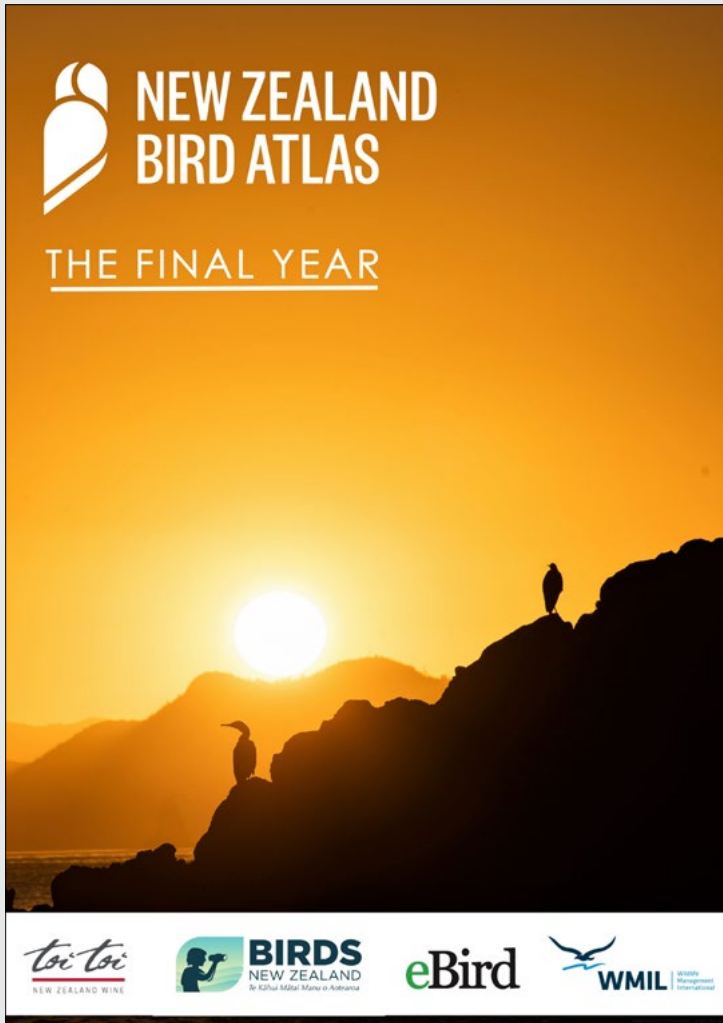
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▲ Dawn Palmer photo by Pete McClelland.





Region	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Total
Auckland	88.54	93.75	97.92	96.88	100
Bay of Plenty	67.33	66.67	73.33	59.33	84
Canterbury	77.37	83.95	84.98	76.13	94.65
Chatham Islands	53.12	90.62	93.75	93.75	100
Gisborne	65.31	62.24	71.43	65.31	87.76
Hawke's Bay	70.19	80.12	85.09	62.73	96.89
Manawatu-Wanganui	81.28	88.94	88.51	85.53	97.45
Marlborough	79.41	80.88	94.12	86.76	99.26
Nelson	100	85.71	100	100	100
Northland	69.31	78.22	77.72	80.2	92.08
Otago	69.25	84.48	89.94	81.9	96.84
Southland	59.38	74.52	87.74	71.39	95.67
Taranaki	96.63	95.51	92.13	94.38	100
Tasman	75	87.96	92.59	90.74	100
Waikato	90	93.45	93.45	89.31	98.62
Wellington	94.29	94.29	96.19	92.38	98.1
West Coast	53.48	71.43	83.15	67.77	94.87
TOTAL	73.11	81.96	87.04	78.59	95.7
TOTAL	21195	27685	35090	26293	110262

Region	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Total
Auckland	2713.456	3494.069	3411.788	3042.635	12662
Bay of Plenty	759.403	651.929	593.618	418.456	2423
Canterbury	2590.452	3625.023	3837.748	3015.861	13069
Chatham Islands	96.575	428.27	686.137	435.551	1647
Gisborne	228.365	258.887	269.951	205.113	962
Hawke's Bay	463.251	1203.855	922.224	395.805	2985
Manawatu-Wanganui	1974.397	2176.533	2298.906	1405.624	7855
Marlborough	1398.253	1812.202	1728.014	2185.799	7124
Nelson	453.087	418.292	440.998	415.393	1728
Northland	867.353	1061.183	1191.385	1218.693	4339
Otago	1764.711	2497.328	3031.505	2503.401	9797
Southland	1007.596	1957.801	4210.606	1727.578	8904
Taranaki	766.171	1248.468	847.892	1406.897	4269
Tasman	757.253	1097.738	4180.325	978.983	7014
Waikato	2097.603	1925.638	2405.909	2855	9284
Wellington	2350.744	2905.897	3161.201	2049.353	10467
West Coast	905.99	921.564	1871.562	2032.839	5732
TOTAL	21195	27685	35090	26293	110262

Year Five – The Final Countdown

We are very excited to be entering the fifth and final year of the NZ Bird Atlas project! After four years there is still plenty of atlasing to be done, but the challenge of the final year excites us. We hope you are keen to help us ensure that this project has a strong finish. There are still many ways to tease out areas to increase our collective Atlas effort and find new spots for some more atlasing adventures. This is the year for undertaking more intensive atlasing as a community, to support each other across regions, and ultimately to 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 will continue to need cross-regional communication and support, and the effective use of the various specialised tools available both within the NZ Atlas eBird portal itself, plus a few additional tools the Atlas team have generated. Many of these can be found within the 'Explore' tab on the NZ Atlas portal, the most valuable of which is the Atlas Effort Map. Use this to find those areas with very little or no effort (day and/or night), plus low species counts, or checklist counts. We have found this to be immensely useful for planning targeted atlasing adventures, big and small.

Scientific value

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-surveyed areas that are the most

beneficial, particularly in those 'less desirable' areas such as the vast agricultural landscapes in NZ. 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. If atlasers continue to commit to following the best practices, and venturing into new and under-surveyed habitats, it will go a long way towards helping us fill in the gaps in the Effort Map.

Breakthrough after breakthrough

Continuing to enter data across the entire country, to spread our efforts and spend time in all the Atlas squares, remains one of the highest priorities. To date the NZ Bird Atlas has received over 340,000 complete eBird checklists, submitted by over 1,422 Atlasers. That's an average of 85,000 per year over the four years the project has been going. A total of 3,093 of the 3,232 grid squares now have some data in them year-round, even if it is only five minutes! Nearly 110,500 effort hours have gone into the project so far (which equates to nearly 4,600 days' worth and over \$2.6 million dollars if paid out at the Living Wage rate). The Atlas community has done an amazing job so far of helping contribute a vast amount of valuable data to the NZ Atlas portal.

We still have plenty of atlasing to do as a community over the next 12 months to bump-up effort (day and night) across the grid, with a particular focus on those under-surveyed areas, and targeting the 139 Atlas grid squares that still have no data – if you fancy a challenge!

Toi Toi Wines expeditions

Thanks to the generous support of Toi Toi Wines, three Atlas expeditions have been funded in 2023. Two of them are reported in detail on page 10 (Southland) and page 16 (Gisborne). The Northland expedition took place recently in April and a report will be made available soon. Future expeditions are on the horizon, and we need as many passionate atlasers as possible to support those efforts, so please do sign-up! Keep an eye on the NZ Bird Atlas website and Facebook page for more information. A big thank you again to Toi Toi Wines for providing funding!

DOC Tier 1 2022/23 season data

The 2022/23 DOC Tier 1 bird monitoring season's data will be uploaded to the Atlas dataset, helping to fill in some of these harder to reach areas. One of the key aspects of the Atlas is attempting to survey the entire country, which 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 New Zealand's land area on behalf of all New Zealanders and undertakes fantastic biodiversity monitoring throughout these areas. The collaboration on this continues to provide a huge amount of support for the Atlas project, increasing the Atlas community's coverage both spatially and temporally. As always, the Atlas team would like to say another huge thank you to the Tier 1 data management team for their continued support of the Atlas project and to the field staff who have gathered so much vital data.

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. Using the Effort Map, you can quickly gauge which squares have no effort, or very little in them. Use the dropdown menus to select individual seasons and plan your atlasing trips from there. You may well be able to colour in that square for the first time that season, or even in the entire Atlas project!

Winter season 2023

The next four seasons will be the final four-season cycle of the Atlas, and each season we will be sharing the 'zero' effort square maps to highlight those that are still without data for that particular season. The winter season maps can be found on the Atlas portal News page and the Facebook page. There are 869 grid squares without data around the country, so we really want to encourage the Atlas community to help us to gather data in those under-surveyed areas. You might be surprised to see areas that haven't been visited in Winter, and there are plenty of areas that need some extra day and night time effort. The shorter days can be a bonus for getting out after dark to survey for nocturnal species, and not necessarily having to stay out late. Use the Effort Map to hone in on these squares to give them some Winter Atlas love!

Large data uploads

Do you run regular bird surveys and have lots of data sitting in spreadsheets that has yet to be uploaded to the Atlas via *eBird*? Have you considered uploading it to the NZ Bird Atlas *eBird* portal? If you need our assistance to upload large amounts of bird observations, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We would love to help you upload your datasets.

New to the Atlas?

Are you a new Birds New Zealand member, or an active birder yet to submit your first NZ Bird Atlas checklist to *eBird*? Whether



▲ Kōkako pair: Darren Markin.

you're seeing common birds or endangered species, the Atlas project and *eBird* thrives on the enthusiasm and engagement of devoted contributors who make atlasing via *eBird* part of their regular birding activities. The next 12 months is your opportunity to get involved, or to inspire others to increase their efforts. While atlasing into the far reaches of the bush is encouraged, a lot of value can still be gained from regular counts on private property, along agricultural back roads, and sections of coastline. Regular counts in your garden, over lunchtime walks, or when visiting friends/family all add up. The Atlas, and *eBird*, welcomes scientifically valuable counts from anywhere, so even a complete checklist in a car park, or a quick survey from your doorstep will help contribute valuable data to the wider dataset.

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. The Atlas team provided an Atlas workshop at this year's Annual Conference in New Plymouth, and if you would like the Atlas team to run a workshop or Q&A session, or to provide regional effort maps, please get in touch: nzbirdatlas@wml.co.nz

Birding after dark

If the sun has set and you still haven't submitted your daily list, don't worry it's not too late! We encourage atlasers to submit nocturnal counts. Nocturnal counts can provide immense value as night time birding is heavily under-represented due to the understandable preference for birding during the day. Undertaking regular night time counts can help us understand where and when atlasers are finding Ruru/Morepork, Little Owl, kiwi, and other species active at night. While it can be easy to get 'skunked' (ie, find no birds) on nocturnal counts, please remember this is absolutely fine! Lists with zero species are still incredibly important, and very welcome as they help show what is not being detected at a specific location. In this instance, we advise that you simply add checklist notes clarifying that you found no species.

A big thank you!

As always, we can't thank the NZ Bird Atlas community enough for contributing so much time and effort to the project. Citizen science projects like this thrive on the dedication of volunteers. We are confident that the Atlas community will gather a scientifically valuable Atlas dataset in this five-year period. We also know that this project has really strengthened the birding community in New Zealand, and we hope you continue to want to be a part of that community.

Anyone with an interest in birds and basic identification skills can get involved with the project via *eBird*. Your bird observations are of immense value; whether they be from the alpine tussock, forested lowlands, farmland, urban centres, or even your own backyard, it all counts and helps inform bird research and conservation.

This is the final 12 months to add to the impressive legacy that this and the previous two Atlas projects have created. We can't wait to see what we can achieve together. Happy Atlasing!

NZ BIRD ATLAS TEAM



▲ Atlas expedition team at Tikapa Marae: Malcolm Rutherford.



▲ Keegan Miskimmin and Malcolm Rutherford route planning.

Tairāwhiti Gisborne Atlas expedition – from cuckoos to emus

Tairāwhiti Gisborne has been an under-surveyed region for the NZ Bird Atlas project, so it was of great excitement that a group of enthusiastic atlasers was able to travel there over Waitangi weekend. Their expedition would not have been possible without funds generously donated by Toi Toi Wines, who are helping to fund at least six Atlas expeditions across the country to help gather data and fill in gaps.

Based out of Tikapa Marae, the group fanned out and surveyed surrounding areas using public access routes and roads that were safe to drive after recent flooding. They were lucky to have some great weather, and their enthusiasm was clear from the outset.

Regional Atlas Coordinator Malcolm Rutherford says, "It was very satisfying to know as I walked beaches or surveyed along roads that we had teams out across the survey area all putting in a huge effort recording the birds. We pretty much covered every road that wasn't closed between Tokomaru Bay and Hicks Bay and much of that was completely unsurveyed."

"Being based at Tikapa was a real treat too. What a great introduction to 'the coast' it was for those who hadn't been to the region before. I was also pretty chuffed that visitors to the region got to see our East Coast 'moa' [feral Emu] wild on the river flats."

Expedition participant Isabel Castro says, "For me, the most astonishing finding of the atlasing trip was finding coastal paddocks converted into impromptu wetlands covered with thousands of wetland birds, something quite rare in Aotearoa. We saw the largest groups I have seen in New Zealand of Canada

Geese, several duck species, Greylag Geese, Spur-winged Plovers, and Pukeko mixed with hundreds of Starlings, an impressive sight despite the largest numbers being introduced species."

"The best moment was an encounter with two Shining Cuckoos amongst Bellbirds, NZ Fantails, and Tui song by a small stream sandwiched between regenerating native forest and a pine plantation on a small farm - magical."

Each evening the group consulted the Atlas Effort Map and topo maps to plan the next day's activities to best target all the possible habitats and balance spending time in each square with covering more ground. At the end of each day there was a sense of shared community when everyone gathered to discuss their observations and enjoy a meal together at the marae.

By the time the three-day expedition came to an end, there was an incredible amount of effort and number of bird species compiled into the Atlas *eBird* portal. Many within the group continued to add checklists on their way home, helping to fill more of effort gaps. With expeditions such as this, it is always impressive to see how much can be achieved by a small group over a short period of time. Key statistics were as follows:

- * 16 atlasers submitted 423 *eBird* checklists (1-7 February 2023).
- * 30 Atlas grid squares received data.
- * Over 70 hours of atlasing effort was logged by expedition members.



▲ Shining Cuckoo: Michael Szabo.

▲ Tairāwhiti Gisborne atlasing expedition location photos by Malcolm Rutherford.



▲ Emus: John Kyngdon.

* 69 species recorded, including Whio/Blue Duck, Koekoeā/Long-tailed Cuckoo and Ruru/Morepork.

Huge thanks to Malcolm Rutherford (Gisborne Atlas Coordinator), Keegan Miskimmin, Geoff Foreman, Raewynn Foreman, Stephen Legg, Kirsten Olsen, Pauline Priest, Ray Priest, Isabel Castro, Yi Luo, John Kyngdon, Bryan McCavana, Erin McCavana, and Amanda Hunt for all their atlasing efforts. Many thanks also to Graeme Atkins for letting the group stay at Tikapa Marae. And finally, thanks to Toi Toi Wines for enabling this

expedition by providing funds to offset the costs.

This expedition also provided an opportunity for many of the group to go atlasing in a new part of the country and several new atlasers were upskilled in bird identification and using *eBird*.

You can see all 423 expedition checklists here:

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/tripreport/105073>

NZ BIRD ATLAS TEAM & TAIRAWHITI GISBORNE ATLAS EXPEDITION TEAM (MALCOLM RUTHERFORD, GEOFF FOREMAN & RAEWYNN FOREMAN)



▣ Beach patrolling, Ngunguru Sandspit: Melva Ward.

Beach Patrol Scheme 2022 Annual Report

A new user-friendly design for the Beach Patrol Scheme was introduced on the Birds New Zealand website in October 2022. Observers are now able to submit beach patrol records through the Society's website from a computer at home, or a mobile phone. A revised "Beach Patrol Reporting Form" replaces the cards and sheets previously used which can be downloaded from the Society's website. Observers can also upload photographs of dead birds - helpful for confirming or for requesting identification from experts. Using the new procedure nearly 300 new records were submitted by members up to 31 December 2022.

Integration of the 1951 to 2019 Beach Patrol records into the new database continues and will, from 2023, enable comprehensive analyses of data over a 70+ year period to be made. The Scheme's objectives and Convener role description were amended during 2022 and approved by Council. The Society expresses its gratitude to Lloyd Esler for providing consistently effective support as the Scheme's Convener between 2007 and 2021; thank you Lloyd for a job well done. Lloyd Esler reported that 2022 Beach Patrol records showed a slight increase in bird recoveries and total distance patrolled, and acknowledged the dedication of Patrick Miller for his efforts in patrolling Northland beaches. Four dead birds were found tangled in fishing lines (Sth Black-backed Gull, Australasian Gannet, Little Penguin, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross). Unusual species reported were a rosella, a Cattle Egret, a Brown Booby and White-naped Petrel. A Matsudaira's Storm Petrel (Muriwai, 27/5/22) was a first-time Beach Patrol record. There were two notable 2022 beach wrecks. 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, CONVENER

Records Appraisal Committee 2022 Annual Report

RAC Secretary Elizabeth (Biz) Bell continues to provide timely and efficient administrative support to the committee and submitters. Paul Sagar also continues to provide independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members, as a co-opted RAC member (8 times in 2022). The online UBR reporting system continues to be the main source of UBRs received. This was migrated to the Society's new website late in 2022. 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 RAC in a single year (124 in 2018). Of these 123 UBRs, 109 (89%) were accepted by the RAC. Three new species were added to the New Zealand list (Black Tern, Black-naped Tern and Matsudaira's Storm Petrel).

The online database of UBRs now has a new URL (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/rare-birds/>) and along with supporting systems, has worked well since the transition. 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.

A paper reporting on the 210 RAC decisions from 2021-22 will be published in *Notornis* later in 2023. I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow RAC members (Andrew Crossland, Ian Saville, Ian Southey Alan Tennyson) for their efficient support during 2022.

COLIN MISKELLY, CONVENER



▣ Field Camp location, Makarora/Wilkin Valley: Rachel Hufton.

2024 Makarora Field Camp for Young Birders

A Field Camp for Young Birders (14-18 years old) will be held from 8th-12th January 2024. Led by Aspiring Biodiversity Trust with Birds New Zealand, it will be based at Makarora, near the head of Lake Wanaka on the eastern side of the Haast Pass, adjacent to Makarora River. The programme includes mist-netting, bird banding, 5-minute bird counts, predator control, river bird survey, acoustic survey for bats, and more. It will also be a chance to learn about geophysiography, biodiversity monitoring, and threat management from practising experts.

See Wrybill/Ngutuparore, Black-fronted Tern/Tarapirohe, Black-billed Gull/Tarapuka and Banded Dotterel/Pohowera breeding on the braided river habitat. The nearby beech forest provides habitat for Brown Creeper/Pipipi, Mohua, Kākā and Ruru, and remnant populations of Rock Wren/Pīwauwau, Kea and Whio live in the alpine areas. To register your interest and get more details, including costs, please send us an email: info@aspiringbiodiversity.co.nz



▣ Black Petrel/Tāiko, Aotea/Great Barrier Island: Michael Szabo.

New Black Petrel breeding sites on Aotea/Great Barrier Island

The main breeding site for the vulnerable Black Petrel/Tāiko on Aotea/Great Barrier Island is on the upper slopes of Mount Hobson/Hirakimata, where a reported 880 pairs breed in a colony. Circa 25 pairs also breed within nearby Glenfern Sanctuary. A new survey using two wildlife detector dogs in January 2023 has found signs of breeding at a further two localities on the island, around Mount St Paul and the Needles Rocks inland from Oruawharo Bay on the east coast. Eleven active burrows were found, with adults, two chicks and an abandoned egg recorded.

The survey was done for Oruawharo Medlands Ecovision, a local community group, by Joanna Sims (with dogs Rua and Miro) of DabChickNZ. In her report she writes: "There could be more burrows here as this was not an extensive search. The most predominant place burrows located were deep inside Puriri trunks or in rocky crevices, that would be nearly impossible to locate without a dog." The newly found breeding birds are at risk of predation by feral cats and pigs. The only other island where Black Petrels breed is Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island, where 620 pairs were reported in 2016.

JOHN COOPER, ACAP SECRETARIAT



▲ Auckland Branch children's guided walk, Cornwall Park (17/4).



▲ Michael O'Shea, Paul Gibson & Ormond Torr watching Nankeen Night-heron chick, Upokongaro, Whanganui (24/4): Peter Frost.

FAR NORTH

Kiwi Coast Project Northland reports that this year's annual February Brown Teal/Pāteke flock count found a pair on the Puruerua Peninsula on the north-west side of the Bay of Islands and a pair on Motoroa Island, but no flocking sites in the Bay of Islands. This means that Pāteke numbers from past local releases there appear to have dwindled to fewer than 10 birds. In the past, Pāteke was the most widespread and abundant water bird species in New Zealand but introduced predators and habitat loss mean there are now only 2000–2500 birds left, mostly in Northland and Aotea/Great Barrier Island.

So, it was welcome news that a translocation of 20 juvenile Pāteke took place on 13/3 at The Landing site near the tip of the Puruerua Peninsula as part of Pest Free Puruerua and Kiwi Coast's work to restore the biodiversity of the Puruerua-Mataroa Peninsula, Bay of Islands. The release site is located within an area with an intensive Stoat trapping network that covers 90% of the peninsula. A feral cat trapping programme has also been implemented there to help provide a safe habitat for Pāteke, but unfortunately the last few feral cats are proving difficult to capture.

Kevin Matthews reports seeing 9 Shining Cuckoos in his garden near Kaitaia feeding on Bamboo Moth larvae from January to March, that eventually left in early April. He also reports seeing 15 Cattle Egrets at Unahi on 23/4. Lastly, Ian McLean and Trina Smith report seeing a Whiskered Tern in non-breeding plumage foraging along the reed beds at Lake Ngatu near Waipapakauri on 30/4.

– ISABELLA GODBERT

NORTHLAND

The weather in Northland has been very wet for a long time with many tracks and access points closed after Cyclone Gabrielle. The weather also appears to have been responsible for bringing down some subtropical species to the Northland region. For example, a Frigatebird spp. with "pale head and pale patch on chest" was reported flying above the surf beach at Pataua South on 14/4.

In February, Ilse Corkery talked to the branch about her Ph.D. research on Fairy Prions and Tuatara on Tokopourewa/Stephens Island. There was a lot of discussion about how the study was carried out and how much heat prion could generate to be advantageous to the Tuatara. In March, we had our AGM at which Ilse stepped down as regional representative (RR), and we discussed how we would continue as members were to be absent at various times.

In the end, various RR tasks were assigned to different people, and we all agreed that we wanted to maintain regular branch meetings.

In April, Tony Beauchamp talked about the results of a monthly survey between April and November 2022 of 17 Whangarei wetlands to assess where Grey Ducks and grey-like ducks were located. The study found that Grey and grey-like ducks favoured some wetlands, but generally, Mallards now predominate in most wetland types near Whangarei.

The lake on Lake Road, Tikipunga, is a popular spot for many visiting birdwatchers to observe Australasian Little Grebes. Four pairs fledged 13 young during the past breeding season from August to May. This species has also been recorded in 3 of the surrounding wetlands for the first time. The 5/3 Petrel Station pelagic trip from Tutukaka out past the Poor Knights Islands organised regularly by Scott Brooks recorded 2 Black-winged Petrels and a new trip record of 225 Grey Ternlets, including the discovery of a new roost site on an offshore pinnacle. The 25/4 trip recorded 3 Westland Petrels, the first record of this species on one of these trips as well as the 49th tubenose seabird species recorded on one. Scott has recently set up this new website:

<https://www.thepetrelstation.nz/>

– TONY BEAUCHAMP

AUCKLAND

We had quite a varied schedule of field trips, surveys and events in March–April. High water levels made quite muddy work of our Puweto/Spotless Crake monitoring at Orangihina Wetland in Te Atatu on 12/3, with 7 keen participants recording 2 Puweto, 1 Banded Rail and 7 Fernbirds. Our Ambury Park Guided Walk on 19/3 was well-attended with over 30 participants. Highlights included circa 200 Red Knot (many showing breeding plumage), 350 Wrybill, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, 1 Whimbrel, 150 Royal Spoonbills and 58 Caspian Terns. A post-breeding flock count at Omaha Spit on 5/3 recorded 215 Northern NZ Dotterels.

Our branch was invited to take part in the Cornwall Park school holiday programme on 17/4. We ran a guided bird walk that attracted 25 children under 12 years old and their parents. A very pleasing aspect of the day was the extent of birding knowledge that many of the children had. Some of them definitely knew their Yellowhammers from their Greenfinches! Birds seen included an impressive 60 California Quails.

Atlasing was a huge part of our Pouto Point Field Trip on 18/4, visiting grid square W61 in Northland which had not been done before.

An excellent day out for our 22 participants included a return cruise with Kaipara Cruises from Shelly Beach to Pouto Point, followed by 4WD and ATV transport provided by local Steve Nathan and his whanau to visit Lakes Whakaneke and Mokeno on private land. We found various waterfowl at the lakes including pure Parera/Grey Duck, Australasian Shoveler and Grey Teal. An impressive 29 NZ Dabchicks were present at Lake Mokeno plus 4 at Lake Whakaneke. Habitat there looked ideal for Australasian Bittern so in future we may plan an overnight trip to look for them. Birds seen from the boat included dark and intermediate morph Arctic Skuas, Tara/White-fronted Terns and Kuaka/Bar-tailed Godwit.

The annual South Kaipara Lakes NZ Dabchick survey took place on 25/4 in association with South Kaipara Landcare. Thanks to Denise Poyner for her excellent organisation of this survey and her report on page 9.

Special permission was granted to patrol Muriwai Beach on 15/3 where we found 1 Sth Black-backed Gull, 1 White-fronted Tern and 1 Cook's Petrel. Our 18/3 Omaha beach patrol found 2 Little Penguins. Rarities have been relatively few. A Black-fronted Tern was seen by Arthur Bensana at Manukapua/Big Sand Island on 27/3 and a Kotuku was seen by Dion Pou at Orangihina in Waitemata Harbour on 6/4.

– IAN McLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

In March, Keith Woodley gave us an entertaining talk on the history of the Pūkoro Mirānda Shorebird Centre, recounted in his recently published book, "In Search of Champions". Many Birds South Auckland members have a long association with Pūkoro Mirānda. In April, Jeremy Painting spoke about his trip to Africa last June, with photos of the huge variety of birds and mammals to be seen there. He also mentioned the negative impact that poaching and deforestation has on many species there.

A collaboration between Birds New Zealand members and Auckland Council resulted in a very successful forum about Nth NZ Dotterels, held at Ambury Park on 17/4. Members also joined the annual post-breeding flock counts of Nth NZ Dotterel and Banded Dotterel at various locations in the greater Auckland region during March. Counts were also done at several locations around the Coromandel Peninsula after a few years absence, with good numbers recorded. The highest counts were at Matarangi Spit, with 205 Nth NZ Dotterel on 10/3 and 170 Banded Dotterel on 15/3. Many of the circa 700 Bar-tailed Godwits



▲ Australasian Crested Grebe, Nelson WTP (5/4): Paul Griffiths.



▲ Red-tailed Tropicbird, Onemana, Coromandel (31/1): Dean Campbell.

there had fattened up and were in breeding plumage, ready to migrate to Alaska. Among them was 4RBBY, who was banded and had a transmitter attached as a juvenile at Foxton Beach on 13/11/19. She moved to Matarangi in 2020, made her first trip to Alaska in 2021 but arrived too late to breed, and only travelled as far as Papua New Guinea last year. She left Matarangi on 14/3.

A Shore Plover with transmitter and bands WR-OR was seen at Whitford on 4/3. It had been released on Motutapu on 28/2. An Eastern Common Tern was seen at Kawakawa Bay on 11/4. A sighting of 4-month-old Nth NZ Dotterel 'JAR' at Kaiaua recently is only the second time a bird flagged on Auckland's West Coast has been seen on the east coast. Two White-winged Black Terns were present over the ponds at Pukorokoro Miranda from January to April, and a Whiskered Tern was in the same area in March and April. Many birds were found dead after an outbreak of avian botulism at Whangamarino, Pukorokoro Miranda and Paeroa WTP. Species affected have mostly been ducks, teals and Black Swans. Birds seen at Kidd's Shellbank recently included 4 Red-necked Stint, 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 15 Whimbrel, and a Red Knot fitted with a transmitter at Pukorokoro Miranda 2 weeks earlier. - SUE FROSTICK

WAIKATO

Our March speaker was a member who showed us a homemade video of a trip to Antarctica and the Subantarctic Islands. Mark Lammas, a local Biodiversity Ranger spoke at our April meeting about his involvement with the Maungatautari Ecological Trust. He was heavily involved with the successful reintroduction of a self-sustainable, genetically unique population of western North Island Brown Kiwi to the maunga, having worked closely there with ecologist Chris Smuts-Kennedy. Mark also trained and worked with Bella, a specialist kiwi detector dog.

There was a significant black water event leading to an outbreak of avian botulism in north Waikato wetlands from late summer to early autumn. Fish & Game staff and volunteers and DOC staff collected around 1,500 dead or dying waterfowl. The main species impacted were Mallard, Grey Duck, Black Swan, Grey Teal and Australasian Shoveler, with small numbers of a much greater number of other species. This site is/was a stronghold for Australasian Bittern. The black water event started in Lake Waikare, the location of a large breeding colony for several species of shag. We don't know the total number of birds that were affected because

of the large area involved with a myriad of waterways and dense vegetation.

Caiden and Simon Binzegger reported seeing and hearing Fernbird at Lake Ngāroto, and seeing a Black Noddy and a Pomarine Skua off the coast at Waitete (Coromandel Peninsula) on 23/4. Other reports include a late-leaving Shining Cuckoo (26/4) and a deceased Long-tailed Cuckoo (19/3). More Royal Spoonbills are being seen away from the coast, especially in the wet paddocks around rural Waikato including Paeroa, Ngāroto and Te Kuiti, and Kaka are back for the winter in the Waikato.

Russell Cannings reports a mixed flock of Red-billed and Black billed gulls seen feeding in a paddock around the Tahuna and Paeroa Road, an Eastern Barn Owl near Hamilton (10/4), and a rare sighting of a Pied Shag flying over Morrinsville. A couple of interesting beach wrecked birds have been found at Onemana, both after severe weather: Salvin's Albatross (4/1) and Red-tailed Tropicbird (31/1).

- KEN WEDGWOOD

TARANAKI

Five of us gathered at Mahood-Lowe Reserve for our February field trip. We have visited this QE2 Trust site south-west of New Plymouth near the mountain previously, but this time birds were scarce with only a few Whiteheads, Bellbirds, Tui and Grey Warblers seen. Only Kereru were out in force, with at least 9 seen. Also on the plus side, the wild blackberries were delicious.

At our March meeting I reported back on the recent RRs Zoom meeting. Our field trip was a walk alongside Herekawe Stream on the western outskirts of New Plymouth ending on a beach in Nga Motu Marine Reserve. We managed a reasonable species list with Kereru, Swamp Harrier, Sacred Kingfisher, and assorted passerines in adjacent paddocks. Looking out to sea we saw a skua harassing a flock of White-fronted Terns. From there we drove west and did another walk alongside Tapuae Stream, which is the western boundary of the marine reserve. Introduced songbirds frequented the paddocks including a California Quail. Three NZ Pipits was a good find, and despite all the people and dogs on the beach there were 3 Caspian Terns and a variety of gulls. Our beach patrols have turned up little of interest. However, Steve Purdon found a record of a beach-wrecked Spotted Shag at Okato via iNaturalist, a species with only a few previous records in Taranaki.

We held our AGM at our April meeting, including a financial report from our Treasurer. We have 29 financial members and all incumbents were returned to their respective positions.

A lovely sunny day in mid-April saw a group of us at Lake Rotokare, by far the most popular choice among the post-conference field trips. There has been a heavy fruiting of Kahikatea and birds - especially Tui, Bellbird, and Tieke - were most active and vocal. A high-flying NZ Falcon was seen, a Spotless Crake heard, and much to the delight of one of the older members, Hihi were also seen clearly. NI Robins were numerous and there were Pateke on the lake, but NZ Tomtits were hard to find. We saw a total of 30 species. Fingers crossed it will be like this on June 5th. Lastly, 3 of us have worked out a plan of attack for the Global Big Day on 13/5. All we need is for the birds to cooperate and we should achieve a good list.

- PETER FRYER

WHANGANUI

The focus of local birders during the past few months has been the Nankeen Night-herons breeding at Upokongaro. Sightings of young birds in recent years, some only a few weeks post-fledging, at several locations along the Whanganui River, including Upokongaro, have shown that they are breeding successfully, but only 1 active nest had previously been seen. That was in November 1995, near Hiruhārama/Jerusalem. So, finding a small colony of at least 4 pairs nesting in the grounds of the 'Behind the Door on 4' café provided an ideal opportunity to learn more about their nesting behaviour locally. Jim Norris' article on page 9 describes this event in more detail.

Jim has been the leading light in this study, having developed a deep interest in the species over the past few years. He spent many hours at Upokongaro where, with the help of several others, principally Paul Gibson, Michael O'Shea and Ormond Torr, he gradually pieced together the details. The activities and enthusiasm and the photos posted online by this group created a kind of 'mass effect', attracting increasing numbers of others, both locally and from further afield, to come to see and photograph the herons. The many hundreds of photos taken and posted online, and the information shared among these observers, has helped detail the chicks' development and outcomes. This illustrates the value of bird photography and the enthusiasm of photographers in studying some facets of birds' lives. We could all do more to foster this approach.

Beyond Upokongaro, interest focused on the departure of the northern hemisphere migrants from the Whanganui Estuary and the passage of local migrants from the South Island to their North Island wintering grounds, including a smattering of Wrybills and small flocks of Royal Spoonbills. Large numbers



▲ Little Egret, Lake Forsyth, Canterbury (22/4): Adam Colley.



▲ Nelson Branch field trip, Lake Matiri, December 2022: Jane Meiforth.

of White-fronted Terns (937 counted from photos on 1 occasion) and several records of Black-fronted Terns (identified with the help of photos) added to the mix. Paul Gibson paid particular attention to the departure of AJD, 'our' male Bar-tailed Godwit, spending his 15th successive summer on the Whanganui Estuary. He normally migrates around 25/3. This year, he and 2 other brightly coloured males left the estuary overnight on 23/3, apparently flying first to Foxton Beach. Jesse Conklin, who was monitoring godwit departures there at the time, reported the sudden appearance of 3 well-coloured males on 24/3, one of which had a white flag, thought likely to be AJD. These birds departed the same evening.

- PETER FROST

HAWKE'S BAY

A 'Farewell the Godwits' event was held at Te Whanganui-a-Orotū/Ahuriri Estuary on 26/2. This was the third such joint event organised by the Ahuriri Estuary Protection Society and Birds New Zealand Hawke's Bay, with a couple of 'Welcome the Godwits' joint events held previously. Despite Cyclone Gabrielle dispersing the normally circa 200 godwits that would have been seen, good birdwatching was had by all. Ten members joined our March field trip walking along Muddy Creek to the Tukituki River mouth, where they saw various waterfowl, shorebirds and seabirds. In April, a couple of carloads drove to Pekapeka wetland, newly reopened post-Cyclone Gabrielle. Although no rails, crakes, or bitterns were seen, we spotted a good variety of duck species, plus some Weweia/NZ Dabchicks.

Royal Spoonbills continue to expand their range in Hawke's Bay, with a flock of 7-8 seen in a paddock in Central Hawke's Bay in January, and new nesting colonies now known from Anderson Park, Lake Whatumā, and the Waikahu wetland constructed behind Horseshoe Lake.

Remarkably, a Whio/Blue Duck was seen on 3/3 in the industrial area of Hastings on Omaha Road behind a large warehouse. This was about two-and-a-half weeks after Cyclone Gabrielle hit Hawke's Bay, and the poor Whio was probably wondering how it got so far from home! In April and May, an Australasian Little Grebe was present for several weeks at Muddy Creek in Clive, first found by Marg and Wayne Twyde, which is thought to be the first sighting of this species in Hawke's Bay. Also of interest was a Long-tailed Cuckoo on Bluff Hill in Napier.

Lastly, a few of our members have been involved in local efforts to monitor Banded Dotterel nesting success at 2 local sites. The

project got underway in September 2022 along the Bay View and Clive beachfronts. A list of volunteers worked in teams of 2 on a weekend roster to find and monitor nests. This had a double advantage, with the volunteers learning about the behaviour of nesting dotterels and contributing valuable knowledge about the survival of this key species, while also educating the public about the dangers posed by off-lead dogs, 4WD vehicles on beaches, and other hazards to the birds.

- BERNIE KELLY & THALIA SACHTLEBEN

WAIRARAPA

Our first outing of the year was a walk along the Woodside to Featherston trail including the new bicycle bridge across the Tauherenikau River. The birdlife was noisy and active with loud contributions from Aus. Magpies and Spur-winged Plovers plus sightings of Kereru, Tui, NZ Fantail and Grey Warbler - and some good blackberrying spots.

We were lucky to secure a day-trip to Mana Island in March with our skipper Mike Jacobsen and his boat Sgt Pepper. Five of us were warmly greeted there by Geoff de Lisle and Dallas Bishop. We completed the island circuit walk including a picnic with great views. Highlights included encounters with resident Takahe, and snatched sightings of Fernbird and Whitehead. The blizzard of Bellbird and Yellow-crowned Parakeets was impressive, and a more unusual sighting was a Shining Cuckoo.

Our April trip was a walk in cool misty conditions around the Kiriwhakapapa Loop Track in the Tatarua Forest Park. We were particularly on the lookout (and listen out) for NZ Tomtit and Rifleman. We heard 3 NZ Tomtits in the bush and then found 1 waiting for us on our return to the car park that posed for photos. No Rifleman were recorded but 1 of us has since encountered them on a track further up the hill. Kereru were constantly seen and heard with a rough total of 15 recorded. There were also plenty of Tui and Bellbird with much discussion and practice in making the IDs from their calls.

Unusual birds reported in the last few months include a pair of Cattle Egrets on the Tauherenikau Delta, and the puzzling sighting of a Weka by the side of West Lake Road in southern Wairarapa. The Wairarapa Moana Wader Survey is now in the capable hands of Nikki McArthur and was successfully completed in March. Some of the more interesting numbers recorded were 1,194 Pied Stilts, 363 Banded Dotterels and 338 Black-billed Gulls.

- OLIVER DRUCE

MANAWATU

It has been fairly quiet in Manawatū this autumn. There was a credible daylight sighting of an Eastern Barn Owl at Linton army camp near Palmerston North, and small groups of Rainbow Lorikeets were also seen in Linton that warrant attention in case they persist in the wild. Along the coast, the semi-resident Little Egret has been showing well at the Manawatū Estuary since 19/2, where an Australian Gull-billed Tern was seen from 9-17/4. What was likely the same bird was seen 10km north at Himatangi Beach on 29/4. My most unexpected personal sighting recently was a flock of Goldfinches deep in the Ruahine Range forest canopy, presumably feeding on beech seed.

- PHIL BATTLETT

WELLINGTON

Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington members have been busy again this quarter! The Pūatahanui Inlet survey is in full swing, adding a fifth decade to this impressive dataset. Those who wish to join in with this amazing long-term effort can do so by contacting Ian Armitage (ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz). We have also started another Matiu/Somes Island survey, revisiting sites that were surveyed 20 years ago! To join in, please contact Shane Cotter: (heather.shane@xtra.co.nz). Additional survey efforts are now taking place on Kāpiti Island together with mana whenua.

Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington Branch is also continuing its long run of successful 'hybrid' meetings combining face-to-face and Zoom. This quarter's meetings have included talks on the Birds New Zealand Research Fund (Graeme Taylor), Takahē genomics (Alex Verry), and Mana Island restoration (Colin Miskelly). I'm truly proud of how active our region is!

Next to these formal surveys, members have also been out and about, enjoying some of the Australian vagrants that have graced the region, including an Australasian Little Grebe found at Pharazyn wetlands in Waikanae by Duncan Watson and Dianne Parker on 6/4, a Little Egret present at Ohau Estuary and Foxton since 19/2, and an Australian Gull-billed Tern present at Foxton from 9-17/4 that was refound by Ian Armitage at Himatangi Stream Estuary on 29/4. Black-fronted Terns were still being seen migrating up the Kapiti Coast in late April and along the south Wellington coast in early May. Storms have also brought some real goodies to the coast, with a Juan Fernandez Petrel and 4 Long-tailed Skuas seen during a land-based sea-watch from Cape Palliser being the absolute highlights.

- JOHANNES FISCHER

NELSON

Twenty people attended our February meeting to see our first Zoom presentation, which was given by Marlborough regional representative Pat Crowe who spoke to us about the many birding opportunities in our neighbouring region.

The Nelson Boulder Bank Red-billed Gull survey of December 2022 conducted by David Melville and drone owner Chris, using software "DotDotGoose", recorded about 2,188 nests. When compared with the 2015 survey conducted by Pete and Ingrid Hutzler who recorded 761 "active nests", this suggests a likely increase in the number of breeding birds there.

At our March meeting Paul Griffiths gave updates on the Fernbird project, where there is some concern around the impact of last year's floods on the monitored population, and on a recent field trip to Motueka Spit by Nelson members, including videos and photos.

Rebecca Bowater and Paul Griffiths recorded the first record of an Australasian Crested Grebe in Tasman for 50 years, a single bird that we found at Nelson wastewater treatment plant on 5/4. A Fairy Prion was seen off the Boulder Bank by Paul Fisher on 2/2, an unusual record for that location. Lastly, a vagrant male Hardhead from Australia was found by Warwick Allen at Nelson wastewater treatment plant on 24/4 which stayed until 29/4, long enough to be seen by various members from near and far.

- PAUL GRIFFITHS

MARLBOROUGH

In late February Mike Bell hosted a Swamp Harrier banding session in rural Marlborough. About 20 cage traps were set around a couple of vineyards near the Wairau River and checked regularly over 2 days. Seventeen people joined over the course of the weekend and we caught a total of 46 harriers (29 new birds and 17 recaptures). It was a great opportunity to upskill some raptor banding with everyone taking part having the chance to hold or band birds. We also took measurements from birds and learned about using various measurements and characteristics to age and sex birds, as well as recording moult scores.

Five people attended the March field trip to Grovetown Lagoons to see the putative Chestnut Teal that has been resident for several months now. The bird was seen within the first few minutes of setting off, but we continued to complete the loop around the lagoon anyway and saw 6 Black-fronted Dotterels feeding at the old sewerage pond over the back.

In April, 8 members visited Lake Jasper on private property in the Awatere Valley. The lake has not yet been covered for this Atlas and we had a perfect day for birding. Seven NZ Dabchick were seen on the lake consisting of 2 pairs and 3 juveniles, another indication of the continued expansion of breeding range for NZ Dabchick in the 'Top of the South'. Another highlight was seeing several hundred Paradise Shealducks.

Also in April, we hosted our first Birds New Zealand Marlborough Branch evening talk with Mike Bell presenting on his seabird work out on the Forty-Fours Islands in the Chatham Islands. It was an impressive turnout with 24 people showing up to hear Mike speak and ask plenty of questions about this unique work he

does in such a remote place. After the success of the first evening talk, we plan on continuing them in future, particularly over the months with long nights.

Outside of our organised field trips, many local members continue their Atlas efforts everywhere they go and making special efforts to visit under-surveyed grid squares. Only 1 of the 136 Marlborough grid squares still has no effort and we are working towards gaining access to the area to remedy that.

- PAT CROWE

CANTERBURY

Over the last few months, we have had a presentation by Fraser Gurney about his tracking study of Black-fronted Terns, a Zoom meeting with Ariel-Micaiah Heswall about threats to seabirds from the sensory perspective, and a Zoom presentation by Kurien Yohannan entitled 'Wildlife Photography, Painting with Light'.

A recent survey at Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere recorded a variety of migrant species including Bar-tailed Godwits, Pacific Golden Plovers, Red-necked Stints, a Marsh Sandpiper, an Eastern Little Tern, and some White-winged Black Terns. During March at least 11 White-winged Black Terns were seen at Cooper's Lagoon/Muriwai and 3 Little Egrets were reported by Andrew Crossland at Lake Forsyth (27/4).

During April a Northern Shoveler was seen again at Pegasus Wetlands along with a juvenile NZ Dabchick, and a Sanderling and a Little Egret were reported at the Ashley Estuary. A NZ Falcon has recently taken up residence in the Ilam Gardens at the University of Canterbury and a Marsh Crane was seen at the Wigram Retention Basin. Lastly, a Greater Sand Plover was photographed by Ben Ackerley at Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere on 6/5.

- SAMUEL AMARIS

OTAGO

Continued good weather has enabled plenty of fieldwork for the Atlas project. Our Autumn coverage is currently at 283 squares (out of 248) so hopefully, with another Autumn season still to go, we can get close to 100% coverage. Some Otago members joined with some Southland members in the Eyre Mountains over a weekend in late February, in a combined Rock Wren/Atlas expedition, where good coverage was achieved. Another trip to the Clarks Flat area filled in some Atlas gaps in an easily overlooked locality.

As part of the annual mid-April Wild Dunedin festival, local members were joined by about 40 members of the public at Tomahawk Lagoon, where telescopes were set up to enable an appreciation of the birdlife there. Our monthly meetings have also been well-attended, with recent speakers' topics including birding in the Subantarctic Islands, Derek Onley speaking on his experiences from a lifetime of ornithology, and Rachel Hufton summarising her bird counts in the Makarora/Mount Aspiring areas.

Pelagic trips off the coast of Otago continue to produce interesting records, though perhaps the seabird highlights were recorded closer to shore, with a rare sighting of a Great Shearwater from MV Monarch. Footage of a rare Leach's Storm-Petrel was captured on

the albatross colony webcam at Taiaroa Head, while Reef Herons have been noted at various widespread locations and an Australasian Bittern was photographed on a farm near Balclutha. Moulting Erect-crested Penguins and Fordland Crested Penguins have been reported from several locations along the Otago coast, a long-staying Hudsonian Godwit was seen at Kaikorai Lagoon and then Aramoana, and a Kaka was reported from Mosgiel in February. Lastly, the annual Australasian Crested Grebe count on Lake Hayes recorded 243 individuals.

- RICHARD SCHOFIELD

SOUTHLAND

It has been a busy time in Southland, starting with a Chestnut-breasted Shelduck at Te Anau sewage ponds on 10-11/1. A Little Whimbrel was seen at the New River estuary high tide roosts 3 times between 11/2 and 5/3. This could have been the same bird that was seen at Riverton in February 2021 and Awarua Bay in December 2021. An Erect-crested Penguin found ashore at Waituna beach on 13/2 close to the site where a King Penguin was recorded late last year. This was 1 of at least 4 reported around the country at the time.

Two Arctic Skuas were seen harassing White-fronted Terns and Red-billed Gulls at Awarua beach on 14/2. White-winged Black Terns are being recorded regularly around the region, including 2 at Waituna on 15/2 and 2 at Oreti Beach/Waimatuku mouth on 15/3. An Arctic Tern was seen at Wakapatu beach near Riverton on 26/3. On 22/2 an Oriental Dotterel was found in a paddock near Waituna Lagoon that stayed at the site for 4 days. A Terek Sandpiper and at least 1 Curlew Sandpiper were present at Awarua Bay over the past quarter period and were joined, at least temporarily, by a Grey-tailed Tattler.

A Little Egret was present at Lake Te Anau in mid-April until it was found predated, probably by a falcon, at the end of the month. In the same period, Little Egrets were also recorded at Stewart Island/Rakiura and Waipapa beach, and at least 5 others elsewhere around the country.

Four Antarctic Terns, 1 Arctic Tern, 565 Broad-billed Prions and 1 Wilson's Storm Petrel were reported at-sea west of Stewart Island by Oscar Thomas over 14-15/4, during a University of Otago marine survey. Two Gull-billed Terns were reported at Awarua Bay on 28/4, the first record of this species in Southland since the first NZ record of successful breeding at New River Estuary in 2021.

Over the weekend of 25-26 February, 18 Southland and Otago members undertook a NZ Bird Atlas expedition in the Eyre Mountains in northern Southland. Sponsorship from Toi Toi Wines and Heliworks in Queenstown allowed 6 teams to be flown to the tops to revisit Rock Wren sites last surveyed in 2006/2007 where they recorded all birds encountered, including during overnighting at each site. Another 3 teams surveyed lower areas at the same time. See full report on page 10.

- PETE McCLELLAND

Our regional newsletters are posted online here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/resources/regional-newsletters/>

Reviews

Takahē: Bird of Dreams

Alison Ballance

Potton & Burton – RRP: \$59.99



The story of the 1948 rediscovery of the *Notornis* or Takahē (a.k.a. rainbow chicken) is widely-known but the subsequent 75 years of research and conservation perhaps less so. This richly illustrated 320-page hard cover book (26 x 21cm) offers a wide-ranging account from its original Māori name of Takahe to its rediscovery and subsequent efforts to secure the future of the species by the Wildlife Service, the Department of Conservation and its Takahē Recovery Programme, Ngāi Tahu, various community groups and charitable societies (including Birds New Zealand and Forest & Bird), university researchers and museum staff, and countless volunteers. Several maps and 140 mainly colour photos also provide a fascinating visual account of the birds, the research, and the field work.

The book presents an absorbing narrative, starting with compelling chapters on the story of Dr Geoffrey Orbell and the original field search team that successfully sought and found Takahe in the Murchison Mountains in November 1948, and the Māori history of Takahē, which gives the original name of Lake Orbell as Kōhaka Takahea ('nests of the Takahē'). Important milestones and innovations are also recounted, including the early field research camps in Takahē Valley where its breeding and basic ecology was first documented, and the publication of the first scientific papers in *Notornis*, the journal of Birds New Zealand.

There are chapters on the establishment of captive breeding facilities at Mt Bruce and Burwood, early deer control in the Murchison Mountains, and the first Takahē management plan (1978-1982), which the author says was a prototype for NZ threatened species recovery plans. Other interesting developments include the first use of radio transmitters, hand-puppet feeding of captive-reared chicks, and egg incubators.

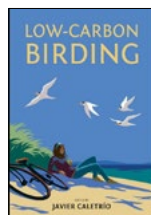
In later chapters the story shifts to the establishment of new populations including the first translocations of Takahē to pest-free offshore islands, the vaccination of birds being moved between populations, and the historic first translocation of Takahē to Goulard Downs on the mainland. The penultimate chapter looks forward to more translocations at new release sites in the Greenstone and Rees valleys, and potentially elsewhere, including near the capital.

This is an excellent, expertly written book in the same mould as the author's earlier award-winning volume on the Kākāpō. Its inspiring story of Takahē conservation success will hopefully become more widely known as a result of her new book.

Low Carbon Birding

Javier Caletrio (Editor)

Pelagic Publishing – RRP: \$35



This new (22 x 15cm) book is as much a set of short essays about different ways of birding and studying birds as it is about their carbon 'footprint'. Written by 30 different authors, they range from the pleasures of local 'patch' birding to the value of long-term studies at a single location. While their geographic focus is Europe, the essays mainly describe the birding and research possibilities offered by the combined use of ferry, rail and bus networks, and/or cycling and walking, with several of them stressing the importance of factoring carbon impacts into field work planning.

Obviously, there are more public transport options for birders and researchers in Europe than in NZ, so if NZ birders or researchers want to travel overseas it inevitably involves flying – unless you join an organised boat trip. That said, there is now an increasing number of rail and bus options on offer in some parts of NZ. Most of the points made in these essays aren't exactly 'rocket science' but the authors give plenty of food for thought alongside practical examples and tips. If this subject is of interest, there's also a useful website: <https://lowcarbonbirding.net/>

Swarovski CL Companion 8x30 RRP: \$2,090

My first impression of these compact 8 x 30 binoculars field testing them in a variety of habitats and light conditions on a recent visit to Australia was that their razor-sharp optics have a reach well above their modest size (12 x 13cm) and weight (490g).



Starting at Mt Lewis under a cloudy sky I was able to see the muted green and blue hues on a pair of Blue-faced Parrotfinches even though they were perched about 30m away in low light. As the cloud burned off and the light increased, I found myself higher up the track marvelling at the radiant golden glow of a male Golden Bowerbird as it preened on a perch in the dense rainforest and then glided down to work on its bower.

An early search of some mudflats just after dawn presented the tricky task of identifying various wading birds. Despite the gloom I was soon able to tell the tattlers from knots and the whimbrels from godwits. Later, in the full glare of the sun, the brighter, whiter form of a rare Nordmann's Greenshank stood out in a flock of Great Knots. Another tricky search involved trying to find a Marbled Frogmouth at night 40m above in rainforest at Gt Sandy National Park. With the help of a torch, I was able to see its distinctive orange eyes and long facial bristles, which confirmed the ID. Having a three-metre close view focus also meant that I was able to identify small, highly mobile White-eared and Black-faced monarchs among flocks of fantails and whistlers inside the forest during the day.

The most challenging viewing conditions occurred during a three-day Coral Sea pelagic trip where the sky shifted from bright sun to darkening clouds, and the sea conditions ranged from relative calm on a modest swell to strong winds and choppy waves on a big swell. The binoculars coped very well with distant views of a variety of storm petrel species as they zipped around between the big waves in quite soft light. Identifying six species was no easy task but I was pleased to add New Caledonian, Band-rumped, Wilson's, White-faced, White-bellied and Black-bellied storm petrels to my trip list. The much larger Tahiti Petrels and Kermadec Petrels were easier to pick out, but the brief appearance of a smaller Gould's Petrel and a Hutton's Shearwater tested the optics once again, with great results. When a South Polar Skua flew into view, intent on making a kill among a flock of Flesh-footed Shearwaters on the water nearby, the subtle feather details on its back were instantly visible as it chased one of them.

These binoculars come in green or dark charcoal grey and felt very comfortable in my hands. The eye cups are continuously adjustable with no click-stops, which didn't impede my viewing as I set them to the closest I could to maximise my field of view. This feature means that you can adjust them to suit your eyes and viewing circumstances. The central focus wheel was a tad less sensitive than the EL and CL models reviewed previously but not enough to impact my ability to rapidly focus on fast flying seabirds and raptors. Having a 132m field of view at 1000m was great for the pelagic trip and viewing waders on mudflats. The compact size and weight also meant that I was also able to use my DSLR camera without being encumbered by them.

This is an excellent, versatile pair of smaller medium-sized binoculars with outstanding optics, razor-sharp focus, and a powerful range. As always, try them for yourself at a local stockist before making a decision.

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



SUBANTARCTIC BIRDING



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