

KUAKA



Newsletter of South Auckland Branch, Birds New Zealand
Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

October – 2023

Kia koutou katoa, warm greetings to all Kuaka readers. Grab a cuppa, find a cosy corner then sit back to enjoy this edition of our entertaining newsletter, full to the brim with great articles and information. There are 12 pages of reading pleasure for you this month beginning with a review of this month's presentation on the pesky myna. This is followed by the Atlas Report, sightings around our rohe, a report on the field trip to the wetlands at Mangatawhiri and several interesting tit-bits on birds and birding in general.

There are two documents attached to this email. The first is a schedule for your reference, of European and Maori names for the more common species of birds we see in our rohe. The second is a sad article on bird-strike in the USA.

And lastly, if you wish to read the NZ Penguin Initiative October Newsletter you can find it at:
www.nzpi.nz/newsletter.

SPEAKER

Kamolphat Atsawawaranunt, or 'A', is a PhD candidate at Auckland Uni with a special interest in birds (as well as orchids, tramping and climbing). The topic tonight was **New Zealand sturnids: ecological niche models and the common myna's introduction history according to population genomics.**



Sturnids are from the sturnidae or starling family. The two species in NZ are common myna/maina and European starling/taringi - both species are invasive in NZ and in many locations across the world.

Starlings were introduced to NZ from the UK in the 1860's as a bio-control for grass-grub. The myna, native to central and SE Asia, has been spread to far-away places by humans – they were introduced to Melbourne from India in the 1860's. From there they were brought to NZ in the 1870's as a bio-control for ticks, and the like, on livestock. Myna were released in Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington, Whanganui, and Ngamotu/New Plymouth. The climate in these areas isn't to their liking and they have not thrived there. Instead, they moved themselves northwards, arriving in Tamaki Makaurau in the 1940's, finally reaching Cape Reinga in the 1960's. A separate population was released in Napier and DNA work suggests they have stayed put.



What makes these two species interesting is their invasive successes. Introduction of a species often involves a small number of individuals meaning that the population goes through a genetic bottleneck – which should negatively impact the adaptive potential of the new population. However, successful invasive species have been able to overcome this, and this is known as the invasive species paradox. – in other words, these two manu are so successful, yet they shouldn't be!



A's main research question is: "why are myna's and starling's successful invaders?" - is it anything to do with their genomes. Did NZ present them with strong selection pressures, or just a "home away from home".

He will develop ecological niche models on the myna and starling data, and compare the niche between the native range and NZ. In doing so, 'A' will also be able to project their current and future suitable habitats and distributions in NZ and use that to assess their further invasive potential.

To achieve these goals 'A' will use correlative ecological niche models which correlate observations to environmental variables and come up with a habitat suitability model.

'A' chose the environmental variables of: annual precipitation (enough for successful breeding), percentage tree cover (both manu prefer open habitat), and human population density (both are happy to associate with humans).

Taking climate change into account 'A' has calculated that by 2100 suitable habitat for myna will increase, especially in the volcanic plateau and Canterbury. Starlings are already present in most of the country and by 2100 they will move to higher elevations in the South Is.

WANTED

FOR GENETIC WORK

Common starling
Sturnus vulgaris

On the loose
since ~1860

REWARD

CHOCOLATE / WINE

kats326@aucklanduni.ac.nz / 02 2486 3780

DISCUSSION

Almost all the discussion tonight was observations and anecdotes about myna's.

We also had a discussion about two red-necked stint seen at Miranda. These manu differed in size and bill length, and plumage – all this led to interesting discussion about stints.

SIGHTINGS

We had a range of sightings this month

- 26 Guinea fowl were sighted near Kawakawa Bay
- Juvenile kuaka/godwits were spotted at Miranda last week, including some with satellite transmitters fitted to them on the breeding grounds in Alaska.
- 60-80 Kawau tikitiki/spotted shag were recorded just north of Thames. They gather in this area leading up to breeding.
- The whiskered tern is still at Miranda as is the glossy ibis. A second ibis is still present at Piako

TWO REMINDERS

- If you spot a manu (dead or alive) with a band or flag, please do your utmost to read the numbers/letters on the band and take note of the arrangement and colours of bands and flags on which leg(s). Let Tony H and/or Adrian know and report your observations to the banding office at bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz
- It has been a great breeding season for water birds in OZ and lots of banding is being undertaken. So watch out for banded Royal spoonbills/kotuku ngutu papa, and egrets over the next few months.

PROGRAMME FOR 2023

Monthly Meetings: held on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Papakura Croquet Club, 1 Chapel Street Papakura. Meetings start at 7:30. Visitors welcome. \$3.00 donation to cover costs please

Nov 14	Daniel Thomas	Seabird fossils in Taranaki (recommended by the Kuaka editor)
Nov 11	Boat trip to Coromandel Hbr	
Nov 19	Firth of Thames Wader Census	high tide 12.43pm
Nov 26	Manukau Wader Census	high tide 10.32am
Dec 2	Christmas BBQ	Ian & Anna are kindly hosting us this year - details TBA

ATLAS REPORT

We are almost halfway through the last spring season for the atlas project, and progress is steady. The map below shows squares with low checklists - yellow squares have had 1-30 checklists - and those with no checklists. In each square, the number of **checklists** are shown in black and the number of **species found** are shown in red. You will see that even though some squares haven't had many checklists, a good number of species have been found. Any help with counts on the Coromandel would be very welcome.

If you see any interesting birds anywhere, please send me the following details: Exact location of sighting, date, start time, duration of count, species, number of birds seen.



Bittern Conservation - New Zealand

Aug 13, 2014 · 🌐

How to identify a bittern in flight, at distance, from the similarly sized and coloured Harrier

Identifying a bittern in flight at distance



Bittern Conservation - New Zealand

8h · 🌐

Bittern are being reported throughout Aotearoa, here is what our national map looks like for the last 7 days... we'd love to hear from you - where are you seeing Matuku| Bittern (doesn't have to be too specific if you don't want it to be) How many? What type of habitat are they in? Do you need help to monitor or protect Bittern? Message us, share here on our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100056994204383> , or record them on www.lovebittern.com website or connect via the Love Bittern! Project in the Conservation Hub <https://conservationhub.nz/projects/646810087afc0f3d3d155d46and> download the free app to record your observations or message to create your group to record coordinated monitoring using the app. #Matuku #Bittern #AustralasianBittern #lovebittern

Tribute to Ray Clough (died 2022) at Mangere (erected by Watercare)



FACEBOOK

Don't forget to check out our Facebook page:
[@birdsnz.sa](https://www.facebook.com/birdsnz.sa)

This past month we had around 60 posts. A mixture of NZ and overseas birds, photos and articles.

Check it out – see what you are missing.

If you have any photos or links to interesting articles let us know so we can post them on the page.



**Birds New Zealand:
South Auckland
Branch**

@birdsnzsa

ROYAL SPOONBILL

Last month we published a photo from Awhitu of a spoonie with coloured plumage. Several people opined that the bird was probably stained by something in the environment, even supplying a photo of a little shag with its white feathers stained bright orange.

Further investigation has revealed that our cousins in OZ have been aware for decades of spoonies with varying amounts of colour in their plumage - a natural occurrence and not related to staining.

We have now seen photos from other parts of NZ of spoonies with coloured plumage. I believe that this is not unusual but has been ignored in the past by experienced birders who dismissed it as staining. Interestingly a recheck of BirdsNZonline revealed an entry we didn't notice last month: *Outside the breeding season the plumage often appears soiled.*

It would be great if these coloured individuals were banded so we could follow them through their moult to see how their plumage changes.

The photo on the left is one of the individuals from Awhitu. The photo on the right was taken by our Waikanae correspondent Roger Smith. Note the variation in colour between the two manu.



This final photo is also from Roger. Taken in 2018, I couldn't resist including it – it's a great photo.



KIWI CONSERVATION CLUB (KCC)

Our Beach Patrol Team is currently in recess but two of the members joined a KCC team at Karioitahi beach during the school holidays to give the KCC members an introduction to the art of beach patrol. It was somewhat windy (to say the least) but no-one, to our knowledge, got blown away. We started by checking out some dead manu and explaining why we beach patrol, why the manu are flying up and down the coast, what happens with the records, and how to handle dead manu. We then walked down the beach for 45 mins but due to the stormy weather the beach had been washed clean of almost everything, let alone any bird bodies. Hopefully the KCC members and their parents/grandparents learnt a little about sea birds and weren't simply put off by the smell of the dead manu.



Another youngster at Karioitahi

Note the difference in length between the upper and lower bill

MANGATAWHIRI FIELD TRIP

Four intrepid souls ignored the poor weather forecast and gathered near Deans Wetland on McIntyre Rd Mercer, changed into their gummies (with one exception who had left his in the other car) and headed out into the wilds to listen for, and hopefully see, some, or all, of the 'cryptic' manu species who inhabit this somewhat damp environment. Almost immediately we were rewarded with the booming of a matuku hurepo/bittern - a great start.



Our eBird list included grey teal/tete, shoveler/kuruwhengi, herons/matuku moana, piwakawaka, riorio, kotare, swallows/warau, mallards/rakiraki, Canada geese/kuihi, black swans/kakianau, harrier/kahu, sw plover, quail/tikaokao, pheasant, goldfinch/kourarini, chaffinch/pahirini, rosella/Kaka-uhi-whereo, and pukeko.

At least five matuku hurepo were heard and one especially, was booming quite close. Only one specimen was actually seen - flying away from us! Despite playing their calls we did not encounter any rails, which was disappointing.

Towards the end of the walk, we saw a kakianau with five almost-fledged cygnets.



Back on the road we viewed a gathering of SW plovers in the distance and four cattle egrets in, you guessed it, a paddock with the cows! The sun was setting at this stage and we meandered back to our cars in the twilight, playing the rail calls at various sites that looked like potential habitat. Again, no response.

Well done team, an enjoyable afternoon and evening. I suggest we reschedule another trip with a view to finding the elusive rails (but this time we will avoid the waist high grass and stick to the trails!!).

THE PĪPĪWHARAUROA - SHINING CUCKOO



SEPTEMBER 14, 2023 RUBY FENWICK

In early September, a unique summer visitor to Aotearoa begins to grace our shores, migrating from the tropics. The certainly make an impression with their intriguing behaviours. From breeding strategy to quirky culinary tastes, here are four facts about the shining cuckoo/pipiwharauoa.



Image credit: Melissa Boardman

Shining cuckoo are susceptible to a number of human-caused dangers

Sadly, often a person's first encounter with a shining cuckoo is when they're injured from flying into a glass window. These injuries from window strike can be fatal but there are ways to prevent it.

By applying window decals that are barely visible to the human eye, you can help these, and other manu, to see the glass and avoid flying into it. Another danger is predators such as rats and possums. Help make your neighbourhood safe for our special

summer visitors by setting traps in your backyard and getting involved with your local trapping group.

While they forage for insects, shining cuckoos can often fall prey to cats. If you have a pet cat, there are steps you can take to protect the shining cuckoo and other birds in your neighbourhood (check the Predator Free website for details).

The migration path of the cuckoo may have helped Maori discover NZ

Ancestors of Māori observed the shining and long-tailed cuckoo/koehoea flying south from Polynesian and Melanesian islands every spring and then returning in autumn. This may have led them to suspect that these birds were flying to land in the south-west Pacific.

The migration patterns of birds were definitely being monitored by navigators around this period. In fact, navigators were using the migratory flight of the West Polynesian pigeon to guide their journeys between Tonga and Samoa.



Shining cuckoo. Image credit: Francesco Veronesi (via Wikimedia Commons)

The shining cuckoo eats insects that are toxic to other manu

Shining cuckoos have a thick mucous membrane that lines their gizzard, enabling them to eat hairy caterpillars that are toxic to most birds. The toxic hairs are embedded in the membrane and then parts of the membrane are shed and regurgitated removing the toxic hairs.

Shining cuckoos can even eat monarch caterpillars which contain cardiac glycosides, a powerful toxin that impacts heart function. It is still not fully understood how shining cuckoos have an immunity to these toxins.



A shining cuckoo with a caterpillar in its beak. Image credit: Duncan McCaskill (via Wikimedia Commons)



A shining cuckoo being fed by its grey warbler foster parent.
Image credit: Melissa Boardman

Small cuckoo – big burden (to its foster parents!)

The shining cuckoo is the world's smallest cuckoo, but by adulthood, it dwarfs its tiny grey warbler/riorio foster parents. Adult shining cuckoos weigh four times the size of riorio and are double their length.

As you can imagine, collecting food for a comparatively enormous cuckoo chick keeps both riorio foster parents busy.

For several weeks after leaving the nest young cuckoo chicks are still dependent on their foster parents for food.

This interesting item about our two cuckoo species comes from *Maori and the Natural World*, published in 2010 by Te Ara the Encyclopaedia of NZ. Birds had a vital place in traditional Maori life, providing food, and feathers for adornment and cloths. The habits of the manu were closely observed, providing a rich source of metaphor and poetry.

The calls of the pipiwharauoa and koehoea heralded (and still do) the arrival of spring. As we know, these manu lay their eggs in the nests of others. **A lazy, irresponsible human parent was said to be like the cuckoo** ('ka rite koe ki te koehoea').



Image credit: Mike Clark

UK MIGRATORY BIRDS 'IN FREEFALL' OVER CLIMATE CHANGE

By Helen Briggs, Environment Correspondent, BBC News, 21 Sept 2023

British bird lovers will see a very different pattern of species as the climate warms, according to scientists. They say climate change is bad news for birds, but locally we will see "winners and losers".

Migrants seldom seen on British shores, such as black-winged stilts and bee-eaters, are delighting bird watchers. But populations of cuckoos are in "freefall" as UK wildlife struggles with multiple pressures.

In nature-depleted Britain, almost half of all bird species are in decline due to a host of pressures - from the loss of meadows, hedgerows and other natural land to climate change and the use of pesticides. The number of wild birds in Britain has fallen by 73 million since 1970, according to the British Trust for Ornithology, which studies birds in the British Isles.

Head of ringing, Dr Dave Leech, said climate change was a growing pressure, particularly for migratory birds dealing with extreme weather on several continents. He told BBC News: "Climate change is one of the biggest pressures that all species are facing, but particularly migratory species, because they have to worry about the climate conditions not only where they're breeding, but also where they're wintering and the areas that they're travelling through to get here, which can be thousands of kilometres."

Some birds such as reed warblers are taking advantage of longer, hotter summers by producing more young. Others, such as the Cetti's warbler, which colonised the UK some decades ago, are expanding their range north. Yet many species, including the cuckoo and the willow warbler, are declining in southern Britain as the climate warms. Scientists think some birds are having difficulty adjusting their internal clocks to cope with changes in the seasons.

Cuckoos spend their summer in the UK, arriving in April when they can be heard making their distinctive call. They then leave in late June to over-winter in Africa. Dr Dave Leech said the birds are struggling to make it back over the Sahara because climate change means there's less food for them to fuel up with before they make the crossing, and that their numbers were in "free fall". "How terrible would it be if future generations never heard a cuckoo, something that was so commonplace in British wildlife before now?" he said.

Many other migratory birds leave British shores and travel south around now, with others arriving from northern countries. For decades, thousands of skilled bird ringers and other volunteers have been collecting data on changes in British bird populations, shedding light on their decline.

Peter has been ringing birds for many years in Gloucestershire. There "will be winners as a result of climate change and losers", he said. "Future generations might not hear a nightingale or see a cuckoo but there will be other things they see. "A bee-eater might become a common species for example. And by collecting all this ringing data we can monitor what is going on and mitigate for the human-led climate change that is the major driver behind most of these changes."

And lastly, a recommendation to check out this story on Radio NZ's Our Changing World.

The great Ireland vs. New Zealand Bird off. Find it at :

www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ourchangingworld/audio/2018905611/the-great-ireland-vs-new-zealand-bird-off-part-1



NZ Dotterel chick at Big Bay



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