

# TŌREA PANGO



## **NELSON BRANCH BIRDS NZ. NEWSLETTER ISSUE 10. Oct/Nov 2023**

This, the 10th edition of Tōrea Pango and the last for the year, marks two years of this newsletter. Thanks to everyone who has contributed over this time and thanks in advance to all those about to! Happy Christmas and New Year to everyone. You will note that I have actually avoided images of NZ endemics in Santa hats. This is less to do with controlling the urge than with the zero responses I have had requesting permission to use “intellectual” property.

## **SUMMARY OF LAST MEETINGS**

The October meeting was cancelled due to the library use as a polling station

### **November 6<sup>th</sup>**

22 people attended the November meeting. Welcome to Maria, Martin, Jill, Joy, David and Karen.

- Paul G gave the customary health and safety brief/debrief.
- Alison Ballance gave an outstanding talk centred around her new book “The Takahe” (see below).
- Paul G presented updates and a tantalizing list of jobs available for volunteers wishing to help out at the 2024 national conference (see below).
- Rebecca Bowater shared photos of a recent trip to Oz (see below).
- David Melville updated us on a recent alleged black stilt reported in our area.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The traditional and much anticipated December meeting will again be held at the Melville residence in Dovedale on Monday 11Dec. Many thanks again to David and Vicki for hosting this. In order to avoid a surfeit of lettuce salad, please email your attendance and the food you are contemplating bringing to David. [david.melville@xtra.co.nz](mailto:david.melville@xtra.co.nz)

## **RECENT SIGHTINGS**

- Streaked Shearwater seen by Scott Brooks on Nov 1st at The Petrel Station out past the Poor Knights Islands - first live New Zealand record.

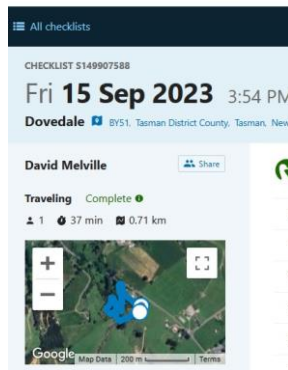


- Locally a black stilt has been reported, (see below)

## **DAVID CLAIMS HIS OWN CHOCOLATE FISH (AND A BOTTLE OF WINE) IN A SOLO RUN TO VICTORY!**

David writes 'Not wishing to claim the chocolate fish due to lack of entries - yesterday I found a Song Thrush nest and have completed a Nest Record Card [see attached]. I think that I can now rightfully claim the chocolate fish (unless you have received any other entries?!)'

New Zealand Bird Atlas [Submit](#)



No, we haven't. So, sadly David, it's all yours. Enjoy! Wine will be delivered at December meeting. Meanwhile bask in the glory.

## **BIRD OF THE CENTURY**

For once I'm lost for words!

## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR BIRDS N.Z. CONFERENCE 2024**

The conference committee has been working extremely hard to organise this event and things are well under way. However, there are a number of roles over the conference weekend which need to be filled by a team of volunteers. Paul G has outlined below the available jobs and the numbers of volunteers needed for each. If you are interested in offering your services, please email Paul at [pgmedia2@gmail.com](mailto:pgmedia2@gmail.com)

### **Registration desk**

Friday	16:00-18:00*	(2 Volunteers)
Saturday	08:00-08:30*, 10:30-11:00, 12:30-13:30, 15:15-15:45	(3+1+1+1)
Sunday	08:00-18:30, 10:30-11:00, 12:30-13:30, 15:15-15:45	(1+1+1+1)

Place advertising banner outside Tides Hotel/Trafalgar Centre

### **Fire Warden/Safety Officer**

Saturday and Sunday - Trafalgar Centre requirement [David Melville + at least (1 other volunteer)]

### **AV operator**

Saturday and Sunday – Work with Trafalgar Center Technician, Steve. Run computer, projector, sound system. Someone needs to provide lap top (with one as a backup) (1 volunteer)

### **Exhibitors**

Someone needed to organise tables and liaise with exhibitors (1 Volunteer)

### **Photo competition**

Photo competition - entries for moult and marked bird will be checked

for eligibility by a panel of scrutineers (Rob Schuckard/Paul Fisher/David Melville) - voting will be by participants.

Friday afternoon and Saturday 08:00-08:30 – receive all photos, record names and issue numbers for each photo submitted.

**(3 Volunteers)**

Saturday (8.00 – 8.30) set up display boards and receive delegates with photos, provide materials for fixing images (Velcro and or pins) issue numbers and record names.

**(5 Volunteers)**

Sunday am Scrutineer(s) for moult and marked bird categories

**[David Melville/Rob Schuckard/Paul Fisher]** judge entries

Also Sunday am. public vote for general category photos,

**2 volunteers** issue and receive voting papers, place in ballot box)

**Student presentation competition**

Judges (appointed by Council)

**Poster competition**

Public are judges (but someone needs to organise voting papers and ballot box.

**(1 volunteer)**

**Field trip guides (2 Volunteers in reserve)**

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Abel Tasman National Park    | <b>Ron Moorhouse, Kathryn Richards</b>                  |
| 2. Mt Arthur/Flora or Wangapeka | <b>Sandy and Robin Toy</b>                              |
| 3. Brook Waimārama Sanctuary    | <b>Robert Schadewinkel, Rebecca Bowater, Peter Gaze</b> |
| 4. Nelson Wastewater Plant      | <b>Paul Fisher, Peter Field, Scott Butcher</b>          |
| 5. Taipare Bay                  | <b>Rob Schuckard</b>                                    |

**Scientific programme**

Saturday and Sunday - M/C – Ron Moorhouse

Session chairs – to be appointed by Ron[?] – we need a bell ringer or similar (**1 Volunteer**)

**Welcome ceremony**

Greet iwi participants and participate in the ceremony – **Paul Griffiths? [also planning – Pete Gaze?]**

**Catering**

Liaise with Viva la Vaca (as needed) – **[Sharen Graham + 1 Volunteer]**

**Dinner**

Place menus and quiz papers on each table – liaise with Viva la Vaca (**1 Volunteer**)

**NEST I.D. NEEDED**

These two shots, taken in the Flora, have been submitted by Robin and Sandy Toy for help in identification of this mystery nest. If they can't I.D. it, I don't hold a lot of hope. But ideas please?? A bored trampler doodling with grasses during a lunch stop??





## **A RELIGIOUS DILEMMA** (Ed)



For some reason, now lost in the mists of time, we have a Buddha head in our entranceway. So, here's a topic for theological debate if you are so inclined- Does the Buddhist belief in the sanctity of life outweigh this sacrilege to the Buddha head? Or vice-versa. Pretty sure I know what Siddhartha would have said on that one and as you can see the three swallow chicks (just showing at the top of the nest) are doing very nicely!



## **REBECCA GOES TO OZ**

At the November meeting, Rebecca Bowater shared (as always, high quality) photos taken on a recent trip to NSW. Obviously, she saw a large number of species. However here are some pictures she took of birds which it is or has been possible to see here in NZ, but much easier in Oz. And there wouldn't be many who have them all on their NZ bird list!





From top; Australian avocet, Eastern curlew, Latham's (Japanese) snipe, Australian tern.



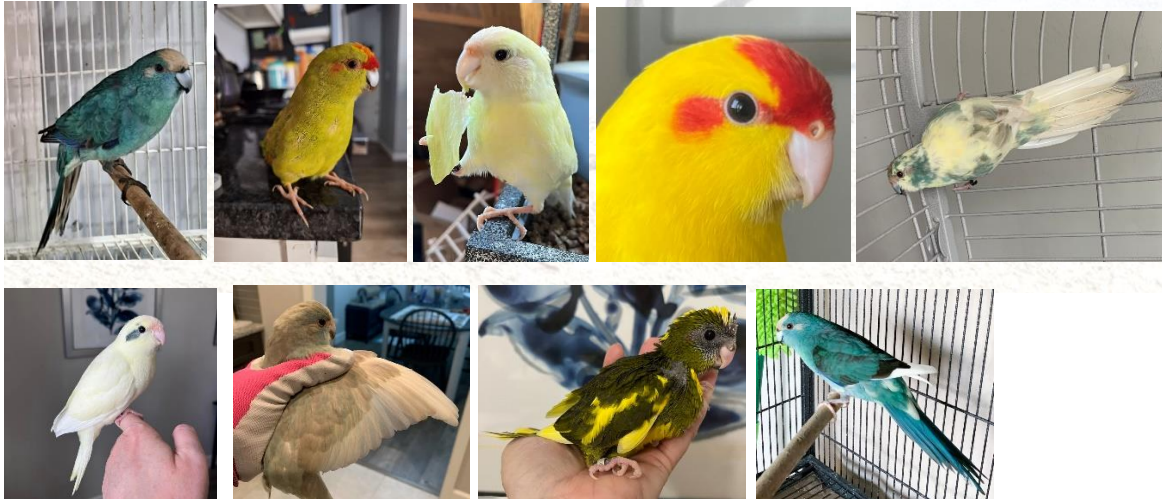




Top left clockwise. Buff banded rail, Eastern rosella, sharp tailed sandpiper, curlew sandpiper,

### **RED CROWNED KAKARIKIS? REALLY?**

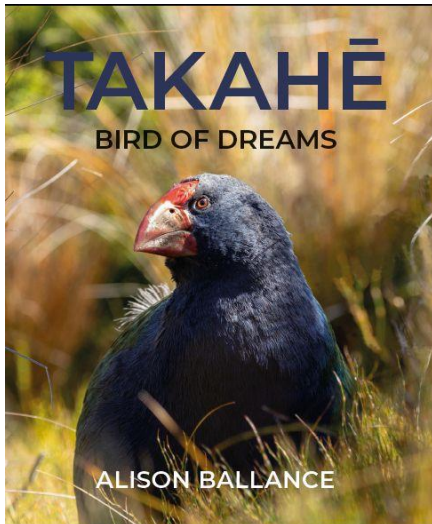
While browsing birdy things on the net recently, I came across various sites and Facebook groups dedicated to kakariki. Apparently our very own red crowned kakariki, which we struggle to conserve, is a popular 'cage bird' overseas. It appears to be bred as easily as budgies and in almost as many colour mutations. I make no judgements and leave you to form your own opinion on this one!



### **'TAKAHĒ – BIRD OF DREAMS' ALISON BALLANCE**

Alison gave an informative, detailed and very entertaining talk at our November meeting telling us the extraordinary Takahe story, the subject of her new book.





Alison's book 'Takahē – bird of dreams' (RRP \$60) is available in all good book shops, from [www.pottonandbburton.co.nz](http://www.pottonandbburton.co.nz) or as a special offer to Birds NZ Nelson members \$50 (offer closes 10 December, and any orders will be delivered at the Christmas BBQ on the 11th ). Email to order: [ali.ballance@gmail.com](mailto:ali.ballance@gmail.com) (note not a live link Ed)

The story of the takahē is a roller-coaster ride of rediscovery, hope, disappointment, perseverance and hard-won successes. The first subfossil takahē bones were collected in the North Island and described in 1848 as *Notornis mantelli*. It was later realized that this was the extinct moho or North Island takahē (the name means hermit).

The South Island takahē, *Notornis hochstetteri*, was described from one of just four live specimens of takahē collected in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was considered extinct for the first half of the twentieth century. The rediscovery of takahē in Fiordland's Murchison Mountains, on 20 November 1948, by a team led by Dr Geoffrey Orbell, made front page headlines around the world. It was described as "one of the greatest ornithological moments in history" and Time magazine wrote that Doc, Joan, Rex and Neil were in a state of 'ornithological ecstasy'!



The rediscovery team with a pair of takahē in Takahē Valley on 20 November

1948 photo Orbell Family Collection

In January 1949, the first scientific expedition to study takahē headed into Takahē Valley, beginning what has been a 75-year research and conservation programme.



A fearless wild-born unbanded juvenile in Takahē Valley photo Alison Ballance

**The basic biology was established** – takahē breed in monogamous pairs, lay 2-3 eggs and usually raise just one chick which often stays as a helper for the following breeding season.

During the 1950s, high deer numbers in the Murchison Mountains had a significant impact on vegetation. Stoats are a significant threat to takahē, especially following large beech and/or tussock mast seeding events – in the 2007 stoat plague, 43% of adult takahē in the Murchisons were killed by stoats.

**The takahē recovery programme** -has led the way in threatened species conservation. Starting in 1984, a ground-breaking hand-rearing programme, which used takahē hand puppets to feed chicks that were incubated and hatched in captivity, released about 250 young takahē onto predator-free islands or back into Fiordland. Since 2010, the Burwood Takahē Centre has changed its focus, and more than 20 captive pairs of takahē incubate and raise their chicks, which are then released, mostly recently (August 2023) to found a new wild population in the Greenstone Valley.

From a low point of about 120 birds in 1981, the Department of Conservation has just confirmed that the takahē population has reached 500, which is a great milestone for the 75th anniversary of the rediscovery.

Takahē are now found in more than 18 sites, including Kahurangi National Park, islands such as Mana Island, and sanctuaries such as Zealandia.



First attempt to breed takahē in captivity - four chicks were collected from the Murchison Mountains in 1958 and raised in the Wairarapa by a bantam foster mother and aviculturist Elwyn Welch. PHOTO Alexander Turnbull Library

### **The ins and outs of takahē diet**

The bottom 2-3 cm of Chionochloa snow tussock tillers is the takahē's staple food in Fiordland, but exotic grasses now form the main diet in many locations. Takahē have an impressively inefficient digestive system. In an experiment using the first three takahē to be successfully hand-reared, Peter Moore quantified that they spend 90% of daylight hours eating, and consume half their own body weight each day (1.3-1.8 kg). The short gut is basically a juice extractor, and after a short transit of several hours the tussock or grass stems are excreted almost unchanged, in 10-cm long droppings that look like mini haybales. Takahē poo every 10 minutes, and leave a mighty trail of about 9-metres of droppings – per day!





Takahē diet experiment – top row, what was offered; middle row, what was discarded after being eaten; and what came out the other end. photo Peter Moore



Children of the original rediscovery party releasing two takahē into the Murchison Mountains, to mark the 70th anniversary of their parents finding takahe. photo Alison Ballance

## **GARDEN BIRD SURVEY**

A plug here for the Garden Bird Survey being conducted by Waimarama /Brook sanctuary This is how they measure whether or not The Brook Sanctuary is creating a “halo-effect” whereby the bird species within the predator-proof fence spread-out well beyond the Sanctuary as their population numbers recover. Success means the Sanctuary will be the catalyst for a halo-effect, with the endangered populations within the Sanctuary eventually spreading into our backyards and other parts of New Zealand. Completing this form enables the Brook gather data about the spread of species beyond the Sanctuary. Link here: <https://www.brooksanctuary.org.nz/get-involved-with-the-brook-waimarama-sanctuary/garden-bird-survey> Incidentally if you haven’t already, it’s really worth subscribing to their newsletter.

## BLACK STILT SIGHTING

A recent sighting of a black stilt reported by David Postles at Manuka Island, Waimea Inlet on 3rd and 4<sup>th</sup> November poses the question 'How black is a black stilt?' At the November meeting David Melville talked us through the issues.



Black stilt (*Himantopus novae-zelandiae*)  
There have been occasional records from our area including single birds at Nelson Haven (Nov 1977, August 2006) and also various reports of hybrid birds



The manuka island bird

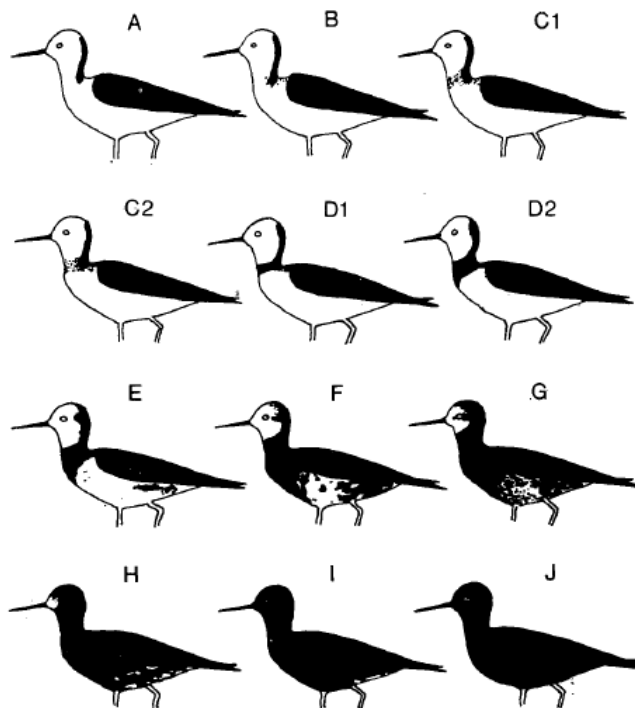


FIGURE 4 — Plumage classification of adults. Not all birds fitted into one node exactly, but each was allocated to whichever node it most closely resembled

Plumage, morphology and hybridisation of NZ stilts *Himantopus* by R J Pierce. (pub in Notornis 31 1984)

Starting with pied stilt (A) and working through to black stilt (J), this figure is a useful tool to categorise the level of hybridisation and can be used when reporting sightings



Clearly a major threat to the black stilt is extinction by hybridization as has (almost?) happened to our gray duck. Captive breeding and subsequent release is only of pure black stilt and all are banded. So, if you want certainty of an actual black stilt to put a tick on your bird list look for a band!



Release of Black stilt into the Tasman valley 10 August 2023. 143 birds were released to supplement an adult population of 143 birds. Compare this to the 1980's population of around 23 adults.

## **ANOTHER ATLASING TRIP**

Sorry folks this report was just a day or two late for the previous newsletter, but hey that photo was worth waiting for.



'On Sat 9 Sept three carloads of members left Wakefield on separate routes. All intending to fill out Atlas lists from various squares enroute to a lunch rendezvous near Tophouse. This seemed to go well although nothing spectacular on the bird front. We were on special lookout for robin, creeper and fernbird but without success.'

And on the subject of the Bird Atlas, time is running out, so why not give it that last fling.

## **BANDED SPOONBILL**

I have a long email conversation about this sighting, the gist of which is that Jenny Edwards reported a banded Spoonbill in September and received this reply from Sandy Taylor

Hi Jenny

The bander has confirmed the identification of the Spoonbill that you have sighted. The details that we hold for this bird are:

Common name: Royal Spoonbill, Kōtuku Ngutupapa

Scientific name: *Platalea regia*

Metal band number: O-31314

Other markings: Colour bands – Yellow/Pale Green (left tarsus); White/Pale Green (right tarsus)

Date banded: 7/11/2005

Age/Sex at first marking: Chick / Unknown

Banding location: Marlborough, Blenheim Sewage Ponds, Harding's Road Latitude/Longitude: - 41.5316 / 174.0502

We haven't had a re-sighting of this bird in quite some time so this is a fabulous record to receive – and to have a photo is even better. We have 166 banded Royal Spoonbills listed on our database so keep looking out for more banded ones (as well as other banded birds). Thank you for contributing to the NZ National Bird Banding Scheme – it is much appreciated.

Kind regards

Sandy

So, this bird which hasn't been sighted for some time was banded 18 years ago! Great Spot!

## **NEXT NEWSLETTER**

With a wee break over the holiday period, the next Tōrea Pango should emerge sometime in the middle of March 2024. All items gratefully accepted!

**Meanwhile, see you all on the 11<sup>th</sup>!**

