

BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

No.40 December 2023



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



BIRDS

NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa



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We welcome advertising. Classified ads for members are at the editor's discretion. Articles/photos of birds in NZ or the South Pacific are welcome such as bird news, members' activities, birding sites, identifications, letters. Deadlines: 10th Feb, May, Aug & 1st Nov. Views expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of OSNZ (Inc) or the editor. When you're finished with this copy please pass it on to someone interested in NZ birds.

Six more Kākāpō at Maungatautari

Six more Kākāpō were released at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari in Waikato in September following the successful settling in of four Kākāpō there earlier this year. The new population will provide vital data to help support the long-term goal of returning them to their natural range throughout Aotearoa. Adult male Kākāpō have been added to the population in the hope that they will start to "boom" and provide training for the juveniles. By monitoring these birds over the next decade or so, DOC will find out whether a larger Kākāpō population could one day thrive and breed at this mainland site.

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COVER IMAGE

Tautahi the Kākāpō at Maungatautari Sanctuary Mountain.

Photo by Jake Osborne:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/theylooklikeus/>



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JULY	Kakadu Birdwatching Tour	4 Days
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AUG	Kakadu Birdwatching Tour	4 Days
SEP	Top End Bird & Wildlife Photo Tour	6 Days
SEP	Kakadu Birdwatching Tour	4 Days
OCT	Borneo Birding & Wildlife Tour	15 Days
	Private Tours (Australia & Sri Lanka)	Various

2025 TOURS

MAR	Sri Lankan Birding & Wildlife Tour	15 Days
JUNE	Wild Kakadu Photography Workshop	5 Days
JULY	Ultimate Top End Birding Adventure	10 Days
AUG	Outback Birding Darwin to Mount Isa	9 Days
	Private Tours (Australia, Sri Lanka, Borneo)	EOI

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From the President's Desk

Mel Galbraith

It was with considerable shock and then sadness that Josie Galbraith wrote to me with news of the passing of her father Mel Galbraith in late September. Mel has had a long record of involvement with Birds New Zealand since 1996. He has always been active and engaged in a multitude of leadership roles in our Society, notably as a past Auckland Regional Representative and a serving Council member. In addition, he has been a founding member of many community conservation trusts, including Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi and Motu Kaikoura Trust. Mel was also renowned for giving freely of his time and expertise to students. On behalf of our Society, I have offered my condolences to the family at this most difficult of times.

Council Meeting

Council met once online during this period and a number of strategic and leadership matters occupied our time. Council now has two vacancies, and this is now having a significant impact on our ability to deliver our work. Without leaders, our Society will struggle to be relevant and maintain the quality work that we complete in our love for, and quest to understand, the birds of New Zealand. Please, if you are interested in joining Council then feel free to send me an email or give me a call to discuss options. Council also had a significant discussion on the proposed new Constitution. This is highlighted further down this page. Suffice it to say that this work will require the attention of members in the first half of 2024.

Changes to *Notornis*

The mode and costs of how our Society operates are changing. Increasingly we are moving into a digital age and the costs of maintaining a hard copy presence for our publications is becoming harder to justify. Our Society has invested significantly in upgrading and expanding our website. We have added more functionality and made available ornithological works that are otherwise difficult to access. The impact of these costs has been that our reserves and funding ability for the Project Assistance Fund have decreased. Council had a full discussion on the costs of managing our Society into the future. We looked at a range of options; not only increasing subscriptions but also cutting costs. We expect that website costs and Executive Officer contract costs will continue to increase in future. The EO role is seen by Council as essential to the continued smooth running of our Society.

Council distinguished between *Notornis* and *Birds New Zealand* magazine. The magazine is part of our marketing strategy and helps to raise the profile of our Society. *Notornis* is equally important in our objective of recording the science of New Zealand ornithology. Council consulted with both editors. *Notornis* editor Craig Symes is supportive of digital-only publication of *Notornis* as it would allow articles to be published online as soon as they are ready rather than waiting for print publication. Magazine editor Michael Szabo responded with a list of options, which noted that the print edition of the magazine was ranked at the top of a list of Society benefits by over 90% of members in the last membership survey, and that it plays an important role in our membership promotion strategy, helping to recruit new members.

Council has decided to cease print publication of *Notornis* at the end of the current volume (Vol. 70) and switch to publishing *Notornis* as a digital-only online publication from Vol. 71 onwards. The publication of a regular newsletter with contents pages and links to articles in *Notornis* is part of the ongoing strategy to ensure the relevance of *Notornis*.

New Zealand Bird Atlas

The last year of this momentous Society project hurtles on. There are now 375,752 checklists covering 96% of the Atlas grid squares. This is a spectacular achievement and something we

should all be very proud of. The recent Labour Weekend Atlas expedition sponsored by Toi Toi Wines was a great success with 500 checklists recording 80 species being submitted.

2024 NZ Bird Conference

Organising for the 2024 conference in Nelson continues. Organisers have arranged some very good field trips and the venue has been booked. Our Society's annual conference is a highlight of the year and I hope that you will consider registering.

I write this at the end of a tumultuous October. Last week we had snow in Dunedin, the robins at Mopanui are still holding territories and eating meal worms, and we have completed the Summer Wader census, so the end of 2023 is in sight. I'm starting to plan Atlas squares to fill over Summer and places and birds to visit to see in all their glory. With the approach of the festive season, I wish you all well and that the time you have with family and friends – and birding – is enjoyable.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT

OSNZ Constitution

As members who attended the New Plymouth AGM in June will be aware, our Society needs a new constitution as a consequence of changes in the new Incorporated Societies Act. At the 30th September 2023 meeting, Council reviewed progress on the proposed new Constitution and asked me to update you on the work completed so far, and next steps. The current draft reflects the advice from Parry Field Lawyers, a legal firm specialising in this area of law. The new Act requires specific inclusion in the rules of Societies to address matters such as dispute resolution, managing conflicts of interest, more specific information on management of finances, and clarification of membership categories. Council is not proposing any changes to the substantive clauses (eg Society objectives, regional structure) but is only addressing the changes required to conform to the new Act and Regulations.

Council intends to share the draft with members once we have digested the legal review and necessary changes as a result of recently gazetted regulations and have updated the text. We expect this to happen in January. We will then invite comments on this draft to be received by 29th February 2024. This will allow time for these to be considered before a formal Notice of Motion is included in the March magazine. An explanatory note and a draft of the new constitution will also be published on the website at the same time to ensure members are aware of Council's intentions.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT

Fledgling Fund grants

Our Fledgling Fund provides grants to encourage student members to attend the NZ Bird Conference and AGM. Each grant covers the cost of the registration fee and formal dinner. Applicants must have been a student member for two or more years and enrolled full-time at a NZ tertiary institution or secondary school. Only one grant can be awarded per student member. Criteria and application form here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/awards-and-prizes/notornis-and-conference-awards/fledgling-grant/> Applications must be submitted to the Secretary (secretary@birdsnz.org.nz) by 28 February 2024.

Making a difference with 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/>

2024 NZ Bird Conference & Birds New Zealand AGM

The 2024 NZ Bird Conference and Annual General Meeting will be held in Nelson during King's Birthday weekend. All events and meals will be held at the Trafalgar Centre (Paru Paru Rd, Nelson). Abstracts of talks and posters should be submitted to conference@birdsNZ.org.nz by 31st March 2024. Check www.birdsNZ.org.nz for details, or contact your regional representative.

31 May 2024 (Friday)

18:00 – 19:30 Registration at Tides Hotel
(66 Trafalgar Street, Nelson)

1 June 2024 (Saturday) at Trafalgar Centre

08:00 – 08:30 Registration
08:30 – 09:00 Opening
09:00 – 17:00 Scientific Day One
17:30 – 18:30 Banding gathering; Atlas meeting
(Tides Hotel)
19:00 Informal Dinner

2 June 2024 (Sunday) at Trafalgar Centre

08:00 – 08:30 Registration
08:30 – 16:30 Scientific Day Two
16:45 – 18:00 AGM and Awards
19:00 Conference Dinner

3 June 2024 (Monday) Field Trips

Abel Tasman National Park.
Mt Arthur/Flora or Wangapeka.
Brook Waimārama Sanctuary.
Nelson Wastewater Treatment Plant & Taipare Bay/
Marlborough Sounds.

Additional events at conference:
Photo competition; Faunatech display.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 2024 Annual General Meeting (for the year ending December 2023) will be held on 2nd June 2024 at the Trafalgar Centre (Paru Paru Rd, Nelson). Johannes Chambon, Secretary, PO Box 834, Nelson. Email: secretary@birdsNZ.org.nz

Call for Nominations for Council

The three-year Council terms of Bruce McKinlay (President), Natalie Forsdick (Vice-president), Paul Garner-Richards (Treasurer) and Ian Armitage will expire at the next AGM (2024). Bruce McKinlay and Natalie Forsdick will not be standing again. One Council position is still vacant. Due to the untimely passing of Mel Galbraith, another Council position is vacant. Nominations are called for these positions.

Note that the incumbents are eligible to stand again. Nominations will close with the Secretary on **29th February 2024**. Nominations must be signed by two financial members of the Society and be consented to in writing by the person nominated who must also be a financial member of the Society. Would nominators please include a brief CV of the nominated person if that person is not already a member of Council. Nomination forms are available on the website (<https://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/about-us/manual/forms/>). Please send to Johannes Chambon, Secretary, 74 Leckhampton Court, Dunedin 9011 or email to: secretary@birdsNZ.org.nz

Call for Notices of Motion

Notices of any motion to be considered by the 2024 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before **29th February 2024**, be in writing and be signed by the mover and seconder who shall be financial members of the Society. Please send to Johannes Chambon, Secretary, 74 Leckhampton Court, Dunedin 9011 or email to: secretary@birdsNZ.org.nz

2024 Membership Renewals

Annual memberships are renewable on the anniversary of your joining date. Renewal reminders are sent out at regular intervals starting six weeks before your renewal date, and will continue until six weeks after the due date, until your annual subscription has been paid. You can renew your membership via the website, either by a direct credit payment or a credit card payment: <https://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount>

The Society depends on your subscription, so please pay promptly. Please also notify the Membership Secretary if your email address has changed since your last renewal: membership@birdsNZ.org.nz

Giving the Gift of Birds at Christmas

Are you looking for a Christmas gift to give? You can gift someone a 2024 Birds New Zealand subscription for \$1.50 a week to help foster a lifetime of enjoyment and study of birds. Please send an email to eo@osnz.org.nz and we will send you the Gift Voucher, or visit our website for more details: <https://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/membership/donate/gift-a-membership/>

Leaving a Gift in your will

Leaving a Gift in your will makes a real difference. All funds we receive go to the Project Assistance Fund so you can be confident your Gift will have a real impact for our birds. You should consult your solicitor, Guardian Trust, or Public Trust office for advice on your will. The options we have 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

New Members

We warmly welcome: Wednesday Davis; Marianne M Patchett; Amy Yang; Bruce Harrison (Auckland); Nicola Jackson; Jaz Morris; Peter Davies; William Frost; Di Powell; Sara Kross; Abe Reid; John Eggleston; Matthew Francke (Canterbury); Mathieu Poot (Far North); Arthur Hyde (Hawkes Bay); Rosemary van Essen; Zoe Bezett (Manawatu); Alejandro Riccheri; Jo Kay; Pip Lynch (Nelson); Carol Bates; Vicki Hetherington (Northland); John Alliot; Fiona Turnbull; Elaine Watson; Amy Adams; Patrick Daugherty; Ann Trewern (Otago); Halema Jamieson (Taranaki); Amanda Hassan (Waikato); Alfie Benbow; Terence Green; Gareth McKnight; Stephanie Raill (Wellington); Bill Rutherford; Sabine Bernert; Keith Pennington (Rest of World).

Donations

We thank the following: Rosemary van Essen, Bruce McKinlay, Matt Moss, Zoe Bezett, Di Powell, Richard de Hamel, Cecily Horne, Tineke Witteman, Mikayla Kendle, Amy Yang, Ian Armitage, Ken Fraser, Vicki Hetherington; Nataliya Rik.

New Otago Regional Representative

Dawn Palmer is the new Otago RR. After working in bird conservation in Australia and the US she moved to NZ in 1993, and has a Bachelor in Applied Science in Ecology. She worked for the Department of Conservation in the Whakatipu area in the 1990s and has worked as an independent ecologist there since 2002. She worked with Australasian Crested Grebes on Lake Hayes with the late George Chance; has been a Trustee of the Whakatipu Wildlife Trust since 2020; and is the ecologist for the new Tucker Beach Wildlife Trust which has a braided river bird focus. She has been a Society member since 1998.

David Medway Scholarship

Sponsored by the George Mason Charitable Trust and named in commemoration of David Medway, this provides financial support to a student studying full-time at post-graduate level on a topic relating to ornithology. One scholarship may be awarded annually with a maximum value of \$5000. Applications open 1st February 2024 and close 30th March 2024. The application form is here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/david-medway-scholarship/>

Marj Davis Scholarship

Established in 2018 in commemoration of Marj Davis, a single scholarship may be awarded annually with a maximum value of \$1500 to provide financial support to a full-time Masters or PhD student conducting research in ornithology. Eligible research projects must clearly be of benefit to NZ ornithology and NZ birds. Preference will be given to proposals for research expected to contribute to a greater knowledge of birds in the Canterbury/West Coast region. Applications open 1st February 2024 and close 30th March 2024. The application form is here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/marj-davis-scholarship/>

New Birds New Zealand Secretary

Originally from France, I have worked in conservation for about nine years around the world, but mostly on islands. I spent several years in the Indian Ocean (Mayotte, Mauritius, Christmas Island), and have some previous experience in Aotearoa New Zealand (Te Mana o Kupe/Mana Island, Whenua Hou/Codfish Island, and Rēkohu/Wharekauri/Chatham Islands). I was involved, among other things, in habitat restoration (plant propagation and weed control), population monitoring of birds and reptiles, often of threatened species, and predator control. In 2020, I went back to university to complete an MRes in Biosciences at Swansea University in Wales, UK, where I studied the migration of the endangered Abbott's Booby. I recently started a PhD at the University of Otago studying the climate change vulnerability of two threatened seabird species endemic to the Chatham Islands, the Chatham Island Tāiko and the Chatham Petrel. I look forward to further contributing to the conservation of the unique avifauna of Aotearoa New Zealand as the Secretary of Birds New Zealand.

JOHANNES CHAMBON

Taranaki banded Weka record

The first North Island Weka to be banded at Egmont National Park (Taranaki) was on 12th November 1970, when 32 birds were banded. Another 94 were banded there that decade, but we have no further records of Weka banding there for the past 47 years. Imagine our surprise when Toby Shanley submitted a record of one of those very first Weka bands (M-21193) that a friend discovered near the Taranaki ski-field! Since Weka only live about 15 years, it is likely the metal band had been lying there exposed to the elements for about 40 years. The unique number on the band is associated with banding and re-sighting data for that bird, which is valuable long after those events, so even though the bird is long-dead, we were pleased to add this record to our database.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW, BANDING OFFICE

Pacific Islands Bird Conservation & Research Fund 2024

This fund supports conservation management and research on bird species classified as endangered by BirdLife International which breed on islands in the South Pacific, excluding New Zealand. One grant may be awarded each year and shall not exceed \$5,000. Applications open 1st February 2024 and close 30th March 2024 (eo@birdsnz.org.nz). Criteria and details: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/pibcrf/>

Impacts of Yellow Crazy Ants on nesting tropical seabirds

The Yellow Crazy Ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) is a highly invasive ant species widespread through the tropical Pacific. Impacts of Yellow Crazy Ants (YCA) on a number of seabird colonies have been documented, but the traits that lead to seabird susceptibility are not well described. Understanding which seabird traits increase vulnerability to YCA is important in order to better predict which seabird species may be more vulnerable. This is particularly important for endangered seabird species where protection from and response to YCA invasion should have a higher priority. However, least concern species can often be used as functional surrogates to determine negative impacts before endangered species are put at risk.

Eradication of YCA from small islands is now possible and such eradications provide an opportunity to rigorously document the mechanism of impact of YCA, and benefits of their removal, through a rigorous before-after-control-impact design. This is the case on the French Polynesian atoll of Tetiaroa where YCA are currently invading. YCA are present on four of twelve motu, although their slow invasion front means they have only completely invaded the smallest of these motu Aie (2.4 hectares). The Tetiaroa Society is currently trialling eradication methodologies on Aie, before scaling up to larger motu. We leveraged this opportunity to work with partners in Tahiti Nui French Polynesia to undertake seabird and invertebrate monitoring on Aie before and after the trialling of YCA eradication, alongside control and impact monitoring at other uninvaded and invaded sites on other motu. We used the Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) as a surrogate species for assessing YCA impact on seabirds and used their breeding site choice (ground or tree) as a trait for distinguishing impact strength. We also simultaneously monitored arthropods to determine impacts of both the YCA, and the invertebrate toxin applied in the eradication, on invertebrate communities.

YCA eradication was undertaken, and is ongoing, with three motu-wide treatments on Aie of fipronil infused hydrogels, spaced three months apart. After two treatments, YCA were reduced to undetectable levels in Aie. No significant effect of baiting on the non-target arthropod community and abundance was detected, although some individual coconut and hermit crab mortality was detected. YCA were found to prefer *Pisonia* forest over *Pemphis* scrub, and significantly excluded breeding Brown Noddies even at low abundances. This impact was strongest on ground-nesting behaviours in *Pisonia* forest while tree-nesting noddies in *Pemphis* scrub were less impacted by YCA. Nest presence and abundance was significantly lower on Aie than nearby ant-free motu. Nest presence and density on Aie increased by 200% following two bait applications, but at the same time decreased on nearby ant-free motu, possibly due to natural fluctuations or Brown Noddy recruitment back to Aie. While nesting success decreased post-treatment on nearby ant-free, untreated motu, it remained the same on Aie, possibly due to ant suppression compensating for extrinsic environmental impacts on breeding success. The third and final bait application was completed in August. These results will have application to other ground-nesting seabird species currently re-colonising Tetiaroa following ongoing rat eradication, including Masked Booby, Wedge-tailed Shearwater and White-tailed Tropicbird. Lastly, we would like to thank the 2022 Pacific Islands Bird Conservation Research Fund for its generous funding.

JAMES RUSSELL, JANA DeVORE & SIMON DUCATEZ

Project Assistance Fund 2024

Each year we make grants for bird research and dissemination of information about birds. The maximum is usually \$2000. Individuals or groups who are current Birds New Zealand members may apply. Applications close 30 March 2024 and are considered at the June Council meeting. Guidelines and application form: www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/paf/



▣ Black-billed Gull: Michael Szabo.



▣ Antipodean Albatross chick, Antipodes Island: Kath Walker.

Albatross diet during critical life stages

Seabirds are one of the most vulnerable groups of birds, with 41% of species listed as globally threatened or near threatened. The main threats are related to interactions with human fishing activities both directly (eg, incidental capture while feeding on bait and discards) and indirectly through the reduction in the abundance of key prey species. Climate change is also increasingly impacting the foraging behaviour of seabirds and their prey species. Thus, knowledge of the diet composition of seabirds has become increasingly important to better understand their ecology, especially in terms of identifying and addressing anthropogenic factors that are impacting their survival.

This research project will focus on Antipodean Albatross (*Diomedea antipodensis antipodensis*) and Gibson's Albatross (*D. antipodensis gibsoni*), located on Antipodes Island and Adams Island, respectively. These birds are classified as nationally critical with their populations predicted to decline by > 70% in the coming years. There is very limited dietary information available for these seabirds whose food sources are threatened. DNA 'metabarcoding' has proved to be successful in identifying dietary target species from seabird regurgitated pellets/boluses, which are ideal sample types to gain dietary information from. A single bolus sample represents an individual chick's dietary period over a few months before they leave the colony.

With assistance from the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, this study aims to investigate the bolus contents that have been regurgitated from Antipodean and Gibson's albatross chicks using DNA metabarcoding to help determine the importance of various fish and cephalopod species during this critical stage. This applied research has the potential to be immediately expanded to previously collected samples that could help us understand why there was a sudden decline in the numbers of these two albatrosses in 2006-2007, and possibly lead to measures to prevent further events like these by informing effective conservation management.

DR AIMEE van der REIS, PROF. ANDREW JEFFS (UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND), DR KATH WALKER, DR GRAEME ELLIOTT (DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION)

Australasian Bittern monitoring

The Australasian Bittern is critically endangered in New Zealand. The current estimate is 250-1,000 individuals and the population is thought to have declined at 50-70% over the last 15 years. More recent research shows that bitterns are highly mobile, suggesting earlier estimates might be based on double counting. Bitterns cryptic and crepuscular birds. Males make a distinct "booming" call during their breeding season in Spring. Surveying these booms in wetlands during Spring with human observers or passive acoustic recorders is the standard monitoring protocol in New Zealand. Previous research involving GPS tracking of a few individual bitterns in the Canterbury and Waikato regions have demonstrated how mobile bitterns are. Most NZ bittern populations have not been monitored using GSM tracking and there remains a huge gap in our knowledge. For most regions, we only have species occurrence data, which gives an indication of distribution, but given the extremely low detection probability, much more detailed information is needed to inform conservation planning. With assistance from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund this research aims to establish baseline acoustic monitoring and movement data for bitterns in the Awarua-Waituna Complex. This research will also help to develop more effective monitoring methods using Passive Acoustic Monitoring and will test new tools by using GSM transmitters that provide near real-time location data.

ZOHARA RAFI, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Birds NZ Research Fund 2023

We manage this fund on behalf of the T-Gear Charitable Trust and briefly summarise here the 2023 grants. Full details are posted online: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/>

New Black-billed Gull Nationwide Census

The endemic Tarapuka Black-billed Gull was listed as critically endangered in 2016 due to suspected large historical population declines. Birds New Zealand and Fruzio funded a national census in 2016-17. The breeding pair estimate from that census was much higher than expected, and it was concluded that the population may be stable but that another census in 5-10 years was strongly recommended. After the 2016-17 census, the Black-billed Gull was re-assessed in the NZ Threat Classification in 2021 as "At Risk - Declining".

Seven years have passed since that survey, so it is time to repeat it to assess current numbers. Rivers in the Southland, Otago, Canterbury and West Coast regions of the South Island will be surveyed by overflights, and Marlborough/Tasman and all of the North Island will be surveyed on the ground. The 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, Environment Canterbury, the Department of Conservation, and Environment Southland are contributing to fund the overflights. The rest of the survey will rely on Birds New Zealand members finding and reporting colonies. Please use breeding codes and write notes in the comments field in your eBird Atlas checklists, or send sightings to: mike@toroaconsulting.co.nz and cmischler@doc.govt.nz

MIKE BELL & CLAUDIA MISCHLER

Establishing a Pakahā study colony

Seabird translocations can help future-proof species by establishing new colonies in suitable, similar habitat. However, seabirds have strong site fidelity to their natal colony and so during translocations, most of the monitoring of these birds occurs at the translocated site to ensure translocated birds return to breed. Four translocations of Pakahā Fluttering Shearwaters from Kokomohua Long Island have occurred since 1991. There has been minimal monitoring of them there except for a 2007-2010 project when 100 artificial burrows were built and monitored. In 2022, another 59 artificial study burrows were installed to aid translocation efforts. However, no consistent annual monitoring has been established there and so the likelihood of translocated birds returning to their natal colony is currently unknown. The nest boxes provide an opportunity to determine if any translocated birds return. The Kokomohua breeding colony is on steep, fragile terrain where slips have impacted the study site. Birds New Zealand Marlborough is also establishing a study to assess its long-term viability for future translocations. With assistance from the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, local branch members will be able to establish a robust monitoring programme. Annual monitoring of the artificial burrows will allow occupancy, breeding status, and adult/juvenile survival data to be collected. With this colony likely to be used as a source for future translocations, it is vital this population is monitored. The project also has a training focus allowing youth members and iwi to gain seabird banding and monitoring experience, and thereby create opportunities to transfer these skills to other projects across NZ.

KEEGAN MISKIMMIN, BIZ BELL & PATRICK CROWE, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INTERNATIONAL



▣ Chatham Island Tāiko: Dave Boyle.

Climate change vulnerability of Chatham Island Tāiko

Climate change is one of the main threats to seabirds, affecting almost as many species as bycatch. It mostly affects breeding and foraging habitats, and ecosystem processes. Around NZ, sea temperature, acidity, and the frequency of marine heatwaves are increasing and one of the most important climate change impacts on sea conditions is predicted to occur on the Chatham Rise. Predicted climate change induced alterations of the marine environment around the Chatham Islands could reduce forage availability for the critically endangered Chatham Island Tāiko, which has a small population of circa 100 adults, and have knock-on effects on population dynamics. To better assess and predict how climate change may affect this species it is vital to improve our understanding of its foraging ecology.

As the population is so small, I carried out a pilot study during the 2022-23 breeding season to assess the effect of GPS deployment on them. Results were positive, so I will next deploy 10 GPS data loggers on breeding birds during the 2023-24 breeding season from late incubation and throughout the chick-rearing period. This will provide insights into at-sea behaviour and distribution during breeding, and enable us to identify environmental factors that drive their movements and distribution, and derive areas of importance. This information can then be used to inform marine spatial planning and will enable predictions to be made about how future climate change may impact the availability of suitable marine habitats for breeding birds. I would like to thank the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund for supporting this research.

JOHANNES CHAMBON, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Understanding Hihi hatching failure

The endemic Hihi or Stitchbird is one of the rarest bird species in the world but levels of hatching failure (>30%) are three times higher than non-threatened species, affecting the viability of existing populations and the establishment of new ones. Although hatching failure is often assumed to be driven by fertilisation failure, our preliminary work has indicated that a large number of Hihi hatching failures are due to very early embryo mortality. We aim to understand the drivers of this failure to help ongoing conservation. This work will provide vital insight into the mechanisms and drivers of early-stage reproductive failure, contribute to our understanding of Hihi breeding biology and population demography, and inform future translocation and reintroduction efforts.

We are currently monitoring nest success and collecting all failed eggs across the Hihi population at Tiritiri Mātangi. With assistance from the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, we will microscopically examine unhatched eggs for signs of development, assess the developmental stage of embryos, and conduct molecular analysis to determine inbreeding levels of failed embryos. We will also collect data from the local weather station, so we can investigate patterns of fertility and embryo survival relative to prevailing weather conditions across the breeding season. The proposed work will allow us to address whether fertilisation failure/embryo mortality is associated with parental or individual (embryonic) inbreeding levels in Hihi, if early embryo mortality in Hihi is sex-biased, and if Hihi egg fertility and embryo survival rates vary with climatic variables including temperature and rainfall.

DR ANNA SANTURE, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND



▣ Attaching time-depth recorder on a Black Petrel, Aotea Great Barrier Island: Biz Bell.

Vertical foraging behaviour of three *Procellaria* petrel species

The five *Procellaria* petrel species are all vulnerable to being killed as bycatch in longline fisheries. I will investigate the diving behaviour of three of them. The vulnerable White-chinned Petrel has the highest mortality from fisheries bycatch worldwide. The endangered Westland Petrel and vulnerable Black Petrel are both NZ endemics, with the latter having the highest bycatch risk from commercial fisheries in NZ waters.

Bycatch mitigation measures include bird-scaring lines, increasing hook sink rates, reducing weight spacing, and night-setting when many seabirds are less active. Bycatch still poses a serious threat to many seabird species, suggesting such measures are insufficient or ill-informed. For these measures to be revised, a thorough understanding of seabird foraging behaviour is imperative. For example, the descent rate and dive depths of seabirds can directly inform the necessary sink rates of hooks, and known maximum diving ability can inform depths to which hooks must be protected. Diving behaviour can be investigated with the use of time-depth recorders (TDRs). These retrieve depth measurements from which dive depths, durations, and frequencies can be extracted. Previous studies have investigated White-chinned and Black petrel dive depths. Neither the diving behaviour of the endangered Westland Petrel, nor variations in diving behaviour among species have been examined; nor has variation in diving behaviour associated with fishing boats.

With assistance from the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, we will analyse and compare diving behaviour within and among study species and between sexes, across body sizes, seasonal cycles, and distributions. Currently, there is no distinguishing between vessel-associated dives and natural foraging dives of petrels. Given that the risk of bycatch is specific to vessel-associated dives, this is a major limitation in previous studies on foraging behaviour and the implications for bycatch mitigation. Thus, I will pair TDRs deployed on Black Petrels with high resolution tracking tags. The data can then be aligned with fishing vessel locations during setting and hauling to determine which dives are vessel associated. The objectives of my study include: 1) examining and comparing the diving behaviour of all three study species, 2) separating and comparing vessel-associated and natural diving behaviours, and 3) relating these findings to bycatch mitigation. My study will provide significant contributions to our understanding of the foraging ecology of these species and has the potential to inform the revision of bycatch mitigation measures.

MARIA DUSSLER, JOHANNES FISCHER
& PROF. HEIKO U. WITTMER

North Island Mātātā Fernbird moult

This project aims to describe the moult and morphometrics of the North Island Mātātā or Fernbird, including the sequence, timing and extent of post-juvenile and post-/pre-breeding moult. An understanding of this is fundamental to determining the age of Mātātā and moult characteristics can be used for conservation management to assess body condition and inform age and sex ratios of discrete bird populations. Mātātā occurs across a wide latitudinal and altitudinal range and therefore is also a candidate to study the influence of climate on demographics, the timing of moult, breeding, and response to environmental factors such as food supply.

DR PAUL FISHER



■ Kuaka Whenua Hou Diving Petrel: Johannes Fischer.

Identifying areas of high conservation concern for Kuaka

The critically endangered Kuaka or Whenua Hou Diving Petrel is a recently described burrow-nesting seabird species that is a taonga species to Ngāi Tahu. Kuaka were once widespread throughout southern Aotearoa, but now the last remaining colony is restricted to Whenua Hou Codfish Island, with an adult population of about 200 individuals. Threats from commercial fisheries around Whenua Hou such as vessel-based light pollution, which can lead to disorientation and collisions of birds, may inhibit population recovery. Kuaka are most at risk from fisheries interaction during the breeding period, as they are bound by central-placed foraging with their distribution overlapping with commercial fisheries and marine traffic.

Increased human use of New Zealand waters is predicted, with the anticipated installation of offshore aquaculture and wind farms. To ensure that current threats are addressed and future developments do not increase risks to Kuaka, areas of high conservation concern need to be identified. With assistance from the 2023 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, I will deploy lightweight GPS data loggers on adult Kuaka and track them during the incubation and chick-rearing period. The resulting fine-scale distribution data will allow us to identify at-sea behaviour, foraging hotspots, and overlap with commercial fisheries/future offshore industries. Identifying areas of high importance for Kuaka will inform proactive conservation management.

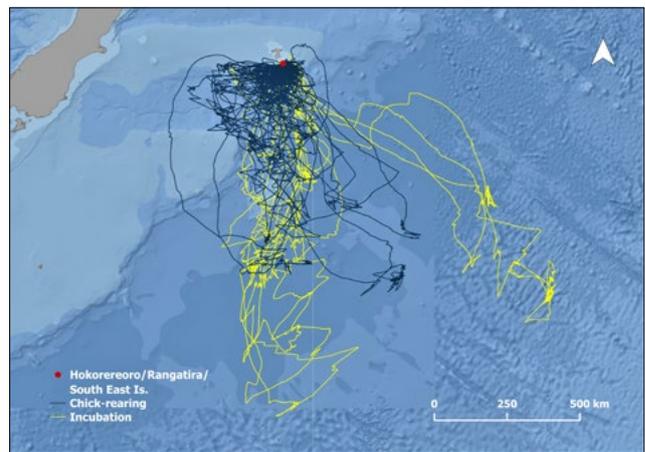
– JOHANNES FISCHER, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Geographic vocal variation in NZ Tomtits

With assistance from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, I investigated if song dialects exist between North and South Island subspecies of NZ Tomtit (Miromiro and Ngirungiru), between different North Island populations, and within individual North Island populations. Between August 2022 and August 2023, male Miromiro song was recorded from six North Island sites (Bay of Islands, Waitākere Ranges, Coromandel Forest Park, Taranaki National Park, Tararua Ranges, Remutaka Ranges). South Island Ngirungiru recordings were obtained from public bird song archives (Xeno Canto, Macaulay Library). DNA samples were also collected from North Island Miromiro populations, to be analysed as part of a future study investigating genetic similarity of populations and utility of using bioacoustics as a monitoring tool for population connectivity.

My results indicate that macro scale (>2km) song dialects exist between North and South Island subspecies, and between North Island populations. North Island birds had shorter, lower frequency and less complex songs compared to South Island birds. North Island populations displayed a general relationship where geographically distant populations had greater dialect differences than geographically close locations. I found no evidence of micro-dialects (<2km) within North Island populations, but some evidence for small-scale dialects occurring on scales of 2-10km. Macro-scale patterns indicate that isolation between subspecies and North Island populations has been great enough to allow dialect differences to accumulate. A lack of micro-scale dialects indicates that juvenile Miromiro likely learn song pre-dispersal (or only modify their song slightly after dispersal) and disperse between 2-10km away from their natal areas. Overall, this collection of acoustic and DNA data will lay a foundation for future study of Miromiro and suggests that dialect studies may be a useful tool for monitoring bird populations and dispersal.

ANA MENZIES, MSc, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND



Chatham Petrel climate change vulnerability

The endemic Chatham Petrel is one of the rarest seabird species in the world with only circa 1,100 adults. Once abundant on several islands in the Chatham archipelago it is now restricted to a handful of intensively managed populations. Major threats on land have been identified and are being managed, but at-sea threats are largely unknown. Around New Zealand, ocean temperature, acidity, and the frequency of marine heatwaves are increasing, and one of the most important climate change impacts on oceanographic conditions is predicted to occur near the Chatham Islands. These predicted alterations could reduce Chatham Petrel forage availability. Improving our understanding of the species' foraging ecology is crucial to better assess and predict how climate change may affect this threatened species.

With assistance from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, we were able to use GPS tags to track Chatham Petrels breeding on Rangatira Island from mid-incubation through mid-chick rearing. The deployment and recovery of GPS tags on breeding Chatham Petrels was quite successful with 70% recovery and a cumulative tracking of 358 days. Ten GPS tags were deployed in early February, out of which seven were recovered in late March (all recording data for the whole tracking period), two fell from the birds, and one bird was not recaptured as its breeding attempt failed. The recovered GPS tags are still functional and will be redeployed on Chatham Petrels next season.

The tracks were described in terms of trip range, length, and duration. During incubation the trips lasted on average 9.96 ± 2.50 days (mean \pm SD), with a range of $1,237 \pm 251$ km, and a length of $5,312 \pm 1,058$ km. Chick rearing foraging trips were shorter (duration = 3.55 ± 2.06 days; length = $1,625 \pm 1,011$ km) and closer to the burrows (trip range = 357 ± 230 km). Tests are underway to investigate the effect of sex on the trip metrics. The birds flew mostly south and southeast during incubation and south-southwest during chick rearing.

The population level core area during chick rearing (50% utilisation distribution) is centred about 100km south-southwest of Rangatira Island. There is a high overlap in individuals' utilisation distributions. Interestingly, very few locations were recorded north of Rangatira Island, which may reflect the species' habitat preference. We have not started the behavioural and step/habitat analyses yet, but initial exploration of the data indicates that wind direction may be a key factor affecting the birds' movements with foraging trip spatial and temporal patterns seemingly matching that of the region's wind circulation driven by eastwards drifting low- and high-pressure systems. Funds have been secured for a second season of tracking. Twenty GPS tags will be deployed in 2023-24 and results compared to this initial tracking to assess inter-annual variation in foraging ecology. This will also help refine the identification of the environmental variables driving the species' movements, habitat preferences, and the subsequent modelling of the future distribution of its preferred habitat under different climate change scenarios.

JOHANNES CHAMBON, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO



▲ Mohua, Anchor Island: Oscar Thomas/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Clare Gunton during field work: Harley Lawson.

Conservation genomics and phylogeography of Mohua

With assistance from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, our research project used genome-wide single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) data that was generated via genotyping-by-sequencing (GBS) to investigate population structure and levels of genetic diversity and inbreeding in mainland and island populations of Mohua Yellowhead. We also evaluated whether island populations of Mohua are suitable sources for translocations to supplement declining mainland Mohua populations. Our analyses of population structure found that island Mohua clustered away from mainland Mohua, indicating a loss of the genetic signature found on the mainland. Our findings further revealed reduced genetic health (ie, higher inbreeding and decreased genetic diversity) in island Mohua, calling for caution when establishing new populations via translocation with birds sourced solely from a single island.

We also used the mitochondrial cytochrome b gene and the control region to resolve the phylogeography of Mohua. By gaining insights into past demographic distribution and patterns of gene flow, historical relationships between Mohua populations can be discovered, which can have implications for conservation management. Our GBS analysis divided present-day mainland Mohua into three geographic groups (roughly west, south and east). In contrast, the analysis of mitochondrial DNA did not reveal structured distribution patterns, thus indicating continuous past gene flow between populations. In the absence of historic structure, Mohua could be translocated across populations to restore previously naturally-occurring migration, should this become necessary in future.

JOHANNA KANN, DR LUDOVIC DUTOIT & PROF. BRUCE ROBERTSON, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Newly uncovered parasites of Kahu

The native Kahu Swamp Harrier is a carnivorous raptor that also scavenges roadkill. There is only a single, unnamed species of capillariid nematode parasite recorded from the Kahu in the NZ ornithological literature. With assistance from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, our project set out to recover all parasitic helminths from 65 Kahu corpses that we received from Dunedin Wildlife Hospital and The Raptor Trust, from which we recovered six parasite species: three nematodes, an acanthocephalan, a cestode and a trematode. One nematode, the cestode and the acanthocephalan are new species and have been formally described and named. Another nematode (*Porrocaecum circinum*) was poorly known and has been re-described, and the trematode (*Strigea falconis*) is the first NZ record of this genus.

The origins of the helminths and their arrival in NZ is of interest as we have records in the literature covering the date of introduction of almost all alien species. The Kahu is thought to have naturally colonised NZ from Australia after human arrival, and probably became established here following the habitat disturbances associated with humans in the past 800 years. As most of the helminth parasites use small mammals or frogs as intermediate hosts, all of which arrived in NZ several hundred years after the Kahu, we infer that the immigrating Kahu arrived with no viable parasites, and acquired infections from introduced species of intermediate hosts at a later date.

BRONWEN PRESSWELL & JOSHUA BENNETT,
UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Home range and habitat use of western Weka in the alpine environment of Secretary Island

One of the main purposes of my study is to evaluate the home ranges and habitat use of western Weka in the alpine environment of Secretary Island Ka Tū-waewae-o-Tū, a largely predator-free island off the coast of Fiordland National Park, in order to better understand their alpine ecology. During my field research (November 2022–April 2023), DOC conducted a translocation of Mahogany Skinks from an area above Sinbad Gully to the alpine zone of All Round Peak on Secretary Island. I used this opportunity to also assess whether Weka home ranges and habitat use changed after the translocation.

During field trips to Secretary Island in November 2022 and January 2023, we caught and harnessed 20 Weka. With support from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, we attached Lotek PinPoint 350 GPS store-on-board data-loggers and TW-28 VHF transmitters. In April 2023 we re-caught most of the Weka and retrieved a few harnesses that had fallen-off, getting back 17 of 20 harnesses. Unfortunately, many of the GPS data-loggers experienced a technical or mechanical error, so most did not function as expected. This means I will not be able to make a comparison of Weka habitat use pre- and post-skink translocation using GPS data. However, there is enough data to gain some valuable insights into Weka home ranges, habitat use, and resource selection in alpine, subalpine, and forest environments. I also placed ten trail cameras around the skink release site. Between mid-February and early-April, these recorded plenty of skinks, but only two occurrences of Weka, and no evidence of Weka preying on skinks. I have not yet started the formal analysis of the GPS data. Once completed, I will share this with Birds New Zealand.

CLARE GUNTON, MSc STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Toanui plastics ingestion on Ohinau

The aims of this project were to quantify the ingestion of plastic pollution and the plastics colour preferences of Toanui Flesh-footed Shearwaters on Ohinau Island, and to explore if the colour of the plastics resembles the colour of natural prey items. In 2022 and January 2023, any plastics regurgitated by Toanui or found across Ohinau were collected and categorised into seven different plastics colour categories (white/clear, red, blue, green, brown, yellow/gold, black). Using an ocean optics spectrometer, we measured the spectral reflectance of the plastics and natural prey items, including an Arrow Squid, an Atlantic salmonid, a New Zealand sprat, and crustacea. Their spectral reflectances were modelled into the vision of a Wedge-tailed Shearwater to see how visually different the plastics looked compared to the seabird's natural prey.

Only white, blue, red, and green plastics were found on Ohinau with white plastic being the most abundant colour found. White plastics looked most similar to natural prey, which could explain why white plastics were more abundant. However, green plastics also looked similar to natural prey, but were not as abundant. Other factors could also be influencing seabird plastics ingestion such as the shape and size of the plastics. We would like to thank the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund for funding the charter boat to Ohinau and the collection of extra plastics.

ARIEL-MICAH HESWELL, SIMON LAMB & DAN BURGIN



▲ Mary Thompson.

Mary Thompson steps up

Long-serving Otago Regional Representative Mary Thompson really is a 'force of nature'. After recently stepping down as Otago RR, she immediately stepped up to take on the co-ordination of two major ornithological surveys.

Since retiring from the University of Otago, where she was a biochemistry lecturer, she has organised over 50 field trips and 150 talks and seminars during her 17-year 'stint' as the Otago RR. She also organised various major surveys including a survey of Australasian Crested Grebes in the Otago Lakes and a nationwide nest count of Royal Spoonbills for Birds New Zealand.

Over the next five years she will co-ordinate an Otago-wide survey of wetland birds, data from which will be used by the regional council and Department of Conservation to find out which species are present in Otago wetlands. She will also co-ordinate a new nationwide Royal Spoonbill survey for Birds New Zealand. The previous survey recorded 2,500 birds and she is hoping the total number will have risen to more than 6,000 birds by the end of the new survey.

She says that her favourite part of being the RR was giving people the chance to see more new bird species. The most valuable lesson that she has learned about birdwatching is, "Observe carefully. The people that observe carefully see the most. If you look carefully, you'll see more and learn more," she told the Otago Daily Times.

At a recent farewell party with Otago branch members, Mary was presented with gifts of appreciation including a card and a wall hanging of New Zealand bird photographs taken by fellow branch members. "I have really enjoyed every minute of my time as RR," she says. "I can look back on all the different kinds of events, field trips and birding opportunities that I helped create with some satisfaction. I think all of us have experiences with birds we wouldn't have had, had we not been members of Birds New Zealand. May there be many more".

2024 nationwide Royal Spoonbill census

"Royal Spoonbill numbers have just gone ballistic; they're a success story in New Zealand", commented Birds New Zealand Taranaki Regional Representative Peter Fryer during an interview with Radio New Zealand. Birds New Zealand has been following the increase in population and breeding of Royal Spoonbills in New Zealand since the late 1970s. The last nationwide census was organised in 2012. It was agreed at the June Regional Representatives meeting held in New Plymouth that Birds New Zealand regions should collectively carry out another nationwide census and colony and nest count in 2024. I offered to organise these surveys. In preparation for this census, I am suggesting that during our atlasing we all check for and identify possible locations of breeding colonies during the coming summer; usually undisturbed areas away from humans. This 'recce' work will help us to get some idea of what will be required to do the survey in 2024; perhaps boats for access, etc. We will be applying for funds from the Project Assistance Fund for this. Plans for the census will be published in the magazine so please watch this space.

MARY THOMPSON



▲ North Island Kōkako: Oscar Thomas/NZ Birds Online.

Kōkako thriving in Rotoehu Forest

The Kōkako population is rapidly expanding at Rotoehu Forest between Rotorua, Whakatāne and Te Puke according to a new survey across 2,450-hectares of public conservation land. The Department of Conservation (DOC) reports that Rotoehu Forest now has the second largest mainland Kōkako population with 289 breeding pairs counted, an 89% increase on the 157 pairs in 2019. The huge increase is due to ongoing pest control efforts using bait stations and aerially applied 1080 bait pellets. "This result is significant for the local population of Kōkako and for the future of the species," says DOC Senior Ranger Rebecca Newland.

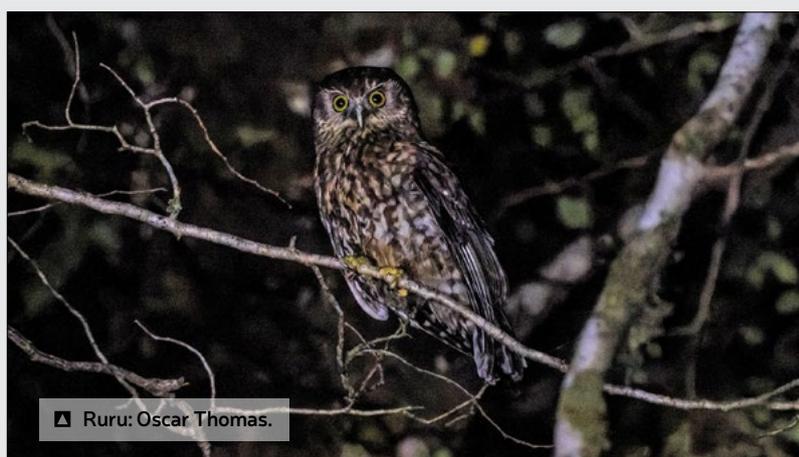
Kōkako are a taonga for local iwi Ngāti Māhino and hold a special place in the stories and traditional knowledge of the area. Ngāti Māhino Iwi Authority is working alongside DOC to help protect Kōkako at Rotoehu Forest. "Preserving our native Kōkako species is deeply rooted in our cultural and spiritual connection to the land and its environment, says the Authority's Environmental Manager John Rapana. "Over the centuries, observation of our Kōkako and other manu taonga species resulted in an accumulation of local knowledge about their behaviour, habitat, and seasonal patterns that were observed, contextualised, and appropriated into our cultural stories and practises."

The Rotoehu Ecological Trust, which has managed bait stations in the forest since 2013, says the survey result is testament to the hard work of community volunteers and advocates who have strived to protect the forest for decades. "In the late 1980s, protests by members of Forest and Bird Te Puke led to the creation of a protected conservation and ecological area, which was home to the ancestors of the current Kōkako population," says Trustee Jane Bird.

Booming bitterns and cryptic crakes

This is a major new project that the Birds New Zealand Otago branch will be involved in over the next few years. The branch has signed an agreement with Otago Regional Council (ORC) to survey Otago wetlands for the presence of Australasian Bitterns and any crakes. There should be opportunities for members to take part, either in the field or analysing sound recordings at home with expenses to be fully reimbursed. This survey will be contributing to ORC's overall regional biodiversity monitoring. Bittern survey fieldwork will commence this year during October-December. We need people that have time to travel to wetlands to place automatic recorders and to return three weeks later to retrieve the SD cards, replace batteries and redeploy them for a further three weeks. If you would like to get involved, please contact Mary Thompson: nzmaryt@gmail.com

MARY THOMPSON



West Coast Atlas Expedition

– Kiwi and Cuckoos

The New Zealand Bird Atlas team organised another Toi Toi Wines funded expedition in October, this time to the West Coast over the Labour Weekend. The key aim was to increase day and night effort as much as possible in areas close to Hokitika. We had an amazing response with more than 20 people registering and a fantastic effort from the entire group!

Altogether the expedition completed 526 checklists and recorded a total of 85 bird species with more than 105 Atlas grid squares receiving data. Highlights included encounters with Okarito Brown Kiwi, Koekoëa Long-tailed Cuckoo, Ruru Morepork and Kōtuku Ngutupapa Royal Spoonbills.

Our group of keen Atlasers met on the Friday evening at Hokitika Holiday Park, with members coming from Dunedin, Christchurch, Blenheim, Nelson and several spots along the West Coast itself. Members got in to the Atlasing spirit before the big weekend by Atlasing along their routes helping to fill in some of those gaps!

The plan was simple: to split up the group of about 20 into smaller groups, targeting sets of grid squares which had little to no effort in them and undertaking as much birding as possible. Nocturnal effort was of course encouraged, as was trying to bump up effort hours and species totals for as many grid squares as possible. After the original West Coast expedition was cancelled last year due to heavy rainfall, the Atlas team were over the moon to see that no rain was forecast for this Labour Weekend and a solid weekend of Atlasing could finally commence!

After catching up on the Friday evening, the teams were established and everyone was up early and ready to Atlas. We split into six groups, with vehicles heading in various directions to target under-surveyed areas such as Ahaura, Blackball, Dunganville, Turiwhate, Lake Kanieri, Kokatahi River, Fergusons, Waitaha River, Herepo and more. The teams spent as much time as they could to collate as many bird observations in the different habitats that they encountered.

The weather was fantastic with periods of sunshine warming the teams. A notable highlight was some of the group getting access to see the Plumed Whistling Ducks currently present near Reefton, with Oscar Thomas and Bradley Shields both getting fantastic photos. These birds are vagrants from Australia and small flocks of them have reached New Zealand at least eight times since 2000. Most sightings have been in western New Zealand, with some birds also having reached Hawke's Bay and main Chatham Island.

The fun didn't stop after the sun went down, with groups targeting Korora Little Penguins along the coast near Hokitika, and others targeting Roroa Great Spotted Kiwi or Ruru Morepork north of Hokitika.

Being keen to make the most of the good weather, everyone was able to get in another great day of Atlasing on Sunday. The groups began to venture north towards Reefton and focused on under-surveyed areas near Mawheraiti, Maimai, Gloriavalle, Buller Creek Road, Cronadun, and Inangahua. One group explored a rarely visited Saltwater Lagoon between Hari Hari



▲ Plumed Whistling Ducks: Bradley Shields



▲ Keegan Miskimmin and Kirsten Olsen Atlasing: Stephen Legg.



▲ Stephen Legg and Kirsten Olsen after a hard day Atlasing.



▲ Oscar Thomas, Ela Hunt, Keegan Miskimmin, Bradley Shields, Sam Ray, Nick Allen, Serge Crottaz, Charlotte Crotaz, Janet Newell, Sharen Graham, Mats Olsthoorn, Marilyn Court & Rachel Taylor.

and Whataroa. The lagoon is huge and a special West Coast experience with a challenging track with numerous boggy bits, windfalls, and interesting stream crossings. This is one of the few places on the coast where Titipounamu Rifleman still exist close to sea-level.

After a hard day's Atlasing, the group very much appreciated the opportunity to catch up with each other and share their stories over a glass of wine. The Toi Toi Wines team were incredibly kind in not only providing funding for the trip, but also sending some bottles of their wine for the teams to enjoy!

Everyone enjoyed the weekend and had positive feedback. Kirsten Olsen says, "The highlight for me was when I heard my first Long-tailed Cuckoo of the season at Hokitika Gorge after the three of us in my group had to give counting in a square that had no spring counts because the road was blocked by a locked gate."

Bradley Shields says, "The expedition was a fantastic way to explore the most under-surveyed region, finally having an excuse to go down all those random side-roads and find some really awesome birds. The highlight for me was hearing Spotless Crake and Okarito Brown Kiwi calling near Okarito."

Sharon Roberts says there many highlights: "One was meeting and spending time with birders whom I'd never met before. Exploring very minor back roads 'with a purpose' was very interesting, and observing a Royal Spoonbill carrying nesting material into a grove of trees beside the Hokitika River, where there were also another 3 spoonbills, was a very exciting sighting for me."

With everyone buoyed by the good weather and a successful expedition, people returned home on the Monday, stopping off to do some more Atlasing along the way, of course! The Atlas Team couldn't have been happier with the results. More than 105 Atlas grid squares received data over a 72-hour period, and an impressive dataset was collated in an under-surveyed, and sometimes very hard to survey region. You can see from the map on this page showing all the checklist locations from the expedition. You can view all the checklists here: <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/tripreport/165929>

A huge thank you goes to our hard-working group of Atlas enthusiasts who gave up their Labour Weekend. They included Arna Carlson, Marilyn Court, Sharen Graham, Mats Olsthoorn, Richard Nichol, Stephen Legg, Kirsten Olsen, Oscar Thomas, Janina Castro, Lily Eagen, Ela Hunt, Serge Crottaz, Charlotte Crottaz, Bradley Shields, Sharon Roberts, Nick Allen, Rachel Taylor, Zachary Thomas and Janet Newell. We can't thank you all enough for coming together and helping support this Atlas expedition. It was great to share birding knowledge and work together on it. As always, a big thank you also goes to Toi Toi Wines for their generous sponsorship which made the expedition possible and for the wine they donated!

There are still gaps and under-surveyed areas remaining on the West Coast, so we really encourage people to Atlas there if you get the chance to. And, of course, we encourage everyone to continue to Atlas across the country wherever you may be, and whenever you can to help us to finish the project on a high note!

NEW ZEALAND BIRD ATLAS TEAM



NZ Bird Atlas – The Final Summer

The final Summer season of the NZ Bird Atlas project is upon us! Having the last Spring season conclude at the end of November, we are now edging ever closer to the close of the project. As always, we thank everyone for their efforts so far and we hope you all managed to get out and gather some important Spring observations, particularly at night to bump up those nocturnal effort hours!

As we head into the 'home strait', we continue to be blown away by the amount of effort and bird observations being submitted.

To date over 380,000 checklists have been logged to the Atlas eBird portal by over 1,500 atlasers, covering 305 bird species. That is an impressive amount of data, and a total of over 123,000 effort hours, or 5,100 days. We are humbled with how much dedication the ever-growing Atlas community has put into this nationally significant scheme. We really hope you continue to enjoy regularly uploading your bird observations to the Atlas portal and seeking out those under-surveyed areas this Summer.

You may be wondering how much Atlasing is left to prioritise this Summer season. The answer is plenty! Current coverage shows that 87% of grid squares (2,813) have received some Summer data since the Atlas project began in June 2019, even if it's just a five-minute count. That means that over 419 grid squares are still yet to receive their first Summer effort. Can you be the first to venture out to these squares to gather some important Summer bird observations? We certainly hope so.

If you can't then please remember, repeated surveys across the whole grid are the desired outcome over the next three months, spreading that effort over time and space, and trying to gather observations in the less visited areas. The vast agricultural landscape of New Zealand, and under-surveyed stretches along back-country roads are still in need of attention. Plenty of these areas are easily accessible, and chatting with landowners can

always reap further benefits through more access. It just takes a little bit of effort for a big reward.

Targeting under-surveyed areas is easy through the use of the many valuable tools that are available on the Atlas eBird portal under the 'Explore' page. The Atlas Effort Map as well as Species Maps continue to be the two key tools that we recommend to plan your Atlas adventures. Atlas Target Species, and using the Top 100 birder totals for regions, and even grid squares, can also be a fun motivator! We've loved featuring Atlasing tales on the portal, so please do get in touch if you have an Atlasing story to share. We love to showcase the efforts the community are going to for the project.

Colin Miskelly Atlasing Te Araroa Trail

Within the wider Atlas community there are always impressive stand-out individual efforts, and we want to wish Colin Miskelly all the very best with his incredible Te Araroa Trail Atlasing adventure! Colin will be Atlasing the entire length of the country along the trail, undertaking counts each 2km as well as getting some valuable nocturnal counts at huts and campsites. In doing so, he'll gather an impressive dataset over time and space, and we can't wait to hear all about it. You can keep up the date via his Te Papa blogs (<https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/author/colinmiskelly/>) and he'll present his findings at the 2024 annual conference in Nelson. Good luck Colin!

Toi Toi Wines Expeditions

We've recently had a fantastic Toi Toi Wines-funded West Coast Atlas expedition (see pages 12-13). Otago still have some areas to cover and we aim to share more information soon on how you may be able to get involved with them. Please keep an eye on the Atlas project website and Facebook page for more information. A massive thanks again to Toi Toi Wines for providing their generous funding, it has really boosted effort in these spots and provided opportunities for Birds New Zealand members to come together for a shared goal in some beautiful parts of the country.

eBird Workshops December 2023

The Atlas team is very excited to announce that there will be a series of eBird workshops in December 2023, with members of the eBird team! With the help of Birds New Zealand, Zealandia, Nelson City Council, Environment Canterbury, Queenstown Lakes District Council and Whakatipu Wildlife Trust, the Atlas team (logos opposite), and the eBird team have set up eBird workshops in Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin and Queenstown this December! Ian Davies and Tom Auer from the eBird team are visiting from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology in the US and will be showcasing how to use eBird and eBird data for your birding and conservation research - completely free. They'll explore the value of this free global community science tool and how your observations can support local to global bird conservation and research, as well as how eBird data informs our understanding of species distribution, status, and population trends. RSVP links and more details are available on the Atlas News page within the eBird Team Visit article. We invite you to come along to learn about how your eBird observations can inform research and conservation action here in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.

As the project finale approaches, we really hope that you will continue to feel inspired to contribute to the Atlas. There are some incredible personal and group efforts within the Atlas community that have helped the project go from strength to strength. With only six months left, please join us in lighting up the map with even more bird observations. Happy Atlasing!

NEW ZEALAND BIRD ATLAS TEAM

HELP US TO HELP THEM



HOIHO
(Image: Alan Tennyson)



KORORĀ
(Image: Colin Miskelly)



TAWAKI
(Image: Doug Gimesy)

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The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology



eBird





▲ View from the maunga.



▲ Inside the goblin forest.



▲ Entrance to the valley.



▲ Rimu.

Puketahā Ecosanctuary and the Kākāpō

The Kākāpō is one of the most remarkable birds in the world. This nocturnal forest giant is the only flightless parrot species, the heaviest parrot species with males weighing up to 4kg, and one of the longest-lived of all bird species, with a reported lifespan of up to 100 years.

Although now listed as a critically endangered species they were once common throughout Aotearoa New Zealand's native forests. Thanks to decades of dedicated conservation work by the Kākāpō Recovery Programme their numbers increased last breeding season from 202 to 247. The population is now beyond the capacity of the pest-free offshore islands where they are currently located: Whenua Hou Codfish, Ka Tū-waewae-o-Tū Secretary, and Pukenui Anchor. As a result, there were two translocations of a total of ten Kākāpō to Maungatautari Sanctuary Mountain in the Waikato this year.

Another notable development has been the publication of a detailed feasibility study for the establishment of a new 15,000-hectare pest-free fenced Puketahā Ecosanctuary in an extensive area of lowland podocarp forest in the Wainuiomata water catchment area adjacent to Wainuiomata Regional Park.

This area is described as the most intact large tract of lowland podocarp forest in the lower North Island and is dominated by 18,000 mature Rimu, which makes it suitable for Kākāpō. In fact, the last accepted record of Kākāpō in the wild in the North Island was in Whiteman's Valley north of the boundary in 1905.

There is also a dense 'goblin forest' of gnarled tawhai beech trees higher up, covered in thick green moss. These *Nothofagus* forests of Aotearoa are relict of the ancient forests of Gondwana. The panoramic view from the maunga, 800m above sea level, is breathtaking.

The proposal to establish a predator-free Puketahā Ecosanctuary is supported by Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika, the Department of Conservation and Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC). The proposal is to install a 28km predator-proof fence around 3,300-hectares of the Wainuiomata Water Catchment before eradicating the invasive pest animals inside the fence and reintroducing Kākāpō and various other threatened bird species including Hihi Stitchbird and Rowi-Kiwi Okarito Brown Kiwi or Kiwi Pukupuku Little Spotted Kiwi.

The site was selected due to its size, habitat quality, valley topography suitable for fencing, and location close to a DOC staff base. The study identified the other threatened or at-risk species that would benefit from reintroduction there as Tieke Saddleback, Kōkako, Kākā, Red-crowned Kākāriki, and Toutouwai Robin. It also described how the ecosanctuary could possibly provide breeding habitat for up to 150 Kākāpō, 2,000 pairs of Hihi, and 500-700 pairs of Kōkako.

The native forest there was saved from the axe once it was set aside as a water catchment area in the 1800s and has the healthiest regional populations of most of the naturally surviving common native bird species that occur in the lower North Island, especially Titipounamu Rifleman and Miro NZ Tomtit. There are also about 20 pairs of Kiwi-Nui North Island Brown Kiwi in the area, originating from a nearby 2006 reintroduction by the Remutaka Conservation Trust, which has been monitoring the increasing kiwi population there and trapping invasive species for about 20 years.

The only way for the public to access the site is to join one of the ranger-guided walks notified via the GWRC website.



▲ 1300-year-old Matai.



▲ Rosemary the Kākāpō: Jake Osborne.



▲ Tititipounamu Rifleman.



▲ Hihi Stitchbird.

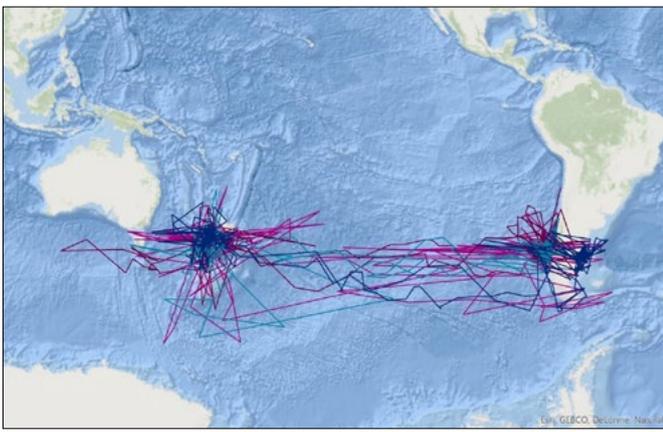
These start at the main gate and involve walking a 10km return route through the tall native forest and across several stream tributaries of the Wainuiomata River. Walking here, you can see for yourself just how impressively tall the ancient Rimu, Matai, Kahikatea and Northern Rātā are there.

In summer, expect to see good numbers of Kererū and Tūi flying and diving over the forest, Korimako Bellbird and Pipīwhararua Shining Cuckoos darting around the canopy, Miromiro and Tititipounamu foraging in the lower forest, and Tauhou Silvereyes and Piwakawaka NZ Fantails along the edge of the forest, all wary of Kārearea New Zealand Falcons. If you join a tour there, be sure to check any Kārearea you see just in case the bird turns out to be a Koekoē Long-tailed Cuckoo!

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



▲ Kiwi Nui North Island Brown Kiwi.



▣ Movements of four Westland Petrel adults across their migration annual cycle (2 male, 2 female).

At-sea tracking of Westland Petrels

A preliminary progress report on new research on Westland Petrels or Tāiko by a Department of Conservation team has revealed new information about diving depth, foraging locations and their migration to South America. The team of Kate Simister, Samhita Bose, Johannes Fischer and Graeme Taylor found that mean daily maximum dive depths for Westland Tāiko across years and life stages averaged at 2.2 metres and total maximum dive depth averaged at 7.7m. The deepest dive recorded was 14m.

Preliminary analysis suggests that Westland Tāiko perform shallower dives during pre-laying and incubation compared to the dives they performed during chick-rearing. This signal was clear in both the mean daily maximum dive depths (1.8 vs. 2.5) and the total maximum dive depths (6.0 vs. 9.2). The variation in dive depths between incubation and chick-rearing indicates different foraging behaviours conducted by Westland Tāiko during self-provisioning and chick-provisioning. The team also recovered 47 of the 50 Global Location Sensing (GLS) tags deployed in 2021 (94%) during the 2022 breeding season (see map). Another 29 GLS tags were deployed for short-term tracking on breeding adults during the breeding season of 2022 to identify movement and foraging areas during incubation and brood guard stage. This new information can help decision-makers to better understand the potential impacts of commercial fisheries on Westland Tāiko at different times of year and life stages.



The genetically unique Spotted Shag or Kawau Tikitiki population in the Hauraki Gulf has dramatically declined from about 2,000 pairs in the 1960s to only 250 breeding pairs in 2022, with monitoring data since 2015 suggesting a slow decline. These shags can dive to the seafloor to find prey but shellfish beds and seafloor habitat have been destroyed by past dredging for shellfish. This map shows their modern core habitat overlaid on the historic extent of dense shellfish beds and dredging industry activity in the inner Hauraki Gulf. These shellfish beds were destroyed leading to the collapse of the industry in the 1960s and have not recovered to this day due to ongoing siltation and pollution (Base map by *Revive Our Gulf*).

MATT RAYNER, AUCKLAND MUSEUM



▣ Kea: Michael Szabo.

More Kea seen at Nelson Lakes

More Kea are being seen in the Nelson Lakes area, an encouraging sign their numbers there are growing. Department of Conservation (DOC) Senior Biodiversity Ranger Melissa Griffin says Kea had practically disappeared from the area but more sightings last summer suggest efforts to re-build the population are working. “Trampers reported seeing groups of Kea with juvenile and sub-adult birds. It’s been particularly exciting young kea known to have been bred in the Nelson Lakes area were among those seen. This shows the birds are doing well on their own.”

Six Kea chicks successfully fledged from two monitored nests in the 2022 breeding season, three from each Kea nest. The nesting adult females also each had three chicks fledge from their nests in the 2021 breeding season. Nesting in the current breeding season is starting with one of the females already sitting on eggs in her monitored nest cavity. DOC and Kea Conservation Trust efforts there are being boosted with funding support from the World Parrot Trust and NZ Parrot Trust, which enables contractors to help maintain stoat traps around monitored Kea nests during the breeding season. The exact number of Kea in the area is not known but DOC estimates there could be around 25 birds, based on reported sightings.



▣ Kauai Akialoa: Ren Hathway/Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

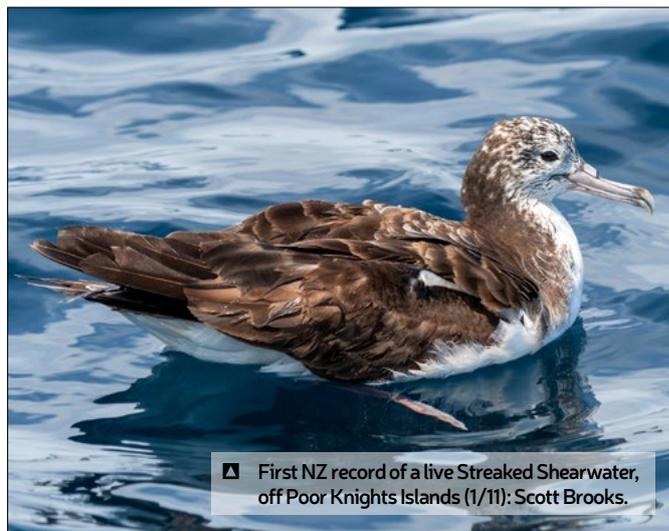
Eight endemic bird species declared extinct in Hawaii

Eight endemic Hawaiian bird species were removed from the US Endangered Species Act after being declared extinct in October: Large Kauai Thrush, Kauai Akialoa, Kauai Nukupuu, Kaula'i 'ō'ō, Maui ākepa, Maui Nukupu'u, Molokai Creeper, and Po'ouli. Bachman's Warbler, a bright yellow songbird species once common in Florida and South Carolina, was also removed from the list and declared extinct.

The US Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, emphasised the importance of wildlife conservation in a statement: “With climate change and natural area loss pushing more and more species to the brink, now is the time to lift up proactive, collaborative and innovative efforts to save America’s wildlife.” The US Center for Biological Diversity also commented on how these bird species, “can never be brought back”.



▲ Melanistic Pied Shag, Waitangi (19/10): Les Feasey/NZ Birds Online.



▲ First NZ record of a live Streaked Shearwater, off Poor Knights Islands (1/11): Scott Brooks.

FAR NORTH

Ninety Mile Beach is always interesting and varied. In October, although there were relatively fewer birds and no Red-billed Gulls, we saw 12 NZ Dotterels, 1 Banded Dotterel and 19 Bar-tailed Godwits by Te Paki Stream. There were 2 Banded Dotterels nesting at Spirits Bay plus 2 NZ Dotterels and 2 Variable Oystercatchers, and Kevin Matthews reports that he saw 50 Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage in a paddock near Waiharara.

The Waitangi Estuary continues to be a good birding site with a recent visit reporting 8 species including NZ Dotterel, 2 Caspian Terns, 5 Bar-tailed Godwits, 2 Red Knots and 30 Red-billed Gulls including several mating pairs. The shag colony at Haruru Falls in Waitangi has been very interesting recently. Cynthia Matthews reported a melanistic Pied Shag at a nest with a pied mate in mid-July. Les Feasey followed up on her report and took photos of them on 19/10 (see photo above).

- ISABELLA GODBERT

NORTHLAND

Ornithologist David Crockett, who was supported in every way by Ruth, was a very long-standing and valued member of the Northland Branch, and members and former members were well represented at the celebration of David's life on 31/8. There was considerable emphasis on David's persistence in searching for and finding the Chatham Taiko in 1978, at a time when the species was considered to extinct. Many members participated in and benefitted from the subsequent expeditions to study them at the Chatham Islands.

In September, Luis Ortiz-Catedral gave a fascinating talk about the activities of the World Parrot Trust and the support it gives to projects here in NZ. In October, Gary Wilson gave a very interesting talk about a trip he and Robyn had taken in the Russian Far East which was designed around supporting and staffing conservation efforts to benefit the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The impacts of warming seas there were very evident, and extra travel was required in pursuit of seeing Walrus.

'The Petrel Station' pelagic trips from

Tutukaka continue to record many interesting seabirds including: 1 White-chinned Petrel (25/9); 1 Westland Petrel, 44 individual albatrosses of 7 species, and circa 60 NZ Storm Petrels (7/10); over 100 White-capped Albatross, 1 Mottled Petrel, and 1 Cape Petrel (16/10); 2 Chatham Albatross and 12 Mottled Petrels (3/11). The most notable sighting was the first NZ record of a live Streaked Shearwater, found during the 1/11 trip (see photo above). This was the 67th seabird species and the 50th tubenose species recorded on these trips. Organiser Scott Brooks has more trips planned over the months ahead:

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

The wet weather appears to have benefitted some wetland species. In Mangawhai and Whangarei, there seems to be increasing activity from herons, bitterns and grebes on lakes with substantial breeding populations of introduced frogs. Grebes have turned up in lakes where they have not been previously detected. Members have also noted the considerable loss of small introduced songbirds in the Whangarei area. These observations are backed up by counts of House Sparrows accessing Matakoho Limestone Island during winter.

- TONY BEAUCHAMP

AUCKLAND

We hosted a "Kia Ora Kuaka" event at Ambury Regional Park on 1/10 in co-operation with Auckland Council, starting with a talk by Adrian Riegen about their annual migration and then a guided walk to see them at the wader roosts. This attracted 45 participants in addition to a good number of branch members working as guides. Birds seen included 600 Kuaka, 250 SIPO, 200 Red Knot, 5 Northern NZ Dotterels, 19 Caspian Terns and 250 Black-billed Gulls. The Michael Taylor Memorial Guided Bird Walk at Cornwall Park took place on 29/10. Although over 30 people booked, only a third turned up due to the Rugby World Cup final. Despite the windy weather a good variety of birds were present with 24 species seen, including 13 Common Pheasant, 11 California Quail, 3 Kereru and 1 Shining Cuckoo.

The Shakespear Regional Park Survey took place on 23/9. Despite recent Stoat incursions from 2020, NI Saddlebacks are still there with

3 seen on the day and later reports indicating 19 birds still present. Other species seen included 23 Pateke Brown Teal, Fernbird and Red-crowned Kakariki. The cryptic monitoring survey for Spotless Crake at Orangihina took place on 2/10 after bad weather postponements. One crake was detected, 10 Fernbirds were seen or heard, and numerous Banded Rail footprints were found in the salt marsh.

Our annual Motutapu Island Survey took place on 7-8/10 with 8 participants. The results are still being formulated, but the total count of all species was the lowest since 2013. Species with especially low counts were Song Thrush (lowest ever), Blackbird (lowest since 2009), Bellbird (lowest since 2014), Tui (lowest since 2017) and Whitehead (lowest since 2018). However, counts of a few species were higher than last year: Pateke (highest ever), NZ Dotterel (second highest) and Spotless Crake (third highest). Some interesting sightings were the continued presence of 2 NZ Dabchicks on the Administration Bay pond, the first island record of a Barbary Dove, and (disappointingly) 2 Mallard x Pateke hybrids.

Our beach patrols have generally found very few wrecked birds. The exception was a Muriwai Beach patrol on 12/8 which found 4 Australasian Gannets, 5 Fairy Prions, 1 Slender-billed Prion, 1 Salvin's Prion, 1 Blue Petrel and 1 Brown Skua, the latter being a most unusual find for us. Other Muriwai Beach patrols were light with 1 Fairy Prion on 9/9 and 2 Australasian Gannets and 1 Fairy Prion on 7/10.

- IAN McLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

At our August meeting, Lenny van Heugten spoke about her research into the Hunua Kokako Recovery Group. Her recently published book documents the decline and subsequent recovery of the Kokako population in the Hunua Ranges south of Auckland. In 2022 the population was 229 pairs and 9 singles, thanks to the work of many volunteers over the years. In September, Stuart Laurensen gave a talk on the various bird roosts on the northern side of the Manukau Harbour at Mangere, and an update on the breeding success of NZ Dotterel, Pied Stilt and



Spur-winged Plover at a disused section in Onehunga. October's speaker was Kamolphat Atsawawaranunt, who has researched the success of Common Starlings and Common Mynas as invasive species in NZ. Using modelling, he has calculated that by 2100 suitable habitat for Common Myna will increase, especially in the Volcanic Plateau and Canterbury. Common Starlings are already present in most of the country and by 2100 they will also move to higher elevations in the South Island.

In August, 3 White-fronted Terns with leg bands were seen at Waiomu, Coromandel that had been banded near Thames 30 years ago. At nearby Tapu, the band on a Black-billed Gull (white band with number 289) showed it was banded as an adult 3 years ago on the Rakaia River in the South Island. It was also seen at Thames last year. September heralded the arrival of Spring, and Shining Cuckoos were heard at several locations in our region. Three NZ Dotterel chicks were seen at Hynds pipe plant in Pokeno, 2 chicks hatched at Big Bay in Awhitu, and nests are being monitored at other Awhitu beaches.

Also in September, 4 members ignored the poor weather forecast and made a field trip to Deans Wetland at Mercer to look for cryptic species. Crakes and Fernbirds proved elusive, but we did hear 5 bitterns booming, and saw 1 fly up in front of us as we pushed our way through chest-high reeds. Towards the end of the walk, we saw a Black Swan with 5 nearly-fledged cygnets, and 4 Cattle Egrets. A bittern was also heard booming in the Big Bay saltmarsh wetland in Awhitu on 13/09.

Among the birds arriving back at Pukorokoro Miranda were some juvenile Bar-tailed Godwits with satellite transmitters fitted to them at their breeding grounds in Alaska, and a Red-Necked Stint. A remarkable record was 13 Australian Gull-billed Terns found at Clarks Beach (South Manukau Harbour) in non-breeding plumage by Tony Habraken on 15/10, and a Common Tern was found at Ray's Rest by Ian Southey on 22/10.

- SUE FROSTICK



▲ Australian Gull-billed Terns, Clarks Beach: Tony Habraken.

WAIKATO

As usual, all four seasons have been a weekly occurrence here through Spring, with very few stretches of settled weather to get out into the field. Some very interesting work is still being done and interesting observations made. Spotted Doves and Barbary Doves continue to expand and consolidate their range throughout the province. The former is now resident throughout most of the Waikato while the latter is still rather localised, though increasing in many cases.

It was exciting to hear of a report from Andrew Styche of a male North Island Brown Kiwi heard in Pureora Forest, where very few reports have surfaced in recent times. Andrew, who works for DOC, reckons there remains a small population throughout Pureora though there have been no dedicated surveys at any scale in recent decades. Apparently, there is a plan to run acoustic surveys throughout the park soon so this should hopefully give us a better understanding of their status there. While not confirmed, some recent reports of Yellow-crowned Kakariki from the Waitomo area give us further hope of uncommon natives clinging on in remnant native bush. Royal Spoonbills are now nesting annually at several sites in the Waikato, however successful fledging has not yet been confirmed after 3-4 years of attempts. Hopefully this will be the summer we can confidently confirm this. As usual, the Tokaanu wharf area near Turangi continues to be a hotspot for bittern activity, and a touring group also noted a Bar-tailed Godwit in the area (rare inland).

Andrew Styche also reports that: "Waikato members have been helping the Bay of Plenty region with 5-minute bird counts throughout the Kaimai Ranges. This survey starts mid-October ... the Waikato Banding Club had another session at Waiwhakareke during October. Banding is being driven by members David and Amanda. A total of 13 birds were caught, mostly native species."

- RUSSELL CANNINGS

TARANAKI

At our September meeting Rob Wheeler took over from Steve Purdon as Secretary - thank you both. Robin Smith has been working with Elise Smith from Main Trust filming the Little Penguin colony at Port Taranaki. Unfortunately, the video showed the presence of 5 cats and birds have abandoned chicks and nests there, so pest control measures have been put in place. Some lucky members went out to sea on a pelagic trip from New Plymouth. Species seen included 6 White-capped Albatross, a giant petrel, a flock of 100+ prion spp, a gannet, plus Fluttering and Flesh-footed shearwaters. They found that many hundreds of Red-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns are starting to nest on islands in the Ngā Motu Sugar Loaf Islands Marine Protected Area.

Pukeiti was the destination for our September field trip. Whitehead were numerous and vocal; Tui and Grey Warbler were around too. Pukeiti has a lodge for hire for a very reasonable rate, so an overnight trip early next year has been suggested for some nocturnal atlasing.

Two groups from Taranaki took part in the Global Big Day on 14/10. One overnights at Rotokare where North Island Brown Kiwi and Morepork were vocal all night and Pateke snooted around our tents. From there we headed to Whanganui, returning via Sandy Bay and Waiwakaiho River estuary. The abysmal weather that hindered the other group had eased by the time we returned, but low cloud, wind and rain forced the birds to seek shelter which limited our tally. We finished 6th with 65 species and 70 checklists.

A group of us attended the Taranaki Biodiversity Forum where a wide variety of topics were up for discussion and Jesse

Morgan from Predator Free 2050 gave us an update on progress so far. Next up is another bird identification course organised by Wild For Taranaki and Wildlife Management International, and a fold-out pocket-sized seabird and shorebird chart with photos is to be funded out of proceeds from the June annual conference.

- PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

In early August our group enjoyed an outing to the Haumoana side of the Tukituki River mouth. A local ecology group had established a small number of signs depicting birds frequently seen around the area, so it was good to see them on display. Due to the very wet conditions this year, a trip to Lake Poukawa was thought to be of particular interest (historically a much larger wetland, the extent of the lake varies widely with seasonal conditions). The lake itself was difficult to get to; however, the surrounding farmland did have a good amount of water still present, making for excellent wader and duck observations when we visited in September. The search was on for a possible Glossy Ibis which had been reported there, and a Kōtuku White Heron which had been seen on 10/8, but neither showed themselves during our field trip. Our October field trip was cancelled due to rain.

A Matuku Moana Reef Heron was spotted in the Ahuriri Estuary on 4/9. Also in the estuary, Tara White-fronted Terns and Tarāpuka Black-billed Gulls started showing courtship/nesting behaviours from 10/9. The Kuaka Bar-tailed Godwits started returning to Hawke's Bay in mid-September, with circa 90 reported on 19/9 and numbers building to 360 by 15/10. A joint 'Welcome the Godwits' event was held with the Ahuriri Estuary Protection Society. About 70 people attended and the cathedral bells rang out in celebration. Four Huahou Red Knots were spotted with the Kuaka.

In September, good numbers of Banded and NZ dotterels started being reported from the Clive/Tukituki River mouth and a Ngutu Pare Wrybill was seen at the Tukituki River mouth. Another Ngutu Pare was seen inland from Waipawa during river surveys, a most unusual location. Kārearea NZ Falcons were observed in Haumoana and the Bay View/Westshore areas in early September. A Kawau Tikitiki Spotted Shag was seen at the Clive outfall on 28/9. A Sanderling, 3 Ruddy Turnstones, and a Ngutu Pare were seen at Clive in early October, and the White-winged Black Tern that has been present for the past couple of seasons returned in mid-October, first spotted in the Tukituki Estuary and then around Haumoana, also being seen in the company of a Tarapirohe Black-fronted Tern.

Australasian Bittern surveys by RR Bernie Kelly detected 7 booming males on Lake Poukawa and 2 at Pekapeka Swamp, but none at Lake Whatumā (traditionally home to at least 5), possibly due to altered raupo conditions.

- THALIA SACHTLEBEN & BERNIE KELLY

WHANGANUI

Spring saw the return of gale-force south-westerlies, a feature that has been less prominent in recent years. Almost no reports of seabirds were received during this period (nobody out looking for them!), but one live



▲ Welcoming the Godwits, Ambury Regional Park (1/10): Stefan Marks.



▲ Terek Sandpiper, Embankment Road, Lake Ellesmere (20/10): Warwick Allen.

juvenile Grey-headed Albatross was taken to Bird Rescue Manawatū-Whanganui at Turakina, having been picked up at Castlecliff Beach in Whanganui on 19/8.

Spring also saw the return of migrant Arctic waders. The most exciting of these was Bar-tailed Godwit AJD, returning for his 16th summer since he was banded as a 3-year-old at Foxton in October 2008. As in almost every previous year, he arrived first at the Manawatū Estuary, being photographed there by Paul Gibson on 22/9. If he is true to form, he should move across to the Whanganui Estuary sometime in early December, spending the rest of summer there before departing in the last week of March. On the Whanganui Estuary itself, Spring brought higher numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits than seen in recent decades. Paul Gibson recorded 77 on 24/10, of which 70 were juveniles. Other notable waders were 1 Ruddy Turnstone on 16/10 and 17 Red Knot on 18/10, both recorded by Jim Norris. The Pied Shag colony first established in 2019 at Pūtiki, upstream from the estuary, continues to grow. The colony currently has 10 active nests - 2 more than last year - and is occupied almost continuously.

The 2 juvenile Kākā that appeared at Bason Botanic Garden in mid-June proved elusive. Only sporadic reports were received, perhaps reflecting less of a focus on them and their activities than in 2022. The last record was in early September. Unlike previous years, they were not reported from Rotokawau Virginia Lake, so we assume that they may have been moving around the wider district, where there are many native forest fragments. Inland, around the forest at Waitahinga, Whiteheads are currently calling conspicuously, and have now been joined by their brood parasite, Long-tailed Cuckoos. The first Shining Cuckoo was recorded on 18/9 (Bill Fleury).

The Cattle Egrets that have overwintered on the same couple of farms on Whangaeahu Beach Road almost annually since the mid-1980s, first returned at the end of May. Numbers increased from an initial 4 birds to 8-9 in June, then to 11 in late-September/early-October, some of which were in breeding plumage. They apparently departed sometime in mid-October, as no birds having been seen since then.

- PETER FROST

MANAWATU

Most of the interest lately has been at the Manawatū Estuary. First, an Australian Gull-billed Tern was seen regularly through September. It was joined by a Shore Plover from Motutapu Island in the Hauraki Gulf, which soon after was back at Motutapu, making the national news for its 800 km journey. The godwits returned through September also, and a couple of notable other shorebirds have been in with the flock - a Hudsonian Godwit and a Whimbrel. It seems to be a bumper year for juvenile godwits again, and a recent count of 350 birds is almost double the usual population these days. Singles of Red-necked Stint, Ruddy Turnstone and NZ Dotterel are good local records, while the very photogenic Little Egret that often frequents the channel by the footpath has also returned.

- PHIL BATTLE

WAIRARAPA

Our August field trip to the Boggy Pond walkway on the western shores of Wairarapa Moana was to check out the Royal Spoonbill colony, where about 60 birds were present. The highlights including an Australasian Bittern flushed into the air and captured by a fast-reacting photographer, and a very large (2000+) flock of gulls passing in the distance. We assumed they were Black-billed Gulls but we caught up with some in a paddock later and were able to confirm that they were Red-billed Gulls. It is very unusual to see such a large flock of Red-billed Gulls on a farm paddock here.

An October trip to Tauherenikau Delta led to the sighting and photographing of a rare Australian Gull-billed Tern, with our observations and photos being entered into the NZ Bird Atlas. It was aggravating to see the extensive delta habitat has again been vandalised by quad bikes and motorbikes. This is a known nesting area for Variable Oystercatchers, Pied Stilts and Black-billed Gulls, so it deserves quality protection but it is very hard to get action from any authorities!

We attempted a Big Day on 14/10 but it was a terrible day for being a bird and for being a birder with northwest gales and rain. However, members managed about a dozen sites with 43 species encountered and a number of Atlas checklists entered. We enjoyed several

evenings to meet and discuss birds seen and heard, and exchange all the news including the latest on the dotterel protection programmes. We also enjoyed a fabulous photographic journey through Jenny Dey's Australian trips of recent years.

- OLIVER DRUCE

WELLINGTON

Birds New Zealand members in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington have been busy over the past quarter! Highlights have included bird surveys at Pauatahanui Inlet and Matiu Somes Island, various Atlasing trips, monthly meetings covering Torea SIPO population dynamics/movements and the biogeography of Aotearoa, and a Cook Strait pelagic trip in November. We recorded six species of shearwater including Short-tailed, Sooty and Hutton's, as well as 3 albatross and 3 petrel species including Northern Royal Albatross and Southern Giant Petrel. We also carried out a count of nesting seabirds on Makaro Ward Island from the boat on the return leg which we added to our Atlas checklists for the day. So, our Wellington members certainly don't sit still. I couldn't be prouder as the RR and I can't wait to see what the New Year will bring our way!

- JOHANNES FISCHER

NELSON

At our August meeting Winifred Long spoke about a past translocation of North Island Brown Kiwi in the Remutaka area near Wainuiomata. As a data manager Winifred had to answer the questions, "Are we protecting kiwi and are they self-sustaining?" The birds originally released were banded with transmitters and tracked with antennae. However, in 2020 the decision was made to remove transmitters from all the birds there, to reduce stress on both the birds and the volunteers, and as an alternative method was needed, placing greater reliance on acoustic recorders. In short, from a founder group of 34 birds released ,15 years ago there is today an estimated population of 150 birds, with both first- and second-generation birds currently breeding. David Melville also presented a talk on "A Rook, fake news and alternative facts", highlighting recent misguided reports in local media concerning Rooks. Rebecca Bowater also

presented some stunning photos that she took of Black-fronted Terns and Banded Dotterels at the Boulder Bank in Nelson.

Our guest speaker at the September meeting was Ruth Bollongino who spoke about "Bio-acoustic monitoring of forest birds in the Abel Tasman National Park". How are these birds doing in the Abel Tasman? The data collected from acoustic recording indicate that where predator control has operated effectively, rat-sensitive species such as SI Robin, Riflemen and Kakariki are increasing. Interestingly, non-rat-sensitive species such as Tui and Bellbird show a decline in these areas, possibly due to increased competition from the developing populations of rat-sensitive birds.

Rob Jones also gave us an update on the Australian Wood Duck project, a small group of Wood Ducks have for several years been living in the Mapua area near Richmond centred around the Playhouse Pond. Although they have bred regularly the population has not expanded significantly. One of the limiting factors to population growth is likely to be the lack of available nest sites. So, under the coordination of David Melville, Rob Jones and Ian Price have been busy installing nest boxes around the Hoddly Reserve and nearby private land. Wood Ducks have been photographed entering the boxes. Robin Toy also provided an Atlas update for the Nelson Tasman region delivered by David Melville.

- PAUL GRIFFITHS

MARLBOROUGH

A lone Kākā has been frequenting populated parts of Marlborough recently. It has been observed fairly regularly at Pollard and McKendry parks near the centre of Blenheim, as well as a brief visit to a few homes around Picton and an extended stay at a couple of properties with orchards near Seddon.

The Royal Spoonbills have returned to their breeding grounds on the island at the Blenheim Wastewater Treatment Plant but unfortunately (as of the end of October) have not been joined by the Glossy Ibis. There have been no confirmed sightings of Glossy Ibis around Marlborough in Spring 2023. This would mark the second consecutive year that the Glossy Ibis have not bred at the Blenheim WTP after breeding there with the spoonbills for several years before. A local project aiming to band both species is starting this year.

All 136 Marlborough Atlas Grid Squares now have some data in them after the opportunity arose for a couple of keen Atlasers to join the Marlborough Tramping Club on a day trip up to Glazebrook Station at the head of the Waihopai Valley which took them into grid square CF54. Twenty-two species were recorded across 37 checklists for the day including South Island Robin, NZ Tomtit and NZ Pipit. There was plenty of suitable habitat for Riflemen and NZ Falcon but unfortunately neither were observed.

Three members did a nocturnal survey down the Awatere Valley hoping to record Little Owl and Morepork. Surprisingly there was very little happening in the upper part of the Awatere Valley with only a couple of Little Owl records. Several Marlborough members also joined the Toi Toi Wines funded Atlas expedition to the West Coast over Labour weekend where they collected checklists for a massive number of grid squares.

With the final six months of the Atlas project just around the corner, members are trying to target those grid squares with little or no effort in each of the seasons as well as getting out at night to increase the nocturnal coverage. A trip to Molesworth Station is planned for Waitangi Weekend in February to repeat the efforts of the last Atlas when a large number of members atlased all around Molesworth.

- PATRICK CROWE

CANTERBURY

Canterbury has seen an interesting influx of vagrant and migratory birds this season. The region is now teeming with Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots and there have been several exciting sightings to report. Lake Ellesmere is a great location for birds at the moment. The arrival of the Alaskan Arctic migrants has also brought a few fascinating vagrants. Notable sightings have included a Glossy Ibis spotted in August and a Marsh Sandpiper in September. More recently, an Australian Gull-billed Tern and a Terek Sandpiper have also been seen in the area. The other Arctic migrants have included Red-necked Stints and Curlew, Sharp-tailed, and Pectoral sandpipers.

New Zealand breeding birds have also started nesting, with some chicks already hatched, especially Banded Dotterels, with most having finished nesting along the Waimakariri River. A recent sighting of an Eastern Curlew at Ashley Estuary and the continued appearance of a Little Egret are of considerable interest.

Other interesting sightings have included an observation of a NZ Dabchick at St Anne's Lagoon in September, a Chestnut Teal at the Ashburton River mouth, and a Fiordland Crested Penguin at Sumner in August. With the new vagrants and all the breeding birds and their chicks around, now is a great season for birdwatching throughout Canterbury.

- SAMUEL AMARIS

OTAGO

We welcome our new Regional Representative, Dawn Palmer, who was elected during our August AGM. Dawn lives in Queenstown and we look forward to the greater representation from that part of the region. We also once more acknowledge Mary Thompson's 17 years in this role. We farewelled her during our AGM.

The final winter season of the current NZ Bird Atlas has finished. Well done to all who made the extra effort to survey squares with little or no winter records. Winter coverage increased to 79%, with a final of 275/348 squares having been surveyed totalling 110 species reported. We now approach the end of the final spring and there is still a challenge for the adventurous to survey under-represented squares, with 86% covered to date totalling 129 species reported.

Records of interest included Southern Crested Grebe at Kaikorai and Katiki, Kotuku at Kaikorai and Karitane, Reef Heron at Otago Harbour mouth, 290 bar-tailed Godwits at Blueskin Bay, a Red Knot at Hooper's Inlet, a Brown Skua at Shag Point, and a possible Black Petrel off Taiaroa Head.

A total of 60 Kererū were reported near Makarora, Kākā were seen near Queenstown, and Marsh Crake and SI Fernbird at Glenhorchy Lagoon. The first Dunedin Shining

Cuckoo records were on 21/9 and 22/9 at Waitati and the Botanic Gardens. DOC and Kai Tahu released 18 Takahē into the Greenstone Valley in early August, the first time this species has been in Otago for a very long time. Reports of flagged SIPO total 12 over the past year with sightings from Warrington, Catlins and Makarora contributing.

Local spring projects are well underway with the SI Robin project outside Orokonui now in its 8th year. The first nests have fledged, and local members have gained bird capture and banding experience. The bittern and wetland bird monitoring project is in its second season and 50 acoustic monitors have been deployed across a range of wetlands in central and coastal Otago, and the Catlins, while a Labour Weekend field trip took place to service monitors at Akatore wetland. The spring town belt bird count was held on the 29/10 with 15 people in attendance to learn from local members.

Archiving data from all significant Otago projects has been completed. Our indoor meetings have been varied, engaging and well attended, the mixed in-person and online option increases attendance. The Birds Otago Facebook page has well over 200 members now.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

SOUTHLAND

Southland Branch members are working with DOC, Southland Regional Council and Fish & Game to get closed shooting areas declared around several of the major wader roosts in our region. This came to a head when a hunting maimai was built basically on the main wader roost at the head of Awarua Bay. It is hoped that suitable protection will be put in place to reduce disturbance to all the waders that frequent these sites with a particular focus on Southern NZ Dotterel, which overwinter in the area.

Along with other parts of the country, Southland saw an influx of Little Egrets in April with birds found at Oban (11/4, Matt Jones), Te Anau (14/4, Anja Kohler) and Waipapa Point (15/4, Glenda Rees). Matt also found 3 Cattle Egrets at Ringa Ringa on Rakiura Stewart Island on 15/5.

The female Northern Pintail is back at Sutton (Tip) Lagoon in Invercargill this year, first seen by Sean Jacques on 9/9. It shares this area with a Marsh Sandpiper which has been around for about 3 years. The regular Curlew Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper and 2 Greater Sand Plovers were at Awarua Lagoon over winter.

The Bar-tailed Godwits are back and while most of them go to their usual haunts, single birds have been seen at the Upukerora River mouth near Te Anau by Anja Kohler, and on the main beach on Codfish/ Whenua Hou by Sandy King. Last but not least, Johannes Fischer found an Australian Fairy Martin on Codfish Island Whenua Hou on 15/10.

- PETE McLELLAND

All of our regional newsletters can be viewed online via our website using this link:
<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/resources/regional-newsletters/>

Reviews

50 Best Birdwatching Sites in NZ

Liz Light & Oscar Thomas

John Beaufoy Publishing

RRP: \$39.99

In this new second edition, Oscar Thomas has updated the original 2019 publication written by Liz Light by adding three new sites: Tutukaka, Tongariro National Park and Orokonui Ecosanctuary. Space for them was made by removing Trounson Kauri Park and Blowhard Bush, and a consolidation of the Taiaroa Head and Otago Peninsula entries.

The new sites certainly fit into the '50 Best', each with specialty birds that can be seen in accessible locations. Tutukaka is the 'home port' of the now regular 'Petrel Station' pelagic trips which are a reliable way to see NZ Storm Petrel, Grey Ternlet, Buller's Shearwater, Grey-faced Petrel and Little Shearwater, and which regularly report rarities, including the recent first NZ record of a live Streaked Shearwater. The Tongariro entry describes some top spots for Whio, Long-tailed Cuckoo, Yellow-crowned Kakariki, Australasian Bittern, and Spotless Crake, and the Orokonui entry describes the specialty birds there such as Tokoeka, Takahe, Tieke, Kaka and Kakaruai. The new Taiaroa Head/Otago Peninsula entry manages to cover all the specialty species in fewer pages, replacing some details of Taiaroa Head with a brief description of the Monarch Wildlife Cruises tour.

The other main difference is the photographs. The cover photo is now a Buller's Albatross rather than a Kereru, and the back cover photo a Kaka rather than a Chatham Albatross. Both these new images are excellent as is the new frontispiece photo of a pair of Takahe. By cutting a page of introductory text, more space is given to seabird photos including beautiful shots of Tawaki and Hoiho. Many of the photos taken by other photographers used in the first edition have been replaced here by shots taken by Oscar Thomas. These are better images, reflecting improvements in his photography over the past four years. All these changes make a superb site guide even better.

Birds of New Zealand

Oscar Thomas

John Beaufoy Publishing

RRP: \$29.99

In this new second edition, author Oscar Thomas updates the 2020 first edition, covering 13 new species, bumping up the total to 250, and including over 200 new photos. The new species are either NZ breeders or non-breeders that have been reported more frequently in recent years: Australian Shelduck, Greater Sand Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Wandering Tattler, South Polar Skua, Brown Noddy, Snowy Albatross, Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, Fulmar Prion, Subantarctic Shearwater, Great Frigatebird, and White-bellied and Kermadec storm petrels.

The Gull-billed Tern entry has been revised and the name changed to Australian Tern, reflecting how it has been split into Australian Tern and Common Gull-billed Tern. Since a Common Gull-billed Tern was photographed at Big Sand Island on 22/1/23, it would be useful to include it in the next edition. A few other newly split species are not included yet: Pyramid Prion, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Siberian Plover and Tibetan Plover. All four must surely be candidates for the next edition too.

The updated information includes increases in the numbers of some of the rarest species: 35 pairs of Chatham Taiko are now 50 pairs, 200 Kakapo are now 252, and less than 150 Kaki Black Stilts are now around 200. The new front cover is an improvement but the main Tawaki image seems to have been printed slightly darker than is ideal. This is repeated inside with a few of the darker images among the seabirds. There are now two photos of Common Tern that illustrate breeding and non-breeding plumage, and more species have a second photo, all of which are labelled. Lastly, the use of a slightly lighter weight paper means this edition is not as stiff as the first, making it easier to flip through. Taken together, these changes make for a much improved, excellent pocket field guide.

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



New Zealand's Biggest Year

Harry Boorman with Felicity Boorman

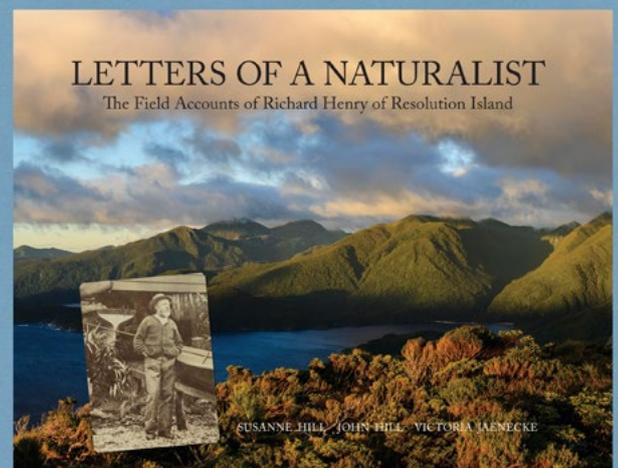
John Beaufoy Publishing

RRP: \$39.99

A birding 'Big Year' involves seeing as many bird species as possible in the wild in a calendar year. Over 230 pages, Harry Boorman describes his 2021 Big Year, in which he and fellow birder Dave Howes each set out separately to better the existing NZ record of 220 species set in 2014 by Brent Stephenson, resulting in what he describes as a friendly rivalry to set a new record.

There are several 'Big Year' classics, including Ken Kaufmann's *Kingbird Highway*, Mark Obmascik's award-winning *The Big Year* (also a 2017 film), and Sean Dooley's hilarious Australian yarn *The Big Twitch*, each filled with amusing observations and insightful people portraits which make them highly readable. This first NZ 'Big Year' book describes a fascinating road trip the length and breadth of the three main islands plus boat trips to the Subantarctic, Kermadec, and Chatham islands. There are more than a few glitches along the way, including a lockdown and some unwelcome cancellations, as well as some fortuitous events including a 'once-in-100-years' wind storm that pushes some unexpected Subantarctic seabirds north to the mainland.

It was good to read about the help received from various people in the NZ birding community, from timely reports of sightings to local help finding tricky species, and the camaraderie of birding with fellow enthusiasts. The writing style here is easy going and conversational, and about 100 of the author's colour photos add to the interest. Most are shots of the birds seen, the rest are of birders he met. Oscar Thomas' beautiful cover shot is of a Sacred Kingfisher, a kingfisher being the bird that first sparked the author's interest in birds. Not everyone has the time and money - or inclination - to undertake a 'Big Year', but following Harry Boorman along his 'kingfisher highway' is a vicarious birding adventure.



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