

# TŌREA PANGO



## **NELSON BRANCH BIRDS NZ. NEWSLETTER ISSUE 11. Jan/Feb 2024.**

A Happy New Year to all of you. It looks like it's going to be a very active one for our branch. This edition was originally scheduled for March. However, with the Birds NZ conference a few short months away, much is happening and it seems like a plan to get the first newsletter with an (always provisional!) program out as soon as possible.

We all know by now that Paul G is resigning as regional representative and leader of our group. (More below). We all know too that we have gained a great deal under his leadership. This could all be lost without the right person taking over the role and without a quality committee to provide support. Paul has sent out nomination forms to everyone. Please think carefully about who you would like to see in these roles and consider nominating someone or standing yourself. As yet, Paul has received no offers to apply for the Committee, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor or Regional Rep. Contenders please contact Paul G as soon as possible. And of course, please turn up for the AGM on March 4<sup>th</sup>!

On a personal note, and further to the above, I've planned a busy year's birding after a few fairly lean years and will be away for the April, May and probably September meetings. This does make newsletter production a bit more difficult (If I'm still editing it) although I'm always at the end of an email. It would be fantastic if someone could record and send me a report of these meetings. Also, with several field trips planned, photos and reports of these would be gratefully received.

## **PAUL G RESIGNS.**

As stated above Paul G has resigned from the regional rep role as of March 4<sup>th</sup>. Paul writes:

"Dear Members

Thank you all for your unstinting support and encouragement over the past 3 years. I intend to stay on and help with the Nelson Conference Committee. I am happy to see that membership is up to 96 in 2024 from 85 in 2023. Also meeting attendance is going up into the 30's. You have been excellent with your monthly reports, sightings, photos and videos and long may that continue. Thanks also for your many contributions to the Nelson Region newsletter edited by the industrious Paul Bennett.

Cheers and Good Luck  
Griffo"

Paul's resignation is sad news indeed. I am sure 'Griffo' would readily agree that he is not an ornithological expert. And it is precisely this happy lack of pretence that has made him so endearing and so good in his role. Under Paul's leadership our group has blossomed - Membership has increased, attendance at meetings has soared, with numbers regularly in the high 20's or 30's. Field trips, atlasing trips, monitoring, banding, bird counts and several

special projects are all regular events that are thriving, supported and attended by many members. We now have a regional newsletter that Paul dumped on me to edit and the contributions and articles in this reflect much of the growing enthusiasm and sense of purpose that our group now shares. Paul's humour, openness and ability to relate to and validate others has created an atmosphere and culture of acceptance. You don't need to be ornithologist of the year to feel welcomed and appreciated at our meetings! Yet at the same time those with a more academic interest have been highly supported to share their learning and raise the level of understanding across the whole group.

I am sure that every member will join me in thanking Paul for the great job he has done and will wish him a very birdy future as an active group member in a less stressful role, and hopefully with more time to get behind his camera. (Ed)

## **LAST MEETINGS.**

### **December 12th**

Once again, many thanks to David and Vicky Melville for hosting the December 'meeting' at their lovely Dovedale property. As always, a delightful social event attended by many. Great food and great company. There must be a word to describe the subdued sound of birders partying? Murmuration?

### **January 29<sup>th</sup>**

32? (Actually, I lost count) people attended the first indoor meeting of the year at the Richmond library. Most of the items are reported on later in this newsletter.

- Paul G gave the customary health and safety brief/debrief.
- Mark Ayre who is a professional bird guide talked us through some fascinating aspects of his chosen career.
- Michelle Bradshaw gave a brief update on the National conference and the volunteer vacancies still to be filled.
- Robin Toy gave what might potentially be the last ebird update and Sandy Toy snuck in an insect cunningly disguised as a kea (see below)
- Sandy Toy showed a couple of fascinating videos and introduced us to a well-deserved candidate for bug of the year.
- David Melville spoke to the possibility of running the 'Introduction to Ornithology' course developed by Birds NZ.
- Members sightings and photos -Rebecca Bowater and Maria Clement

## RECENT SIGHTINGS

As usual there has been a fair bit of activity over the summer period particularly for shorebirds. Below are some of the highlights that have been reported.

### Local

- David Melville reports 'a SIPO at Motueka Sandspit, Tasman Bay on 21 December 2023 with droopy wings suggesting that it was a recently arrived bird - the first time that I have seen 'droopy wing syndrome' in this species.'
- Steve Wood reported a White-winged Black Tern at the Nelson Boulder Bank on Jan 10<sup>th</sup>
- Rob Schuckard and Willie Cook reported via Facebook finding a Terek Sandpiper at Eastern Rabbit Island, Nov 30<sup>th</sup>

### National

- The Petrel Station Nov 2nd pelagic trip offshore from Tutukaka reported a streaked shearwater
- Long-toed stint at Waituna wetland Jan 14<sup>th</sup>
- Adelie penguin St. Claire beach Dunedin Jan 16<sup>th</sup> (subsequently taken into care.
- Lesser frigatebird Whangapoua (Coromandel) Jan 20<sup>th</sup>
- Spotless crake with 3 chicks at Otukaikino wetlands Christchurch Jan 24<sup>th</sup>
- Pectoral sandpiper Koitiata Lagoon (south of Wanganui) Jan 24<sup>th</sup>
- Juan Fernandez Petrel Pukerua Bay Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>

## THE YEAR AHEAD

It's hard not to feel a wee smidgen of existential dread as we brace for 2024. Fortunately, our Nelson branch has a very exciting program of events lined up to help you all retain calm and perspective by immersing yourselves in the wonderful world of birds. The program below is, to the best of my knowledge, up to date and complete. –However, I have multiple versions in my in-box so here's hoping!!

## **Nelson/Tasman Birds New Zealand - Timetable of events and activities first half 2024**

2024			
January			
27	Saturday	Australasian Crested Grebe survey	
27	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 1025h Staples Street
30	Tuesday	Birds NZ monthly meeting	Richmond Library 1915h
31	Wednesday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	Contact: <a href="mailto:david.melville@xtra.co.nz">david.melville@xtra.co.nz</a>
February			
9	Friday	Summer wader count	

10	Saturday	Summer wader count	
11	Sunday	Summer wader count	
12	Monday	Summer wader count	
13	Tuesday	Summer wader count	
14	Wednesday	Summer wader count	
16	Friday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	
22	Thursday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	
23	Friday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	
24	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 09.30h Staples Street
26	Monday	Turnstone catching Motueka Sandspit	
27	Tuesday	Turnstone catching Motueka Sandspit	
<b>March</b>			
1	Friday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	
4	Monday	Birds NZ monthly meeting and AGM	Richmond Library 1915h
9	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 09.40h Staples Street
23	Saturday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	
24	Sunday	SIPO catching Rabbit Island	
<b>April</b>			
1	Monday	BirdsNZ monthly meeting	Richmond Library 1915h
13	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 11.40h Staples Street
27	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 10.00h Staples Street
<b>May</b>			
6	Monday	Birds NZ monthly meeting	Richmond Library 1915h
11	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 10.30h Staples Street
25	Saturday	Motueka Sandspit trip	Meet 09.40h Staples Street
<b>31</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>LAST DAY FOR ATLAS FIELD WORK!</b>	
<b>June</b>			
1	Saturday	Birds NZ Conference Nelson	Trafalgar Centre 08.30h
2	Sunday	Birds NZ Conference Nelson	Trafalgar Centre 08.30h
3	Monday	Birds NZ Conference Nelson	Field trips
10	Monday	Birds NZ monthly meeting	Richmond Library 19.15h
22	Saturday	Field trip to Marlborough	
23	Sunday	Field trip to Marlborough – alternative for bad weather on 22nd	
<b>July</b>			
1	Monday	Birds NZ monthly meeting	Richmond Library 19.15h
		Winter Wader count	TO BE DECIDED
<b>August</b>			
5	Monday	Birds NZ monthly meeting	Richmond Library 19.15h
		Royal Spoonbill survey	TO BE DECIDED

## NOTES TO THE ABOVE

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

Monthly meetings are held on the first Monday of each month at the Richmond Library, 280 Queen Street starting at 1915h and ending at 2100h. Details of speakers etc. will be circulated in advance.

### FIELD TRIPS

Regular field trips are being organised to **Motueka Sandspit** – these are an ideal opportunity to meet likeminded people, hone your birding skills and get some exercise! The trips are scheduled for Saturdays to enable more people to participate, with high tide around mid-day. Meet at the car park at the end of Staples Street – alternatively join us at the north end of Motueka Quay Road, by the golf course approx. 40 minutes after the meet time at Staples Street. You will need to walk a minimum distance of 4km plus and be prepared to get wet feet. All welcome.

### WADER COUNT

Wader counts are organised three times a year: February, June/July, November. Rob Schuckard will circulate more information in late January – if you would like to participate, please email Rob: [rschkrd@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rschkrd@xtra.co.nz)

### WADER CATCHING and BANDING

The branch periodically arranges catching and banding of waders. The schedule includes many possible catch dates, but this is to allow for cancellation due to bad weather, sites being inaccessible etc. If you would like to be included on the circulation list to receive further details of planned catches, please email David Melville: [david.melville@xtra.co.nz](mailto:david.melville@xtra.co.nz).

### BIRDS NEW ZEALAND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 2024 Annual Conference will be hosted by the Nelson/Tasman Region at the Trafalgar Centre over King's Birthday Weekend. For registration: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/>

### SEEKING BIRD MONITORING SUPER HEROS

We have received this email from Elaine Asquith:

'Kia ora koutou

Te Tauihu has an impressive number of dedicated volunteer community of trapping and other conservation. Outcomes monitoring is becoming more and more important to tell the story of (hopefully) success and to maintain the support and motivation for their mahi. But it can be very specialized and expensive. Lots of these groups run on the smell of an oily rag, grit, determination and savvy.

I have a proposal to put to Birds NZ members:

Would you be keen to join a monitoring ninja squad that could team up with projects to share your expert knowhow on monitoring? It could be both to monitor a project with scientific rigour and perhaps upskill the local group at the same time.

It would be a really great opportunity to support trapping groups without getting your hands dirty, and to visit all the neat locations that our volunteer community are working so hard to protect and restore.

If you would like to know more or have ideas please contact me.

Many thanks | Ngā mihi nui

Elaine Asquith

PFNZ Activator | Nelson Tasman Community Predator Control Coordinator

[elaineasquith@tet.org.nz](mailto:elaineasquith@tet.org.nz) 0212608415”

## **PAGE 6 and --TIME FOR A PHOTO**

And what better than this white winged black tern that has been sighted at the Boulder Bank in recent weeks, captured hanging out next to a white fronted tern in this great comparison shot by Rebecca Bowater.



## **WELCOME**

To new members:

Maria Clement

Maria Del Castillo (who has transferred from Birds NZ Auckland region)

Alejandro Riccheri (in Argentina at the moment, returning soon to NZ)

## **FERNBIRD SURVEY IN THE WAIMEA ESTUARY**

Hopefully you all got the following email and some of you were able to take part? Always hard to organize things at this time of year. If anyone did get involved it would be great to get a report, and we look forward to some data.

“The Tasman Environment Trust and "Battle for Banded Rail" team are planning to repeat the 2018 Fernbird Survey in the Waimea Estuary, which provided baseline data. We will again help them run the project. The aim is to investigate changes in fernbird abundance and distribution in the Waimea Estuary. Following six years of improving habitat through intensive trapping, re-vegetation and further plantings, it is expected that fernbird numbers should have increased. All going well we should be able to do the survey (using playback and active listening) in 1 week from 14 January, and the idea is to involve as many keen volunteers as possible. Tracey Murray (Battle for Banded Rail) will be looking after organizing the volunteers. It would be great to have some experienced birders with local knowledge among the teams. If you are keen to be involved in the field survey (even if only for a day or two) please get in touch with Tracey [pukeko92@gmail.com](mailto:pukeko92@gmail.com). Due to their cryptic nature, there have been very few fernbird surveys in the past, so this could be an exciting opportunity! Cheers Ingrid Hutzler and Paul Griffiths”

## **“BLACK” STILT SIGHTING**

In the last edition of Tōrea Pango I reported on a sighting of a ‘black’ stilt by David Postles at Manuka Island, Waimea Inlet and the subsequent information given at the November meeting by David Melville on the various phenotypes of stilt resulting from different levels of hybridization. To be clear David Postles did NOT report this as an actual 100% black stilt, but only as a hybrid bird.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIRDING GEAR**



From top left  
clockwise,:

Victorian, 1920'2  
1950's 1980's 2020's

And Below ---THE  
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## **GUIDED BIRD TOURS - THE LIFE OF A BIRD GUIDE**

Mark Ayer spoke at the January meeting, giving us a great insight into his job as a professional bird guide. Mark started work at a very young age as a volunteer at what is now the well-known RSPB reserve, Titchfield Haven. (Saw my first black tailed godwit there a million years ago!) before securing guiding work with major international bird tour companies such as Naturequest and Vent.



*Left* A youthful Mark addressing his classmates with a fine display of dead birds.

*Right* An only slightly less youthful Mark demonstrating a binocular case to our meeting.

Mark talked about the range of different birders he encounters in his role, from those who don't even have binoculars to fanatical listers. Clearly, he is most interested in guiding those who have an actual interest in the bird in front of them rather than the tick on the life list. He also showed us some of the gear he carries in what needs to be a large backpack – laser



pointer, speaker, telescope, tripod, first aid, waterproof jacket, umbrella, binoculars etc. It looked extremely daunting! One thing that he probably doesn't need to carry is a field guide and he talked about how the use of apps including Merlin and ebird have changed the way birders identify and record their sightings.

New Zealand bird tours run by the companies Mark works for generally last around 21 days, following a route through the 3 main islands and visiting the hotspots that most of us would be familiar with. I doubt many of us would choose to bird like this in our own country, but overseas birders with more than a few disposable dollars would certainly leave with a NZ life list most of us have taken a lifetime to acquire!

Further to this, and as Mark pointed out, we tend not to realize how huge birding actually is overseas. I just flicked through the net to find a few stats. Apparently 50 million Americans birdwatch (wonder who they will vote for in November) and in the UK birdwatching is second only to gardening as an outdoor activity.

## **NEW PROMOTIONAL DESIGNS FROM BIRDS NZ**

**SO MANY WAYS TO HELP OUR BIRDS**



Red-crowned Kākāriki (Image: Michael Szabo)      Antipodes Island Parakeet (Image: Michael Szabo)      Orange-fronted Kākāriki (Image: Michael Szabo)

The Birds New Zealand Research Fund is funding new research on our endemic parakeets to help inform evidence-based conservation management.  
You can join us right now for \$80 a year and for students it's just \$40 a year:  
[www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/)

**JOIN US NOW**



Birds NZ has been commissioning 'New Membership Promotions' design work. Very pretty! I have been asked to include these in our newsletter for your perusal and the three current versions are below. I'm not sure if feedback is being requested. However, I'm sure positive comments would be welcome.  
President, Birds New Zealand  
[president@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:president@birdsnz.org.nz)



**BIRDS NEW ZEALAND**  
Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa



**BIRDS NEW ZEALAND** Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa  
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It costs \$80 a year, and for students it's just \$40 a year:  
[www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/)

**JOIN US NOW**

**HELP US TO HELP THEM**



You can join Birds New Zealand right now for just \$1.50 a week.  
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**JOIN US NOW**



## **DR GRAEME ELLIOTT AWARDED NEW ZEALAND ORDER OF MERIT**

Dr Graeme Elliott has been employed with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and predecessor organizations since the 1980s and has volunteered his own time to furthering ecological research and conservation initiatives.

Dr Elliott's research has significantly expanded New Zealand's knowledge of its endangered birds and the threats to them. He has been a member of the National Kakapo Management Group and Recovery Group since 1995. Since 2003 he has been on the Whio (blue duck), Orange-fronted kākāriki and Mohua (Yellowhead) Recovery Groups, principally as a Science Advisor. His PhD research identified seeding patterns that increased predator numbers and threatened hole-nesting Mohua and parakeet species, which led to improved predator control to protect threatened birds. He is regarded as a cornerstone of DOC's large-scale predator control programmes, with his research informing the approach applied in South Island forests and adapted for North Island forests, leading to an increase in the numbers of forest birds and bats. He and his partner have monitored the health of albatross populations in the sub-Antarctic annually since 1991, much of it in their own time. Through this, Dr Elliott and his partner discovered both Gibson's and Antipodean albatross populations were in a critical condition and have worked to alert others and to find solutions.

## **NATION-WIDE ROYAL SPOONBILL COLONY AND NEST COUNT, 2024/2025 BREEDING SEASON.**

We have received this information from Mary Thompson who is coordinating a survey of royal spoonbill nest sites /colonies for Birds NZ. Obviously, it links to the recent work done on spoonbill movement done locally by Peter Gaze. I imagine there will be more to come!

'At the last nation-wide count in 2013, 20 colonies were identified, mainly in the South Island. There are now reports of colonies in the North Island and with the increase in royal spoonbill numbers and sightings all over NZ we expect that more new colonies will be discovered. Birds NZ is planning a survey to locate colonies and count nests of royal spoonbill during the 2024/2025 breeding season to find out whether royal spoonbill are continuing to extend their breeding range within NZ.

### Tasks this summer

This summer (December/January) Regions should be thinking about how to survey their areas for Royal spoonbill nesting colonies. This season we should undertake a general look-around to find out if these birds are now nesting in your region and if in hard-to-get-to locations, thinking about strategies to try to count the number of active nests. Some areas may need boat access, or flying over, and are use of drones possible?



I will be applying on behalf of all regions for funds from the Project Assistance Fund to help with the Spoonbill Survey, so early in the New Year I will be asking Regions to provide me with estimates of funds needed for this, such as boat transport costs, perhaps light airplane flight, or whatever. Some Regions may have enough reserves to fund the survey of their region themselves.

### Publicity

The public could also be asked to keep a look out and report any colonies and/or nesting behaviour of royal spoonbill such as carrying twigs for nest building, courtship displays, or congregating together in trees near water. Royal Spoonbill colonies are invariably located in sites particularly inaccessible to humans, so try to survey remoter areas. They are usually surrounded by or above water. They are on islands, small islets, rock stacks off the coast, islands within river estuaries, or deep within wetland areas, including the dense kahikatea. The site of the nest ranges from on the ground to many metres high in trees. The type of nest ranges from simply flattened grasses without much nest material to large loose constructions of interwoven sticks and twigs.'

Mary Thompson, Survey Coordinator.

### **ORNITHOLOGY? -WELL AT LEAST IT'S NOT A BAT!**

At the January meeting Sandy Toy cunningly softened us up with a fascinating video of two kiwis 'mutually grooming' and thus overcoming the problem that a long bill poses in preening upper body parts. This was followed by a video of an extremely successful, well-developed and very cute brood of whio enjoying life in the Grecian stream (the northernmost river in the Friends of Flora region). 21 whio chicks have been counted this season which is surely cause for cautious optimism. Thus lulled, we were then shown a clip which pretended to be about kea but was actually propaganda on behalf of the Mt. Arthur Giant Weta, imploring us to vote for it in the 2024 'Bug of the Year' competition! And why not? What a wonderful and magnificent insect it is. Highly endangered and as much a part

of the ecosystem as the kea calling in the background. Sometimes as an ornithological group it's easy to forget that the focus of our interests is just part of a much bigger picture and the continued existence of our avifauna depends on the health of entire ecosystems. Maybe we should count polychaetes with as much rigour as we do the godwits feeding on them.

Anyway, this is the fabulous *Deinacrida tibiospina*, and the link to vote is;

<https://bugoftheyear.ento.org.nz/vote-here-2024/>

As you can vote for three 'bugs' I'd also like to give a wee push for the tuatara tick as a second choice. After all you've got to have some empathy for an ectoparasite that has evolved itself right up the end of a blind alley. And I doubt if it gets the best press or publicity, poor wee thing. What it really needs is some overly made up and underly clad social influencer to take it on board. She could be the 'Tic Tok tuatara tick chick' --- Any volunteers?

Vote at <https://bugoftheyear.ento.org.nz/>

**VOTE Tibio**  
**Mt Arthur giant wētā**

**CRITICALLY THREATENED**

**for Bug of the Year, 2024**

<https://www.fof.org.nz>

## **WHAT A CHECKLIST!**

Jenny Edwards received many brownie points and much mana for the ebird atlas list she submitted on the day of our January meeting. Not surprising when you look at the quality of photos accompanying her checklist. Jenny writes:

“These are the photos that had a moment of fame last night due to being added to my ebird checklist, after a recent walk along the Flora track.

We heard and saw so many birds that day it took us 90 mins just to get to Flora hut from the carpark! Much of that time was spent trying to spot the wee titipounamu which we could hear.

At the point I did the checklist we had a very cheeky tomtit, bellbird, grey warbler, robin, fantails and three tiny titipounamu. It was wonderful”



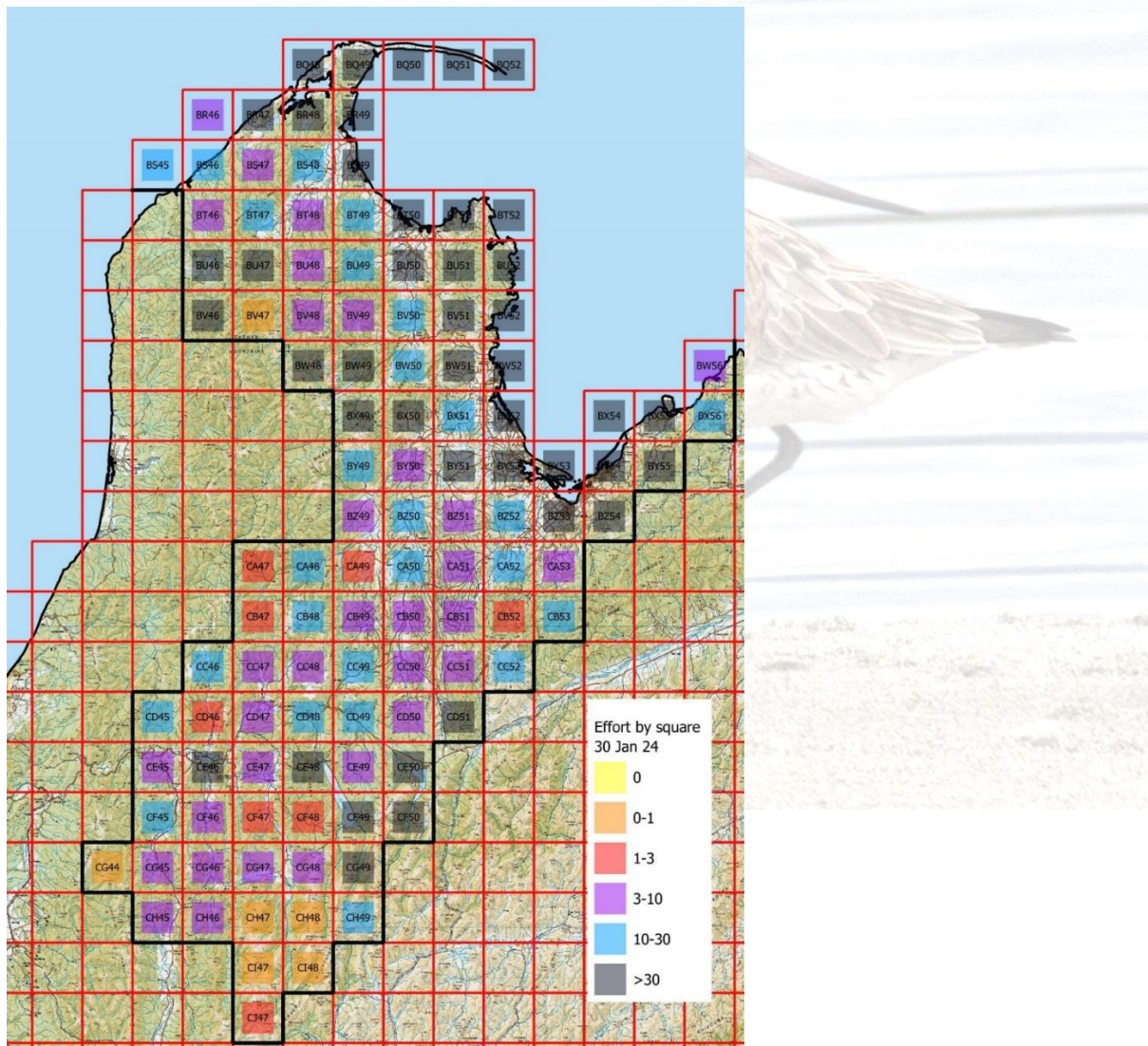
Wonderful Indeed! thank you for sharing

## THE FINAL COUNTDOWN?

Robin Toy gave what could potentially be the final atlas report before the cut-off date for field reports on May 31<sup>st</sup>. He was obviously feeling a sense of lightness around the occasion as he started with a slide of a leucistic pied stilt and then played a mystery bird noise. Many scratched our heads on this one which turned out to be Sacred kingfisher chicks calling from the nest. This probably could be loaded to xeno-canto which has 3 pages of sacred kingfisher calls but none of nestlings!

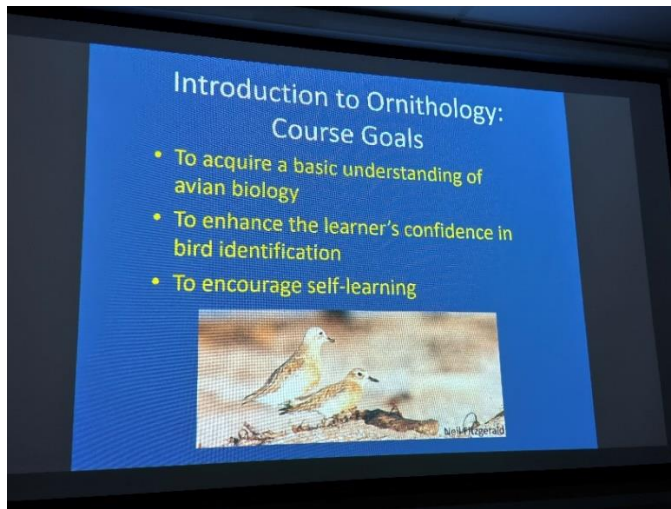
Robin and Sandy have done an extraordinarily diligent job in promoting and encouraging the atlas project in our area, as well as in their own atlas contributions and deserve our full congratulations and thanks.

Anyway, below is the 'effort by square' data for our area as of Jan 04. There are a couple of months left for a last hit but still- it looks like a pretty good job to me.



'Effort by square' is; 'the total number of diurnal birding hours in each square spent recording bird data that has been submitted.'

## AN INTRODUCTION TO ORNITHOLOGY



A few years back Sarah Jamieson (OSNZ) put together a course entitled 'An Introduction to Ornithology'. At the January meeting David Melville spoke to the concept of our group running this as part of our program. The basic idea is that interested members take a different ornithological theme (such as migration, breeding, the moult etc.) and use and/or adapt the course notes produced by Sarah as a base to work up presentations for our members. Expressions of interest to;  
David Melville [david.melville@xtra.co.nz](mailto:david.melville@xtra.co.nz)

## A "SNIPPET" FROM David Melville



According to Birdwatch Ireland, Giolla Brighde, meaning the 'Servant of St Brigid', is one of the names for the Oystercatcher in Irish. The story goes that St Brigid was pursued by a band of men who wished to kill her. Coming onto a beach she realized there was nowhere to hide and so praying, lay down on the beach, accepting her fate. A flock of Oystercatchers was nearby. Realising what was happening, they quickly gathered seaweed and covered St. Brigid, hiding her from the men. In return for saving her, St. Brigid blessed the Oystercatcher. Since then, the Oystercatcher has been linked to Ireland's principal female saint.

On the subject of oystercatchers, Mark Ayres sent me this link to an article published in "Birdwatch Ireland" around catching and banding Eurasian Oystercatchers. It has a fascinating similarity and relevance to the work we do here. While I would like to include the whole article, I have not done so for copyright (and space) reasons. However, click here and enjoy a good read. <https://birdwatchireland.ie/catching-st-brigids-bird-oystercatcher-cannon-netting-in-dublin-bay/>



And these are the pics Mark sent of banding and catching SIPO here in Nelson! Really? Looks like a good excuse for a BBQ to me.

### MYSTERY TERN? Or just a difficult angle?



Sally Carter posted this photo on the NZ birder's FB page and I offered to ask the locals. She writes:

"Could you help me to identify this tern? I saw it at **Boulder Bank** Nelson on Thursday January 25th among many white fronted terns. Sorry the photo isn't up to much. Thank you! "

The head does look very like a white tern as several on FB have hopefully wished for. Close inspection of the beak, I think, shows it carrying something making it appear longer and more white terny. So, more realistically, I'd go for a juvenile Australian (gull-billed) tern with the angle of the photo appearing to reduce the markings around the eye and the lighting making the wing seem paler –but--What do ya'll reckon??



## **CONFERENCE 2024 (Michelle Bradshaw)**

Michelle talked to our January meeting about progress with conference organisation and the need for volunteers. It's definitely time to get serious! The links that Michelle has included below should help you navigate your way through all things conferency.

'As Birds NZ members of the Nelson/Tasman Region, we are hosting the next annual [NZ Bird Conference](#) on 1-3 June 2024. A small Conference Organising Committee comprised of volunteers from the local membership have been working hard since June last year to arrange venues (the [Trafalgar Centre](#) and the [Tides Hotel](#)), caterers ([Viva la Vaca](#)), [registration](#) information, [field trips](#), [photo competition](#), sponsorships, website updates, logistics, etc.

We are now looking for **additional volunteers** to assist with preparations and ensuring that the Conference runs smoothly! A [Volunteer Tasks Google sheet](#) has been set up that lists various volunteer opportunities - please add your name to these or contact [conference@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:conference@birdsNZ.org.nz) if you would like to participate or have thought of something that the Conference Committee hasn't!

We would also like to remind you of the following:

- Early Bird [Registration](#) deadline is 31 March (\$110 more expensive for BirdsNZ Members after this date!)
- Planning to present a talk or a poster? [Submit abstracts](#) by 31 March
- Keen bird photographer? Have a look at the [Photo Competition details](#) - there are four categories and it would be good to showcase some local talent!
- [Field trip](#) options are filling up fast - these are on a first-come-first-served basis
- Please encourage your birder friends from far and wide to attend the Conference!
- It is cheaper to first become a member of the Society and then register for the conference

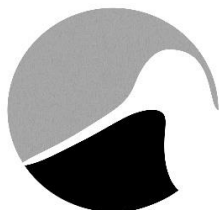


than to register as a non-member - this is a good opportunity to [recruit more members](#), and to ensure that your own membership is [up to date](#)!

Any Conference-related questions can be directed to [conference@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:conference@birdsNZ.org.nz).

Thanks,

Michelle Bradshaw on behalf of the Conference Organising Committee, Birds NZ Nelson'



NELSON 2024

## **SLEEP AND FLIGHT: NEW BAR-TAILED GODWIT STUDY STARTED** **NEAR NELSON** by Professor Bart Kempenaers

Motueka Spit, 29 October 2023. It's almost noon and David Melville is doing the countdown: "Five, four, three, two, one". Boom! Four cannons fire simultaneously and the projectiles that fly out catapult two large nets over a group of roosting birds. For David and Rob Schuckard, among the most experienced cannon netters in New Zealand, this is a well-oiled routine. For us mere mortals, it is a high-adrenaline event allowing us to study the remarkable behaviour of the bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*. This New Zealand "Bird of the Year 2015" is of local and international fame. School children are taught about their biology, and church bells ring when the first birds arrive around September. Previous work showed that the godwits that arrive on the mudflats in the North and South Island started their trip in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska, after they bred – successfully or not – or hatched from an egg on the Arctic tundra, and flew non-stop to New Zealand. Records have been broken: the longest flight in distance (>13,400 km), and the longest in duration (~11 days).



So, why are we netting more birds? What else is there to find out about them? Godwits are shorebirds. They don't soar using thermals, like raptors or storks, and they don't glide across the ocean using a mechanism called dynamic soaring, like albatrosses. Instead, they have to continuously flap their wings to propel themselves through the air towards their next destination. Imagine them moving their wings up and down for days on end, and a question naturally comes: do these birds sleep in flight? Only two possible answers, a "yes" or a "no", and both are equally baffling. If godwits do not sleep, they must have super-biological powers, because all animals sleep. Sleep is essential: without it, you die. If godwits do sleep, then how on earth (or better, how in the sky) can they do this while flying? For us, bird behavioural ecologists and sleep biologists, a practical question arises: how can we possibly study this and find an answer?





With that first catch at Motueka Spit in late October and with a second one on 16 November, we were able to equip each of 44 individual godwits with a 4.5 g solar-panelled tag that records both GPS location and altitude at intervals of 1 hour (at best, depending on battery load). Each minute, the tag also records a measure of the bird's overall activity. All data are downloaded intermittently via the 5G mobile network. To answer questions about sleep, we will have to wait at least six months until the fall, when the bar-tailed godwits will leave New Zealand again for the Yellow Sea. If tags are still working and the data are downloaded after this first flight towards Alaska (~10,000 km non-stop), and again in a year's time, when the birds return to the Motueka mudflats (after the epic trans-Pacific flight), we will investigate two key issues that can inform us about godwit snoozing habits. First, we will look at how flight altitude varies over time. If godwits sleep in flight, we expect to see birds using flapping flight to go up, followed by a phase of gliding down during which they can – at least in theory – have short sleep bouts (“power naps”). Sleep during continuous flapping flight just seems a lot less likely. Second, we will estimate the duration of rest immediately after a long flight. If birds do not sleep in flight or sleep very little, we expect that they will need “catch-up sleep” (as we do, after a sleepless night). The duration of rest after landing should then increase with an increasing sleep deficit – that is, variation in the amount of rest should co-vary with variation in the total duration of each flight, both comparing the same or different individuals. If this turns out not to be the case, it seems almost inevitable that birds would have slept during the flight. As you can see, with this study, we can at best take small steps towards elucidating the godwit sleep mystery. Perhaps one day we'll be able to measure sleep directly in the brain using electrodes, but for now let's see what we can learn, with patience and some luck. In the meantime, the project is becoming a success in other ways.

With the tags working well, we already get the first insights in godwit habitat use around Nelson. We discovered that some individuals that roost at the Motueka Spit visit the Nelson Haven mudflats, while others use mudflats near the mouth of the Motueka river. We can also map the specific parts of the mudflats west of the Spit that are used most often as foraging areas (see figure), as well as pinpoint all the locations where godwits roost during high tide. With more data coming in every day, it's time to return home and let the story unfold.

(With many thanks to David and Rob, and to Phil Battley, for making this study possible, to my wonderful scientific partners-in-crime Jesse Conklin, Niels Rattenborg and Mihai Valcu, to my group members Anne Aulsebrook, Luke Eberhart-Hertel, Eunbi Kwon and Jिंगgang Zhang

for help that led to the tags actually starting to work 15 min before the cannon went off the first time, to Michelle Bradshaw for expert help in the field and for the photo documentation of the event, and to all helpers that came out with us on three early mornings at the Motueka Spit, with two mornings of cannons firing and one peaceful morning with a pod of orcas close to the coast.)

Photo credits: Michelle Bradshaw



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**Next Newsletter deadline March 6th (a tad early but I'm away from the Middle of March)**

