

# **BIRDS NEW ZEALAND**

*Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa*

No.41 March 2024



The Magazine of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand



# BIRDS

## NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

### PUBLISHERS

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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.

## New Zealand Fairy Tern breeding success

The Department of Conservation (DOC) reports that the current breeding season has been one of the most productive for Tara Iti New Zealand Fairy Terns in recent years, with nine wild chicks and four from the captive rearing programme fledging. The Tara Iti population is currently fewer than 40 individual birds, including nine breeding pairs, which makes them one of the most endangered breeding birds in Aotearoa New Zealand. DOC credits the continued refinement of management strategies, expansion of predator control, and absence of extreme weather events this breeding season for this success.



NEW ZEALAND WINE

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### COVER IMAGE

Tara Iti New Zealand Fairy Tern.

Photo by Darren Markin.

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Gouldian Finch photographed by Luke Paterson



## Notices of Motion

In terms of Rule 17.1 of the Constitution, Notice of Motion is given to members that the Constitution of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. be amended at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Society to be held in Nelson in 2024. The following five Notices are proposed to be debated and voted on at the AGM. Background papers are available at: [birdsNZ.org.nz/about-us/](http://birdsNZ.org.nz/about-us/)

**Notice of Motion 1:** Having considered the legislative requirements in the Incorporated Societies Act 2022 and the Incorporated Societies Regulations 2023, and having regard for numerous provisions in the existing Constitution that need to be maintained it is **Moved** that:

(a) a new constitution ("2024 Constitution") that was circulated to all members for information and comment on 28 November 2023 be adopted by The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc, and

(b) that the 2024 Constitution be the basis for an application to Government authorities (the Office of Incorporated Societies in the Companies Office) for re-registration of the Society in 2024.

### Notice of Motion 2

In anticipation that re-registration of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc under the 2024 Constitution will be successful it is **Moved** that the existing Constitution be revoked once re-registration of the Society has been confirmed by Government authorities.

### Notice of Motion 3

Having regard to the requirements of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022 and the Incorporated Societies Regulations 2023 it is **Moved** that new operational processes concerning application for membership, registration of members, obtaining and storing the written consent for each new officer to act as an officer, and for the disclosure and recording of any conflicts of interest by officers be adopted and applied by the Society. (See Notice of

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# From the President's Desk

I have been busy since my last column with holidays and getting organised for 2024. I had a very enjoyable series of birding trips with some highlights being watching a NZ Falcon attacking a sparrow nest in Picton, and a pair of Marsh Crakes foraging along a raupo edge in the Waitaki Valley. I was also able to find some Atlas squares which needed summer season data. Since I got back from my travels, I have been in contact with the sponsors of our Society's various schemes. It was pleasing to receive feedback on the value that our partners see in their relationships with our Society, the work we complete together, and their expectations to maintain or expand our collective efforts. Our ability to complete the research and maintain our schemes is dependent on relationships such as these, so this feedback was very heartening.

## NZ Bird Atlas

To date over 400,750 *eBird* checklists have been uploaded to the Atlas project by over 1,620 Atlasers reporting 308 bird species, and over 96% of grid squares have year-round data. The project is now in its final months before it ends on 31 May 2024. You can see where your efforts are best placed by searching the Atlas Effort Map (<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/effortmap>) for light yellow or non-coloured squares.

## Research Grants

Most of our Society's schemes for supporting projects and research are open for application now. The annual Birds New Zealand Research Fund provides financial assistance, mainly for logistics and purchase of equipment and consumables, to any project that will demonstrably improve our knowledge of New Zealand birds (see page 5). A list of preferred themes for research projects is posted on the Society's website via: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/>

The Pacific Islands Bird Conservation & Research Fund is available to support projects in sovereign states in the South Pacific, excluding NZ. Applications close on 30 March 2024. The Marj Davis Scholarship is intended to provide financial support to a full-time MSc or PhD student conducting research in ornithology, with a preference for proposals based in the Canterbury/West Coast region.

The David Medway Scholarship is sponsored by the George Mason Charitable Trust in commemoration of David Medway, a long time President of the Society. Applications close on 30 March 2024. This can provide financial support to full-time post-graduate students conducting research in ornithology that is expected to contribute to a greater knowledge of birds in the Taranaki region. If any of these are relevant to your research, please see the Society's website for details.

## Membership Database

Over the last year, as the new membership database system beds in, Roger Sharp, the Society's web support officer, has continued to align members' renewal dates with the original joining date. Roger advises that he continues to check renewal dates to catch any last required corrections. If this causes an issue for you, please contact our Membership Secretary ([membership@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:membership@birdsnz.org.nz)), outlining the issue so that arrangements can be made to alter the renewal date to suit you, wherever possible. Members on automatic credit card payment that have had their payment date changed can also contact the Membership Secretary if they want to get their payment date changed to a manual credit card payment. This will then allow them to change it back to automatic payment again the next time they make their annual subscription payment.

## 2024 Annual General Meeting

Work continues on preparing for the adoption for a new Constitution for the Society at the 2024 AGM. The proposed replacement constitution was circulated to members in November and feedback requested by the end of February. Thank you to those members who responded. We have worked to update the Constitution to meet the standards of the new Act and not to incorporate any new material. As a result, much of the current Constitution remains unchanged. A Notice of Motion has been posted on the Society's website ([birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/](https://birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/)) and is on pages 2 and 8 of this edition.

Council has also agreed a Notice of Motion for a modest increase in the membership subscription. This was foreshadowed at the last annual conference in New Plymouth and the need remains for the Society to increase its subscription income. Key cost pressures over the last year include the costs associated with the increased range and quality of online services provided to members. As a result of the cost of maintaining the Society's popular and attractive website due to greater charges for the increasing range of information on the "cloud" storage that supports the website, further website development has been paused until 2026.

As notified in the last edition, Council has decided to discontinue publication of a hard copy edition of *Notornis*, but we still need to cover the costs of the design and layout of the digital edition, and for the printing and postage of *Birds New Zealand* magazine. Although postage costs increased recently, we expect that cost will increase again in future, so will be looking at how to respond to that on an ongoing basis.

The range of partnerships the Society maintains is growing, and various work continues to raise the profile of the Society and increase the membership. To meet these and many other demands, the Society needs an Executive Officer to ensure that the essential administration and management function can continue, and this has increased cost implications. These are ongoing issues and Council is working to build a sustainable future for the Society. At the same time, we have to recognise there is a discrepancy between subscription income and essential operating costs.

The matter of the rate of subscriptions is a complex one. Council has tried hard to find a practical compromise that will be acceptable to the membership for balancing the books of the Society, maintaining our activities, and being reasonable about the cost of a membership subscription.

## 2024 New Zealand Bird Conference

Lastly, I'm looking forward to the Society's annual conference on King's Birthday weekend in Nelson (1-3 June). If you have not already done so, please register for this weekend of presentations, meetings, exchanging stories, and making new friends. I look forward to seeing you there and on the field trips

BRUCE Mc KINLAY, PRESIDENT

## New *Notornis* editor James Savage

Dr James Savage is a behavioural ecologist based in Invercargill. His research focuses on social and reproductive behaviour, particularly maternal effects and how parents coordinate to rear offspring. During his PhD, he studied Chestnut-crowned Babbler, a cooperatively breeding Australian songbird. He has also contributed to behavioural research in Rifleman and Hihi, and led a project on Kākāpō egg infertility. He is the Research Coordinator of the Southern Institute of Technology, which includes advising staff in publishing and academic best practice. He is looking forward to connecting with Birds New Zealand members and building on the excellent work of Dr Craig Symes.

## Call for applications to the 2024 Birds New Zealand Research Fund

Applications open on 1 April 2024 and must be received by 15 June 2024. Applications will be accepted from individuals, students, researchers within universities, or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of NZ birds or their environment. The applicant must be a current member of Birds New Zealand, living in NZ, and the project carried out in NZ or its outlying islands (e.g. Subantarctic Islands). Funding ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 may be awarded. This fund provides financial assistance for logistics and purchase of equipment and consumables. It does not fund salaries or wages. For smaller projects refer to the Society's Projects Assistance Fund. Payments will be funded retrospective (either after submission of the interim or final project report) and are for a 12-month period only. In the event of financial hardship, exemptions may be made after prior consultation.

Preference will be given to applications that will: clearly be of benefit to the conservation of NZ native birds; involve research with a well-defined and measurable outcome; provide opportunities for Birds New Zealand members to assist or participate in research activities; demonstrate intent to publish at least part of the funded work in the Society's journal *Notornis*; lead to results that will clearly be of benefit to the conservation of NZ birds; or involve research on "Preferred Student Research Topics" (for student research projects). Applications must be received by 15 June 2024 on the official application form on the Society's website (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/>) and submitted as a single PDF file. For queries, please contact Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: [eo@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@birdsnz.org.nz)

## Call for Nominations for Regional Representatives 2025

Each Regional Representative serves for a one-year term, starting 1st January, although incumbents can be re-nominated for an unlimited number of terms. Nominations for each region close with the Secretary (74 Leckhampton Court, Dunedin 9011 or [secretary@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@birdsnz.org.nz)) on 31st July 2024. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must also be a financial member of the Society. If the Secretary receives more than one valid nomination from a given region, a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of that region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 2025 year. As per the Constitution, where practicable each Region shall hold an annual meeting before 31st March where an annual report of the Region's activities and a financial statement for the previous year are presented to the members. Johannes Chambon, Secretary, 74 Leckhampton Court, Dunedin 9011: [secretary@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:secretary@birdsnz.org.nz)

## New Canterbury Regional Representative – Anita Spencer

Anita Spencer is the new Regional Representative for Canterbury and West Coast. She works for the Styx Living Laboratory Trust in Christchurch, managing a riparian restoration project designed to eventually create over 20-hectares of new native forest and wetland habitat in the Styx Pūharakekenui catchment. She previously worked for the Department of Conservation for over 25 years in biodiversity and senior ranger roles. Highlights in her birding life include establishing a predator-proof fence around the last Titi Sooty Shearwater colony remaining on the mainland in Canterbury and watching the population there subsequently increase, and working with ECAN to set up conservation management of the local Australasian Bittern population. A low point was while working at Mt Stokes monitoring Mohua Yellowhead in the year that rats invaded the top of the mountain and wiped out the Mohua population there.

## 2024 Membership Renewals

Annual memberships are renewable on the anniversary of your joining date. Birds New Zealand depends on your subscription, so please pay promptly. You can renew your membership via our website, either by a direct credit payment or a credit card payment: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount>

## 2024 NZ Bird Conference & Birds New Zealand AGM

The 2024 NZ Bird Conference and Annual General Meeting will be held in Nelson 1-3 June during King's Birthday weekend. All events/meals will be at the Trafalgar Centre (Paru Paru Rd). **The deadline for early bird registration and submission of abstracts is 31st March 2024:** <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/nz-bird-conference-registration>

### 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 Trip options

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

## New Members

We warmly welcome all our new members: Row Robinson; Nick Quinlan; Leanne Silver; Catherine Oakley; Russell Hall; Paul Helliwell; Mary Helliwell (Auckland); Ilmars Gravis; Anna Wentsch; Callum Armstrong (Bay of Plenty); Phyo Thuzar Win; MacKenzie Flight; Ashley Lennon (Canterbury); Ryan Bauckham; Sue Dryden (Hawke's Bay); Olivia Ediriweera; Steve Trewick; Rowan Bell; Caitlin Lavery; Dave Coles (Manawatu); Esteban Martinez (Marlborough); Maria Clement; Gill Harker; Ruth Bollongino; Lesley Langelaa; Stuart Hanchet (Nelson); Charlotte Holmes; Daragh K Brown; Audrey Austin (Otago); Pashva Patel; Kit Hustler (Southland); Jackie McCullough (Wairarapa); Saul Ward; Gareth; Laura Westphal; Felix Tuff; Maria Ramirez (Wellington); Corrinne Ryan (West Coast); Ann O'Grady; Jake Newton (Whanganui).

## Donations

We thank the following for their generosity: Natalie Forsdick, C. John Ralph, Francois Flanagan, Peter Howden, John A. Stewart, William Perry, Janet Vaughan, Marti Eller, Graham I. Hunt, Shelley Heiss-Dunlop, Annette Cunningham, Paul Cuming, Ian Smith, Graham Barwell, Alan Baker, Kerry Oates, Sue Frostick, David Pye, Heather Smithers, Audrey Rendle, Joy Sagar, Catherine Oakley, Thalia Sachtleben, Darren Lees, Stuart Nicholson, Helen Morgan, Kevin A. Parker, Susan Cook, Stuart Laurenson, Tony Whitehead, Chris Sale, Susan Heron, Colin Miskelly, Sioux Plowman, Brenda Pinfold, Susan Steedman, Timothy Short, Bruce McKinley, Daria Erastova, Israel Cooper, Denise Poyner, Ilmars Gravis, Gill Harker, Lois Wagener, Adrian Riegen, Anthony Carey, Vaughan Turner, Philip Munns, Tineke Witteman, John Flux, Elizabeth Revell, Anita Spencer, Christina Troup, Kay Milton, Ian Williams, Rob Schuckard, Sue Drummond, Neil J. Andrews, Geoff de Lisle, Mary McEwen, Clive Robinson, Keith Woodley, Noel Ward, Raquel Kallas, Michael North.

## Phil Rhodes

Phil Rhodes, a long-time member in the Southland Region, was recently presented with a Meritorious Service Award (MSA) for his contribution to our Society's work in the region. Unfortunately, he died shortly after the award was presented.

Phil migrated to New Zealand from England at age 17, living in Invercargill for all but a couple of the 50 years that he was here. He was a stalwart

of the region for many years being active both in the field with beach counts, atlasing, wader counts and general birding, and in administration having filled the roles of Secretary, Treasurer, Regional Recorder, and wader count Coordinator, and most recently as our Regional Representative, often filling multiple roles at the same time. Phil was a strong contributor to the NZ Bird Atlas project as well as being the local Atlas quality controller. He also worked to build local membership, including among younger birders, and was key in organising our Society's very successful 2018 Young Birders camp on Rakiura/Stewart Island.

Phil was also a founder member of the Allo Scholarship Committee for local students undertaking ornithological study and he was key in supporting recipients with their studies. As Regional Recorder, Phil accumulated a great knowledge of which birds had been seen in Southland, so when a rare bird was reported Phil would quickly let the team know of any previous sightings of the species.

Phil's four passions were his family, birds, football, and music. Somewhat surprisingly, none of his birding friends knew about his other interests (other than family) because, when he was out birding, that was his sole focus.

Phil's many years of work reflected his passion for birds and while he kept his own bird list, he simply enjoyed observing birds and was great company whether it was wading through an estuary or driving the roads to do a few easy Atlas squares. His work, local knowledge, enthusiasm and great company will be greatly missed.

PETER McCLELLAND

## New Otago Regional Representative – Dawn Palmer

After keeping an eye on the Australasian Crested Grebes on Lake Hayes with the late George Chance since 1995, I supported Rosalie Snoyik in coordinating the local efforts of the George Chance Memorial Grebe Census in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2024. I'm not yet a certified bander but I have recently registered with the FALCON banding system and have helped with some Mohua, shrubland passerine, Kea and Fernbird banding work in the past. As a Trustee of the Whakatipu Wildlife Trust since 2020, I've been working to introduce people to birding and enable our many local trapping groups to monitor the birds they want to protect. I'm also the ecologist (and soon Trustee) for the newly formed Tucker Beach Wildlife Trust that have a restoration and braided river bird protection focus.

I am looking forward to being involved in many projects (such as bittern monitoring) and with the membership of Birds New Zealand through my part in the shared Regional Representative role. I am very grateful that this role will be shared and supported by other members of the existing Otago Committee and willing members in Otago. It is a testament to Mary Thompson's past efforts that a committee is now needed to take on her role. See photo on page 21.

DAWN PALMER, OTAGO REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE



Phil Rhodes photo by Lloyd Estler



Makarora field camp photo by Rachel Hufton.

## Makarora Field Camp 2024

The five-day 2024 Makarora Field Camp organised by Aspiring Biodiversity Trust (ABT) in association with Birds New Zealand was oversubscribed, with all 14 places filled. Participants came from as far away as Northland, ranging in age from 13 to 17 years old, and including NZ Young Birders and young people with an interest in nature or keen to pursue a career in the environmental sector.

It was held at the head of Lake Wanaka in the Makarora Valley and had a focus on birds and the local ecosystem. The participants left with an understanding of the value of the Makarora Valley as an important site for indigenous biodiversity. Activities included 5-minute bird counts, mist netting/bird banding, braided river birds and river crossing techniques, invasive predator control, and who monitoring techniques. A total of 42 bird species were recorded. Best practice for biological recording was encouraged with sessions on the Bird Atlas project/eBird (from local verifier Richard Schofield) and iNaturalist. Other activities included a high rope-assisted tree climbing demonstration, canopy mist net assemblage, and an interactive quiz with prizes!

Thanks go to the ABT Team and to Paul Cumming, Richard Schofield, and Graeme Loh of Birds New Zealand, Sara Dean (Parent), Simon Binzeggar (Parent) and the amazing Taylor Coon (ABT Volunteer) for their keen involvement and help during a fantastic week.

Testimonials received included:

*\* It was absolutely amazing. So much expertise in so many different fields, saw Morepork and Brown Creeper for the first time previously only heard. And my first encounter with Wrybill, I learned soooo much! It was also incredible to connect with people who have a similar passion for birds. Audrey – Queenstown.*

*\* The camp exceeded what I thought it would be and it's definitely added some different and broader perspectives and extended Caiden's inspiration. Caiden has expressed that it was such a great experience, thanks for you and your team's work putting this together. Simon Benzegggar (parent) – Hamilton.*

## Every bird band tells a story!

Are you interested to read stories about banded birds, project updates, quotes, puzzles, mysteries and fascinating extracts from the bird banding archives? The Department of Conservation Banding Office produces a quarterly newsletter, "BirDBanD", that goes out to 1,300 certified operators and 800 members of the public who have reported sightings of banded birds. Some 20 editions have been published since 2016 which can be download here: [www.doc.govt.nz/news/newsletters/birdband-newsletter/](http://www.doc.govt.nz/news/newsletters/birdband-newsletter/). Please feel free to share the link with family and friends. We would also like to invite Birds New Zealand members to contribute articles and photos: [bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz](mailto:bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz)

MICHELLE BRADSHAW, DOC BANDING OFFICER

## Birds New Zealand wader counts and re-sightings feed into full-annual cycle population model

Species that range over vast areas throughout their annual or life cycle pose a difficult conservation challenge, because management may be required at specific times or over large spatial scales. At the same time, broad-scale monitoring is needed to provide data on population trends. Tōrea South Island Pied Oystercatcher exemplify this challenge. They are a charismatic herald of spring in many inland areas – particularly the South Island – before they return to coastal sites across New Zealand for autumn and winter.

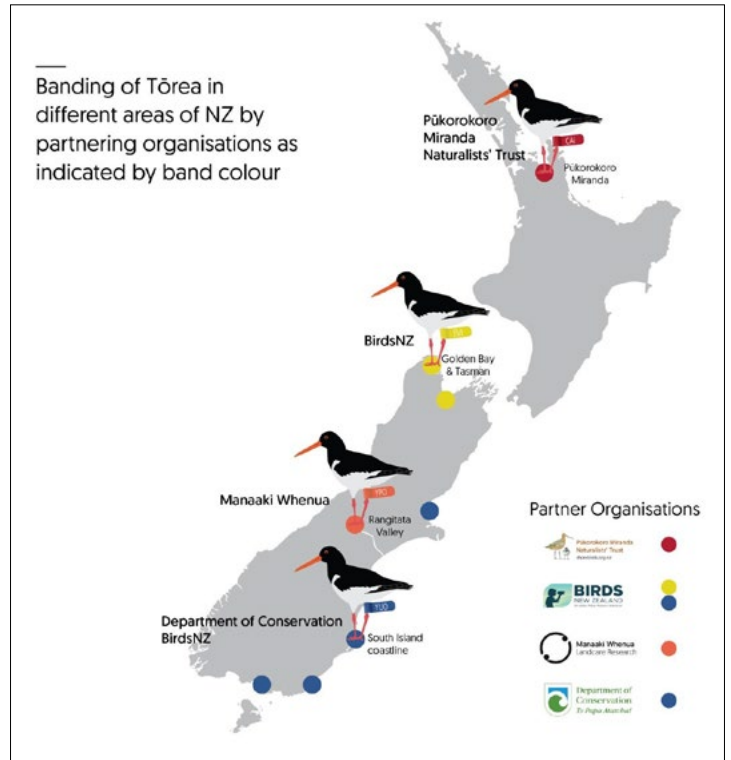
Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research has teamed up with the Department of Conservation (DOC), Birds New Zealand, Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust and Otago Regional Council to better understand population dynamics and movements on Tōrea. The species is currently classified as 'At risk - Declining'. Reasons for the decline are likely a combination of a change in farming practices on breeding grounds, predation of eggs and young by invasive mammals, reduced food availability and roosting and breeding space through invasive plants in river coastal winter areas and breeding areas, and other changes in food availability in estuaries. Current conservation management by DOC consists primarily of predator trapping and weed control at a few river bed sites. Likely new threats are increased onshore and offshore wind turbine developments and solar farms increasing collision risk of individuals.

Manaaki Whenua wants to develop a full-annual cycle population model that integrates several national, regional and local datasets spanning from circa 1980–2024 to assess drivers of population dynamics and provide information to improve management. The population model will use data from ongoing regular winter wader counts across NZ coupled with mark-resight data from key sites. Both of these data sets exist primarily due to the efforts of Birds New Zealand members which have kept up the incredible effort to count wintering shorebirds nationwide and report marked birds over decades.

Manaaki Whenua also carries out research on breeding grounds and follows birds from one breeding ground to various wintering grounds. This intensive field work has been supported by Ministry for Business and Innovation Strategic Science Investment Fund and Environment Canterbury through the Regional Braided River Initiative Fund, and also informs local conservation work. DOC and partners are working across wintering grounds which are linked to many different breeding grounds. At present, we are analysing winter count data and are still collecting mark-resight data. We currently have 272 re-sightings of 190 birds banded in the Rangitata alone. So far, all winter records are from further north, particularly from the Kaipara, Manukau and Firth of Thames. This mirrors the population distribution based on the wader count data.

If you see a flagged Tōrea on your next birding trip, please get in touch directly or through FALCON (banding database) and we can report to you as much as we already know about the history of that bird.

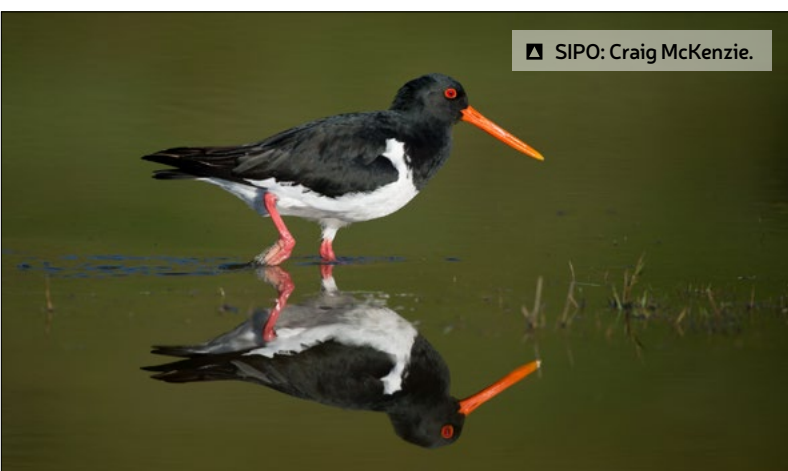
DR ANNE SCHLESSELMANN



Wellington branch member Helen Duncan photographed the Tui on the left just after it 'spat' on the other Tui while the two birds had a 'Mexican stand-off' near Porirua Harbour in December 2023.



Adult Pied Stilt with its chick, Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve, December 2023: Helen Duncan.



SIPO: Craig McKenzie.



▲ Adult Red Knot in breeding plumage, Pūkoro Mirando, March 2007: NZ Birds Online/Neil Fitzgerald.



▲ International movements of Red Knots satellite-tagged in New Zealand that staged in West Papua and Cape York Peninsula, Australia.

## Satellite-tracking Red Knots

Red Knots have proven to be reluctant to divulge their secrets to Aotearoa New Zealand researchers. Knowledge of migration stopovers and staging sites has scarcely increased over the past decade. At the same time, the birds have become less numerous and harder to catch around our shores, yet there are important unknowns such as whether the initial staging site for Red Knots heading north is in Australia or New Guinea, how often birds use Taiwan versus mainland China, and what proportion of the population uses (or more importantly does not use) the well-known staging site in Bohai Bay in China before heading to the breeding grounds.

With Lotek developing new 2g satellite tags suitable for use with Red Knots, we had high hopes of resolving these unknowns. With assistance from the 2021 Birds New Zealand Research Fund, we had planned to deploy some of them in 2022 but the birds, and the weather, had other ideas and no birds were caught. In March 2023, we caught and tagged three at Pūkoro Mirando but one of them turned out to be too young to migrate, and it remained mostly in the Manukau Harbour through the winter. The other two birds left our shores and staged in northern Australia or in West Papua. That answered one question – Australia or New Guinea? Why not both?

Success declined after that. The West Papua bird carried on with a beautiful flight to a somewhat inhospitable part of the coast of Taiwan, and signals ended at that site. Either the tag was shed, or the bird died there. The bird from Australia embarked on a second flight, then thought better of it, turned around, and returned to West Papua. Transmitters were also sent to Chinese colleagues who deployed some on migrating birds passing near Shanghai, but we learned little from those also.

So, the project was not a huge success. We incrementally gained some new insights but we are yet to get a high-resolution track all the way to the breeding grounds. Maybe in 2024?

PHIL BATTLE, MASSEY UNIVERSITY

## Investigating camera traps as a tool for monitoring kiwi

To evaluate camera traps as non-invasive kiwi monitoring devices, we deployed 34 camera traps and 29 acoustic recorders over three years



in Orokonui Ecosanctuary, and carried out detector dog surveys to compare the number of juvenile Tokoeka South Island Brown Kiwi detected. We also deployed 17 camera traps in Rotokare Scenic Reserve and 18 camera traps in the Cape Sanctuary to examine their effectiveness in higher kiwi density areas.

We constructed a stereo camera using two off-the-shelf trail cameras together to trigger from one PIR sensor and briefly trialled it at Orokonui. This method was capable of giving surprisingly accurate bill measurements, but further work is necessary to achieve repeatability. This stereo-camera trial is being prepared for journal submission and we plan more articles on other aspects of our systematic camera trapping work.

We were able to obtain credible population densities and trends. Kiwi detections can be maximised by using a detector dog team to select camera sites and through camera orientation. It is not necessary to use lures to increase detections. Realistic population estimates were obtained using spatial presence-absence (SPA) analysis with an optimal survey length of four months, during peak incubation. Cameras and acoustic recorders gave similar (and realistic) population estimates using SPA. Camera traps and detector dog surveys found a similar number of juvenile kiwi. Estimates obtained using Royle-Nichols analysis likely underestimated populations but correctly indicated population trend direction and magnitude, while the index-manipulation-index method did not give a biologically accurate estimate of population density.

Systematic camera trapping is capable of monitoring the whole kiwi population, including female and young kiwi that are usually under-recorded by other methods. Systematic camera trapping paired with spatial presence-absence analysis performed well in the low-density population at Orokonui. Camera monitoring shows much promise as another useful non-invasive tool in the kiwi monitoring toolbox. We are grateful to Birds New Zealand and the 2022 David Medway Scholarship for funding assistance to carry out this PhD work through Lincoln University.

JANE TANSELL

## Notice of Motion 4

(Cont'd from page 2) In accordance with recently enacted legislation and having regard to various specifications and obligations expressed in the 2024 constitution it is **Moved** that the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. formally apply to Government authorities (the Office of Incorporated Societies in the Companies Office) to re-register the Society under the provisions of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022 and the Incorporated Societies Regulations 2023.

## Notice of Motion 5

The rate of subscriptions for all classes of Society Memberships be amended. The present and proposed amended subscription rates are as follows:

A. New Zealand Membership Subscriptions (\$)						
Category	Ordinary	Family	Student	Group	Corporate	Life
Present Rate	80.00	20.00	40.00	160.00	400.00	1,580.00
Proposed Rate	90.00	22.50	45.00	180.00	450.00	1,785.00
% Change	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	13.0
B. Membership Subscriptions for the Rest of the World (NZ\$)						
Category	Ordinary	Family	Student	Group	Corporate	Life
Present Rate	134.00	33.50	67.00	262.50	805.00	2,800.00
Proposed Rate	151.00	37.75	75.50	295.00	805.00	3,165.00
% Change	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	0.0	13.0





🏆 The Best Overall Image, Axel Mertens, Shelly Beach, Kaipara Harbour. This captures the core goal of the project: identifiable images of Tara prey and a gorgeous portrait.



🏆 Best Portfolio: Nick Beckwith, Tara on Aramoana Spit.



🏆 Most Unusual Prey: Tara chick with Huhu Beetle, Steve Wood, Motueka Spit.

## Tara diet and population survey

The Northern NZ Seabird Trust ran a nationwide photo competition and encouraged citizen science participation in the 'Year of the Terns 2022'. The aim was to gather data about Tara White-fronted Tern diets using the non-invasive method of digital photography. This is an easy way of gathering a lot of good data about the prey they rely on, and was intended as a pilot study to see how much data we could source in one season, with the aim of continuing long-term monitoring using this method if successful.

A total of 27 photographers entered the competition, submitting 192 photos including several portfolios from colonies. Images were collated and presented to the judges without the photographers' names visible, to ensure blind judging of images. Prey items were identified and the data can probably be pooled by marine biogeographic region, although there likely aren't enough observations to look at seasonal shifts. The 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund grant was used mainly for boat fuel costs to ensure our colony counts for the wider Hauraki Gulf region continued into a fourth season. The judges were Edin Whitehead, Tony Whitehead and Neil Fitzgerald, and the prey items were identified by Malcolm Francis and Clinton Duffy. While there was fairly good geographic coverage, notable areas missing included: Northland, Bay of Plenty, Kaikoura, North and South Canterbury, Southland, and Rakiura. This is something we would address if the project is repeated.

CHRIS GASKIN



🏆 Kororā fledgling: NZ Birds Online/Graeme Taylor.



🏆 Attaching a datalogger: Elise Smith.

## GPS tracking Kororā from Port Taranaki

A grant from the 2022 Projects Assistance Fund allowed Nga Motu Marine Reserve Society to deploy GPS dataloggers for tracking work with the Port Taranaki Kororā Little Penguin colony in 2022 and 2023. There were a number of early nest failures in 2022, so the decision was made to stop tracking after we had tracked only three birds due to birds abandoning nests or laying very late. Dr Thomas Mattern has been our training supervisor for the datalogging. Our volunteer team has been developing skills in deploying, recovering and downloading data from the dataloggers, and by working with electronics experts. In combination, this is helping us gain a better understanding of local bird behaviour.

In 2023 the colony seems in better health, and we have tracked nine birds during the incubation and early chick guard phases. We have RFID readers on the nest entrances to tell us when a bird arrives or departs, with field and security cameras to confirm the events. We can see quite different foraging destinations between the August 2023 and October 2023. The birds travelled from Port Taranaki in a radius of between 28km and 65km in August/mid-September, but this reduced to 17km in October 2023. Data on sea and weather conditions has been collected during the deployments and will contribute to further analysis. The tracks of all birds with charts showing the distances travelled may be viewed on Naturemaps, 'Korora in Taranaki': <https://naturemaps.nz/maps/#/viewer/openlayers/708>

ELISE SMITH



▲ Snares Zodiac cruise



▲ Snares Tomtit



▲ Snares Penguins landing



▲ Snares Fernbird

## Cruising Sub-Antarctica

*‘True Young Explorer’ scholarship recipient Bradley Shields reports on his recent cruise to the Subantarctic Islands with Heritage Expeditions (all photographs are his).*

In December 2023 I had the privilege of joining a Heritage Expeditions cruise to the Subantarctic Islands, departing from Bluff on the ‘Heritage Adventurer’ bound for Campbell Island. The first leg took a day and a half, which was a great opportunity to watch seabirds from the deck. As we cruised past Rakiura Stewart Island we saw good numbers of Cook’s Petrels, Common Diving Petrels, Mottled Petrels, and – as the sun began to set – a Broad-billed Prion.

On Day 2, we awoke to a new set of seabirds including Black-bellied and Grey-backed storm petrels, and Campbell and Southern Royal Albatross. Through the day we picked up a few new species including Antarctic and Fulmar prions, and Black-browed and Light-mantled Sooty Albatross. On Day 3, as we approached Campbell Island, we saw more amazing species. Grey-headed, Campbell and Light-mantled Sooty Albatross were swooping around the boat when a white morph Southern Giant Petrel appeared, followed by a couple Fulmar Prions and a White-headed Petrel. This helped set the scene for an epic day on Campbell Island.

After arriving in Perseverance Harbour, we hopped in the Zodiacs for a cruise around the harbour followed by a walk up the Col Lyall boardwalk. Touring the harbour, we saw Campbell Island Teal and NZ Pipits around the shoreline, and Northern Giant Petrels and Antarctic Terns nesting on the edge of the tussocks. We cruised past some NZ Sea Lion colonies and found a few Elephant Seals, including a massive. In another bay, we came across a flock of 11 Chestnut-breasted Shelducks and a single Eurasian Coot. Walking up the boardwalk we were treated to one of the best flowering seasons in recent years, with vibrant patches of yellow and purple megaherbs filling the landscape. We heard and glimpsed two Subantarctic Snipe, and nesting Southern Royal Albatrosses where joined by several other birds soaring in the valleys as the wind spiralled around them.

On Day 4, we arrived at the Auckland Islands where we explored a few sheltered bays around pest-free Adams Island on a Zodiac cruise. We had great views of Auckland Island Shags and Auckland Island Teal here, and seeing a fledgling Gibson’s Antipodean Albatross sitting on the water was another highlight. After lunch the boat headed north to Enderby Island and we had fantastic views en route of Antarctic Prions and Mottled and White-headed petrels. On Day 5, we spent Christmas Day wandering the coast on Enderby Island. Once again, the weather was fantastic and sunny for most of the day. We saw good numbers of Hoiho Yellow-eyed Penguin, plus Auckland Island Shag, Banded Dotterel, NZ Pipit, and NZ Tomtit. There were also a few Auckland Island Teal, Red-crowned Parakeets, Brown Skuas and NZ Falcons. Some Southern Royal Albatrosses put on a show around the boardwalk at the top of the island with impressive flight displays in the wind.

Days 6 was our last day in the Subantarctic. We spent it cruising around the incredibly abundant Snares Islands. After being warned we might not be able to cruise around the islands, we arrived at the east coast in incredibly calm sunny conditions, which made the islands look tropical! The Zodiac cruise gave all guests great views of Snares Crested Penguins and Common Diving Petrels. Heading in closer to a few of the bays we quickly saw a few Snares Tomtits and eventually a Snares Fernbird, and we heard a couple of Subantarctic Snipe. With the amazing weather, we were able to cruise around the Western Chain to view a Salvin’s Albatross colony. Scanning here, many of us saw a Chatham Albatross sitting high on one of the islands.

On Day 7, we woke in Patterson Inlet, Rakiura, and went to Ulva Island where we had fantastic views of the local specialty birds including South Island Saddleback and Mohua Yellowhead, which was a fantastic way to end the trip. An undoubted highlight of the trip for me was experiencing the rich abundance of seabirds in the Southern Ocean. We saw some species in their hundreds – or thousands – that might normally only be seen in low numbers off the New Zealand mainland!



▲ Southern Royal Albatross



▲ Light-mantled Sooty Albatross



▲ White morph Southern Giant Petrel



▲ Antarctic Tern

## HELP US TO HELP THEM



**HOIHO**  
(Image: Alan Tennyson)

**KORORĀ**  
(Image: Colin Miskelly)

**TAWAKI**  
(Image: Doug Gimesy)

The Birds New Zealand Research Fund and Project Assistance Fund have supported 16 NZ penguin research projects since 2013 including Kororā Little Penguin satellite tracking and foraging studies, Tawaki tracking and population studies, and a population genetics study of NZ crested penguins.

[www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/)

**JOIN US NOW**





▲ Katie Gray giving her talk.



▲ Kamya Patel giving her talk.

## Australasian Ornithological Conference 2023

In November 2023, I had the pleasure of attending the Australasian Ornithological Conference (<https://2023aoc.com/>) in sunny Brisbane/Meeanjin. This biennial conference is a joint meeting of BirdLife Australia and Birds New Zealand. This was a highly successful event, thanks to a responsive and highly capable local organising committee led by Hugh Possingham (University of Queensland) with support from a large committee, including Birds New Zealand representative David Lawrie. The conference venue was at capacity with 450 attendees from across Oceania.

The programme consisted of four concurrent sessions across three scientific days, a range of workshops held on the days either side and during lunch breaks, and various group meetings. In addition, a variety of field trips were available across multiple days, along with a guided bird walk at local hotspots each morning of the scientific programme. My birding highlights included excellent views of male and female Paradise Riflebirds on the day trip to Mount Glorious, and Comb-crested Jacanas on a morning walk at the Sandy Camp Road wetlands.

A small but strong Aotearoa New Zealand contingent was in attendance, including plenary speaker Emma Williams (DOC), Dan Burgin (WML) sharing the latest on the NZ Bird Atlas project, five students presenting talks, and a number of other members presenting research. The Best New Zealand Student Presentation award went to Katie Gray for her talk on her Master's research project on GPS tracking Black-fronted Terns and Banded Dotterels in Te Manahuna/Mackenzie Basin. Also of note was the announcement from BirdLife Australia that the 7-volume *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds* is now freely available online at <https://hanzab.birdlife.org.au/>. They plan to bring this key resource up to date, with potential opportunities for volunteer involvement.

NATALIE FORSDICK, BIRDS NEW ZEALAND VICE PRESIDENT

### AOC 2023 Student Travel Grant (Faunatech) – Katie Gray

In May 2023, I looked at the website for the 2023 AOC which showed there would be interesting speakers, bird walks, and opportunities to meet and learn from hundreds of other bird lover and bird researchers. It sounded wonderful, but as a student, a return ticket to Brisbane was out of my reach. Then I learned that student travel grants were available through Birds New Zealand to attend and present at the conference. I applied for, and was thrilled to be awarded a grant by Faunatech which covered my international flights. Thank you, Faunatech! This meant I was able to attend and give a talk about my MSc research on the movements and habitat use of Banded Dotterels and Black-fronted Terns in the Mackenzie Basin during the breeding season.

The AOC was just as wonderful as I anticipated. It was the

largest to date, with 450 attendees and four concurrent streams of oral presentations. On the first day I lapped up talks on tracking birds, and presented my research in the afternoon symposium. It was exciting and educational to hear what others are doing in this space. On days two and three I attended various interesting talks on shorebirds, seabirds, the impact of wind farms on birds, using *eBird* data in research, tool use by birds, and the impact of climate change on the body size and shape of shorebirds.

There were two early morning bird walks near the city. I joined the Sandy Camp Road wetlands walk where I got my first real introduction to Australian birds such as Superb Fairy-wren, White-throated Honeyeater and Olive-backed Oriole. Highlights of the Botanic Gardens walk included a male Figbird, a Blue-faced Honeyeater, and an encounter with Bush Stone Curlews in full voice! These walks were a great way to connect with other attendees and have conversations away from the hubbub of the packed conference venue.

I also met the founder of Druid Technology Ltd and one of their staff members at the conference. I use their GPS trackers for my research and so it was great to put faces to names and chat about their products. I also enjoyed in-depth conversations about research that others are undertaking, which have left me with the impression that there are many passionate, intelligent and dedicated people working towards a better understanding – and protection – of birds in Australasia. That is inspiring and gives me hope.

I joined a couple of post-conference field trips to Lamington National Park and Mount Glorious, where I made more connections with other researchers and continued to be awed by the variety and colour of Australian birds! Highlights included Noisy Pitta, Paradise Riflebird, Regent Bowerbird, Eastern Spinebill and the Green Catbird's bizarre cat-like call.

Winging my way home, my mind and heart were filled with the conference. As I looked out of the window at the vast ocean below, I was reminded once again how astounding it is that some Banded Dotterels fly this expanse of water between New Zealand and New South Wales. Some of them even do it carrying the small GPS "backpacks" I have attached. I also had a sense of deep gratitude, carrying a rich array of insights, ideas and new connections. I am so glad I went! Thank you so very much to everyone who contributed to my attendance and to the AOC organisers, it was a wonderful experience!

### AOC 2023 Student Travel Grant – Kamya Patel

I was fortunate enough to be awarded a Birds New Zealand student travel grant to attend the 2023 AOC. This allowed me to travel to Brisbane/Meeanjin to present the results of my



▲ Katie Vanderstok giving her talk.



▲ Lamington National Park field trip (Jessica Rooke of Birdlife Australia and Katie Gray).

Master's thesis, 'Life in plastic, it's not fantastic' - exploring the sensory aspects of plastic ingestion in seabirds. The conference combined new and interesting research findings with some memorable birdwatching. The day before the conference opened, the AOC committee organised an evening event where student attendees were able to meet and share pizza. This was a valuable opportunity, especially for the kiwi students.

There were two morning guided bird walks which were a chance to see the mesmerising bird diversity within the city limits. The first was at Sandy Camp Road wetlands where we saw over 60 species including Comb-crested Jacana, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin and Eastern Yellow Robin. The other was at the Botanic Gardens, where we saw over 25 species. My favourites included Bush Stone Curlew, Channel-billed Cuckoo and Blue-faced Honeyeater. I would not have been able to spot the majority of the species we saw without the help of the very knowledgeable local bird guides.

On day one, the conference opened with an incredible welcome song by songwoman Maroochy. Each day began with plenary talks by individuals who have made a tremendous impact in the avian world, in terms of research, conservation and community engagement. Each day included four concurrent sessions with a wide variety of talks covering topics such as urban birds, migration, and seabirds. On day two, I presented my talk in the seabird session and answered questions. This also prompted seabird enthusiasts and researchers to approach me to discuss their interests and ask more questions.

All the presentations were very interesting and informative, and I was intrigued to learn about the Australian species we had seen. I also supported my fellow kiwi presenters during their talks, all of whom did a wonderful job. The tea and lunch breaks were also a great opportunity to meet and learn from others with greater experience.

After a very fruitful conference week, I joined a field trip to Mt Tambourine. Our bird guides there helped us spot 22 species including Green Catbird, Wompoo Fruit-dove and Regent Bowerbird. I would like to thank Birds New Zealand for the student travel award and the AOC committee for organising an incredibly engaging and productive conference.

## AOC 2023 Student Travel Grant – Katie Vanderstok

Being awarded a Birds New Zealand Student Travel Grant to attend the 2023 AOC in Brisbane/Meeanjin was an incredible opportunity to learn from Australian birders and bird researchers, present my research to an international audience, and see some wonderful bird species for the first time.

I got a head start by meeting other students attending the conference at the Student 'Meet and Greet' over pizza. The conference opened the next day with a wonderful welcome by Songwoman Maroochy and two engaging plenaries. I was particularly charmed by the musical exploits of the Palm

Cockatoos and was mentally planning a future trip to Cape York to see them in action. I attended excellent talks on mitigating the effects of climate change on birds and bird behaviour in urban environments, and it lovely to catch up with other attendees from New Zealand that I'd met at previous Birds New Zealand conferences.

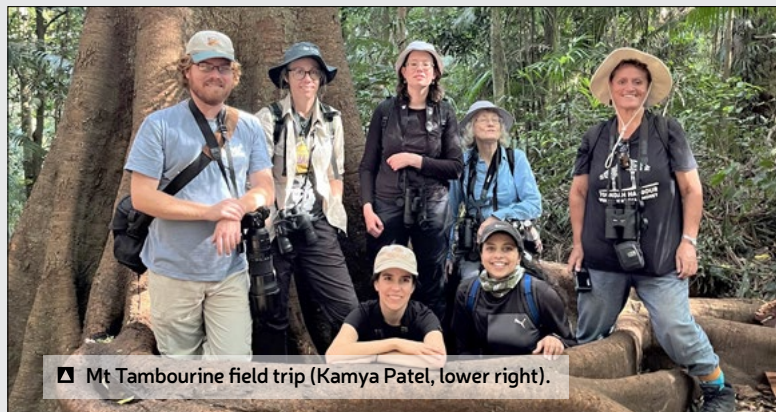
Very soon, it was time to present my Master's research to the conference. This explored the relationships between the anti-predator behaviour of Eurasian Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, and their sex, colouration, and breeding status. I greatly appreciated this opportunity and the many thought-provoking questions from the floor.

Next morning I joined a walk at Sandy Camp Road wetlands. The diversity of birds so close to the city was staggering! We saw over 50 species, including Variegated Fairy-wren, Eastern Yellow Robin and Marsh Crake. I got back to the conference in time for the amazing plenary talk on song in female birds given by Professor Naomi Langmore.

I also joined the Botanic Gardens walk where we saw a Channel-billed Cuckoo and some noisy Bush Stone-curlews. After that, there was a great session on educating communities about their local birds. I was captivated by the mystery of the Goonyandi Grass Wren, which is only known from a single photo and egg! Lastly, it was a great honour to meet and attend a talk by Dr Alexandra McQueen, as my Master's project was inspired her fairy-wren research.

I also attended the post-conference field trip to Mt Tamborine. This was an incredible experience, with expert local guides and a wide variety of rainforest birdlife. I saw my first bowerbirds in the wild (female Satin, male Regent), fulfilling a dream to see them that I'd had since childhood when I was inspired by a David Attenborough wildlife documentary.

I will look back on the 2023 AOC with great fondness. I am very grateful for the knowledge I gained, for the people I met, and for the incredible wildlife I saw. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Birds New Zealand for the travel grant and the conference organisers for making it such a wonderful event.



▲ Mt Tambourine field trip (Kamyia Patel, lower right).



## In Search of Kororā

“Kororā? Oh yes, we used to have lots and now not so much, and we are finding dead ones...”. We are told this again and again as we ask around to find out what’s happening with Kororā, also known as Little Penguins. This encapsulates nicely how much we don’t know. Sure, there are hotspots in New Zealand where a lot of data has been collected and published over decades, for example in Oamaru, and other places where long-term data has been collected but has not yet found its way into the public domain through publications.

There are so many community groups out there that are doing a fantastic job of trapping coastal areas, and this no doubt benefits the penguins. However, where are the penguins exactly, and how are they doing? That is the question the New Zealand Penguin Initiative (NZPI: [www.nzpi.nz](http://www.nzpi.nz)) wants to find answers to because we just don’t know, and we don’t know what the future holds for this taonga species which is facing multiple threats from introduced predators, climate change, habitat loss, dogs, and disturbance.

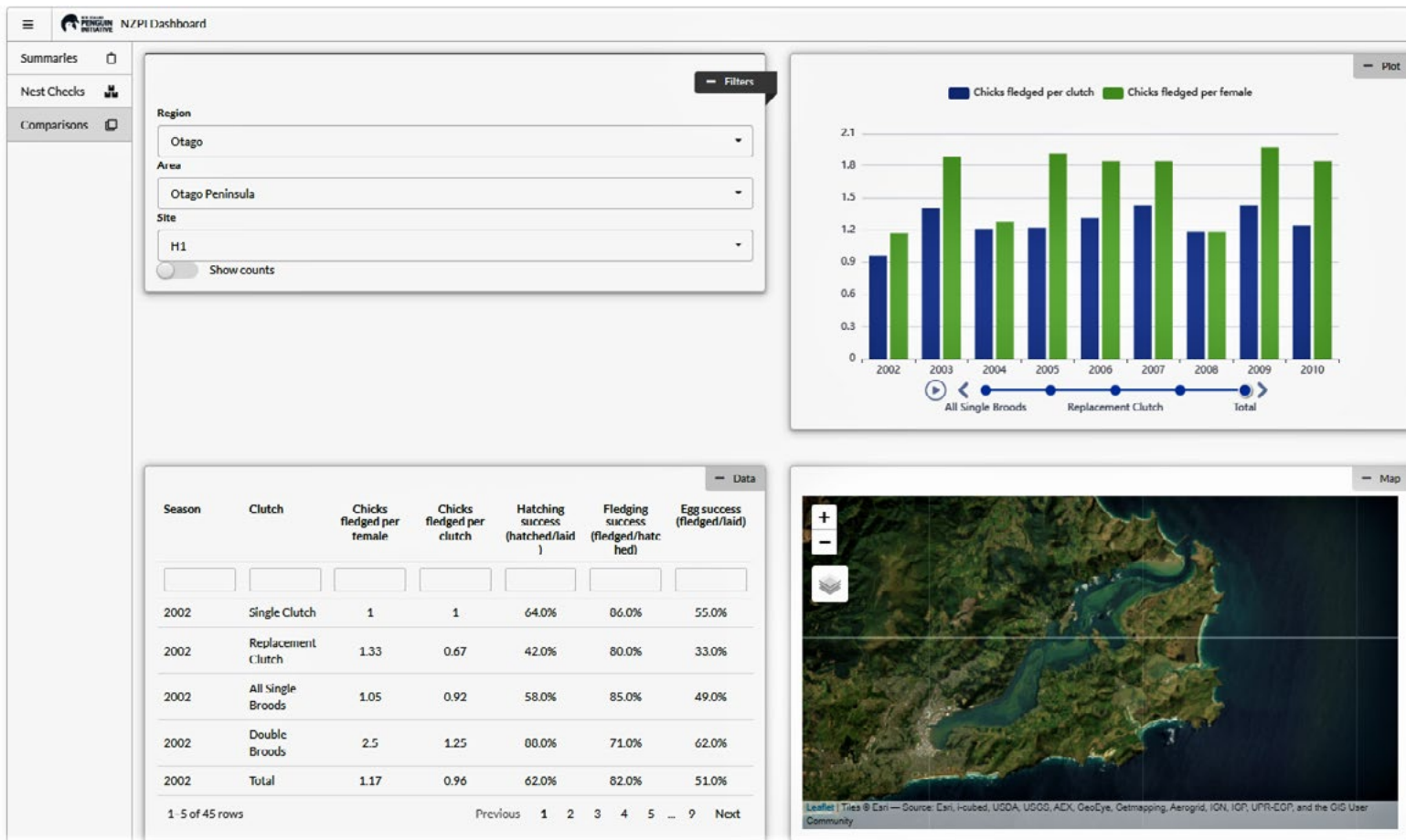
Who are we and why do we care? NZPI is a not-for-profit, privately-funded organisation that is part of the Environmental Law Initiative ([www.eli.org.nz](http://www.eli.org.nz)), with the aim of seeing New Zealand penguins flourishing around our coasts again. Our current focus is primarily Kororā because, while there is some information out there about them, it is scattered, and many groups labour away in isolation without much support, advice, or standardised monitoring methods. We want to change that by providing support and expertise, and bringing together information about the Kororā population into a centralised

Database that analyses the data into comparable parameters such as breeding success.

Once analysed the information is then channelled through to a Dashboard that displays the information on our website for public access – if that is what a group wants. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) safeguards the ownership of the data to the group, and the group controls the level of public access to their data from no access to full public access depending on their aims. The summary of the season’s data can then be downloaded by the group to be included in their reports and presentations. In addition, there is the option to get their data published in *Notornis* with the help of NZPI.

This sharing of data allows a picture to be painted of what is happening with Kororā. When someone says to us, “there are lots of Kororā there, we hear them all the time”, we would like to know how many there are and how they are doing. This involves locating their nesting and moulting spots, and following them through the seasons. Ideally, marking them with microchips allows a count of the population and can be used to determine if and how many of the chicks return. Crucially, if a Kororā is found dead, it can be identified as a resident that might have a mate and chicks.

How can NZPI help? We are available for support and advice, we can help with equipment and training, community education and advocacy, helping with local issues such as developments and submissions, permitting, and certification for microchipping. Our website also has monitoring protocols (endorsed by DOC), nest box designs, health and safety blueprints, and lots of other relevant information. Depending on the resources, ability and



Snapshot of the NZPI Dashboard using mock data to illustrate how Kororā data can be displayed.

commitment of individual groups, the monitoring can be done at three levels.

**Tier 3** - Hands off monitoring involves counting footprints on sandy beaches and trail cameras. This is particularly suitable for school groups as it teaches data collection, recording, analysing, and interpreting the information. Trail cameras do require permission from the local DOC office.

**Tier 2** - Still hands off but checking nest sites without touching the birds will give an indication of how many pairs are breeding and how many chicks are fledged. Individual Kororā are not identified but it gives an impression of what is happening with the penguins. This is often a steppingstone to Tier 1 monitoring.

**Tier 1** - This includes microchipping Kororā (DOC permit and microchipping certification required) and a commitment to monitor the Kororā population weekly or fortnightly. This provides detailed data on how big the population is, adult survival and chick recruitment.

To support the robust collection and storage of data, NZPI has developed a monitoring app that facilitates the data collection in the field and syncs the data to a shared Google spreadsheet, so no transcribing from notebooks to spreadsheets is needed. We are developing a system whereby the field data then migrates to our Database where it is analysed and then displayed with real-time updates on the Dashboard developed by [yousaydata.com](http://yousaydata.com). Community groups retain control of their data and who can access it. The illustration above is an example of what that might look like. The NZPI Dashboard is due to go live in February 2024.

The current distribution of groups - as far as we are aware - involved in Kororā conservation work is illustrated in the map on the opposite page, with groups officially signed up with NZPI (red stars), and other groups (black dots). Some of those other groups

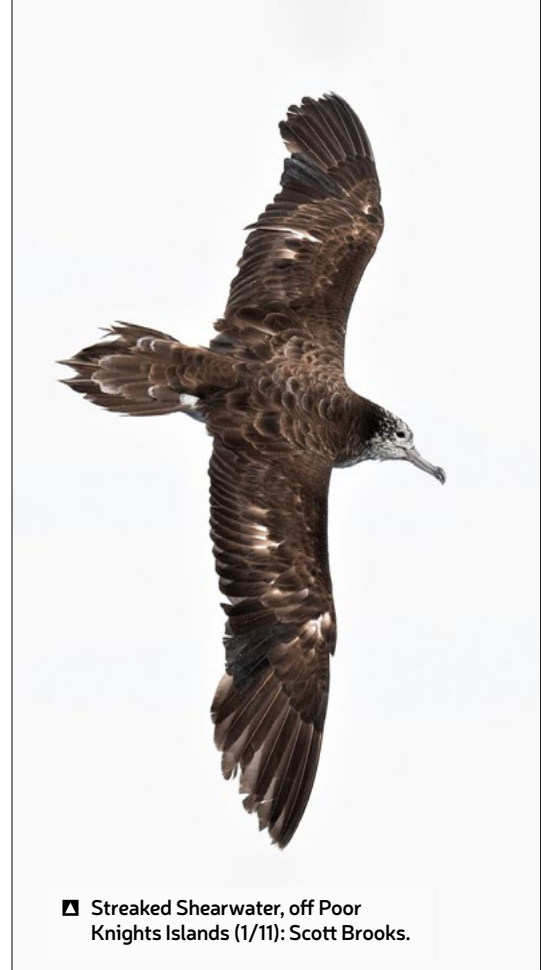
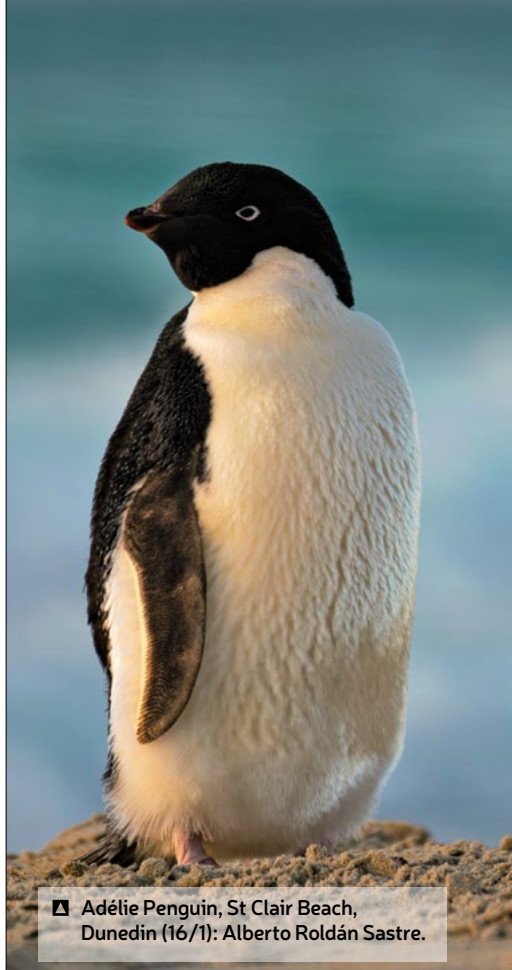
are currently in talks with us about joining up and sharing their data, working out the best outcomes for the penguins. We are open to start a conversation with anyone who wants to chat about their penguin project, their aspiration and importantly challenges, to see if we can help looking after the penguins.

As you can see from the map, there are great holes in the coverage, areas like the East Cape for example, which appear to have no Kororā work happening. But is that true? We call on anyone who has Kororā in their neighbourhood and would like to get involved in their conservation and protection, please get in touch as we would love to have a chat. Historical distributions are always helpful in finding Kororā so talking to long-term residents can provide some insight into where they might be and what is happening with them.

You can reach us through our website [www.nzpi.nz](http://www.nzpi.nz) via the contact page, so drop us a line. We would love to hear from you.

HILTRUN RATZ, PhD, NEW ZEALAND PENGUIN INITIATIVE





▲ King Penguin, Garden Cove, Campbell Island (14/1): Peter Moore.

▲ Adélie Penguin, St Clair Beach, Dunedin (16/1): Alberto Roldán Sastre.

▲ Streaked Shearwater, off Poor Knights Islands (1/11): Scott Brooks.

## Bird News

Some sightings have not received official acceptance by Birds New Zealand's Records Appraisal Committee (1st September 2023 – 1st March 2024).

There were several southerly reports of **Australasian Grebes** from the South Island. Two were seen at Franz Josef oxidation ponds (West Coast) on 4/8, with 1 still present on 3/11; 2 at Karamea (West Coast) on 5/9, 1 at Styx Mill Reserve (Christchurch) on 25/11, and 2 at Lake Murray (Tekapo) on 26/1 and 2/2.

There was a flurry of Australian **Chestnut-breasted Shelducks** including 1 south of Meremere on 8/12; up to 4 at Sutton/Tip Lagoon (Invercargill) from 14-22/12; 11 at Campbell Island on 23/12; 1 at Wairio Wetlands (Lake Wairarapa) on 5/1; and 1 at Upukerora Road (Te Anau) on 7/1. A female **Northern Pintail** was a welcome find at Sutton/Tip Lagoon on 9/9 and 10/10, as were 3 **Plumed Whistling Ducks** at Mawheraiti (West Coast) on 23/10.

Back on Campbell Island, a **King Penguin** was seen ashore at Garden Cove from 14-17/1. Two more were seen at Capstan Cove and Sandy Bay on 28/1 with photos suggesting they were 3 different birds. The Capstan Cove bird stayed until 3/2 while the other bird was not seen in Sandy Bay after 28/1, although it may have also visited Capstan Cove on 31/1 when two birds were again seen there. If not, then that could have been a 4th bird. An **Erect-crested Penguin** was seen at Sandy Bay on 14-15/1 and a **Fiordland Crested Penguin** was reported at Shag Point in early February.

An **Adélie Penguin** was seen ashore at Monkey Island (Southland) on 4/1 and 1 was found on St Clair beach (Dunedin) on 16/1. It is not known if it was the same bird. The St Clair bird was taken into care at OPERA (formerly Penguin Place) on Otago Peninsula "for a health check". While in care there it was viewable by paying visitors before it was released back into the wild at a local beach on 1/2, where it stayed until the next day.

An **Eastern Rockhopper Penguin** was reported at Conway Flat, near Kaikoura, on 1/2, and another was found on Long Beach (Otago) on 30/1 before it was also taken into care "for a health check" on 13/2.

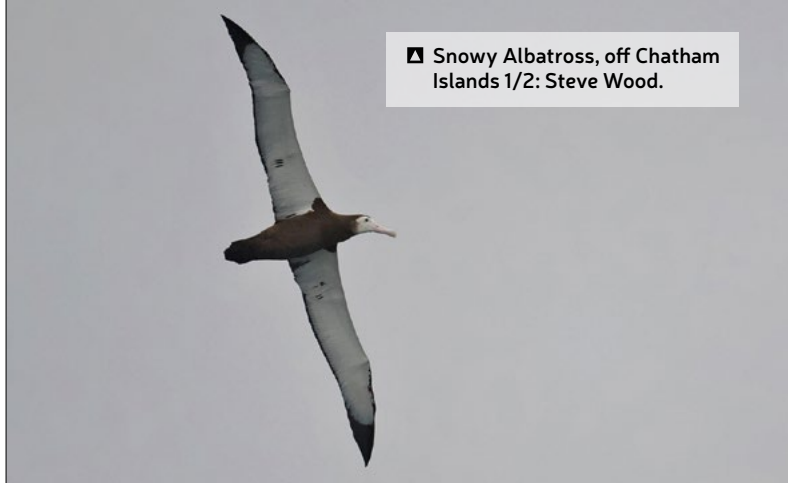
Other notable seabird sightings included a **Snowy Albatross** (*exulans*), an **Antarctic Fulmar** and a **Short-tailed Shearwater** seen on an 'Albatross Encounter' pelagic trip from Kaikoura on 21/11. 'The Petrel Station' pelagic trips from Tutukaka (Northland) continued to record interesting seabird sightings, including 1 **White-chinned Petrel** (25/9); 1 **Westland Petrel**; 44 individual albatrosses of 7 species and circa 60 **NZ Storm Petrels** (7/10); 1 **Mottled Petrel** and 1 **Cape Petrel** (16/10); and 2 **Chatham Albatross** and 12 **Mottled Petrels** (3/11). Most notable was the first NZ record of a live **Streaked Shearwater** seen on 1/11, which was the 67th seabird species and the 50th tubenose species recorded on these trips. There were also sightings of a Chatham Albatross (1/11); a **South Polar Skua** (1/12); 5 **Mottled Petrels** (2-3/12); and a **Kermadec Petrel** (28/1). Checking photographs taken during the 16/10 trip revealed a potential **Pink-footed Shearwater**, which has been submitted as a UBR. Organiser Scott Brooks has more trips planned over the months ahead: <https://www.thepetrelstation.nz/>

A DOC-organised pelagic trip off Taranaki recorded 8 **Broad-billed Prions** and 125 **Thin-billed Prions** on 31/8 and a Wellington branch Cook Strait pelagic trip on 6/11 recorded a **Short-tailed**, a **Sooty** and a **Hutton's Shearwater**. A series of 4 pelagic trips at the Chatham Islands organised by Steve Wood recorded 2 **Pyramid Prions** (28/1), 1 **Gould's Petrel** (30/1), 2 **Chatham Petrels** (28/1; 1/2), and 1 **Snowy Albatross** (1/2). A pelagic trip from Rangaunu Harbour to North Cape organised by Mathieu Poot recorded a **Gould's Petrel** and a **White-naped Petrel** (10/2), and an **Indian Ocean Yellow-nosed Albatross** was reported off Cape Foulwind on 16/1.





▲ Pyramid Prion, off Chatham Islands (28/2): Steve Wood.



▲ Snowy Albatross, off Chatham Islands 1/2: Steve Wood.



▲ South Polar Skua, off Poor Knights Islands (1/12): Scott Brooks.



▲ Chatham Petrel, off Chatham Islands (29/1): Richard Webber.

Tropical seabird sightings included an immature male **Brown Booby** photographed flying past the Thames coast on 8/12, and an immature male Brown Booby photographed standing on a rock near a flock of Spotted Shags on 29/12 with the location given only as "Coromandel Coast". A **Frigatebird spp.** was photographed flying over the Poor Knights Islands on 5/1, another at Okoromai Bay (Auckland) on 14/2. A **Lesser Frigatebird** was photographed and seen on and off at Whangapoua and Great Mercury Island from 19/1 to 28/2, and another was seen at Hihi Beach (near Mangōnui) on 8/2.

An Australian **White-necked Heron** was photographed among the Kotuku White Heron colony at Waitangirotu Nature Reserve (West Coast) on 8/1, and 13 **Cattle Egrets**, including some in breeding plumage seen at Timberyard Point Road junction (Lake Ellesmere) on 6/2, were also seen in a paddock east of Leeston near Hart's Creek on 8/2.

Wader news included an **Eastern Curlew** at Ōkārito Lagoon mudflats on 22/10 and another at Ashley Estuary on and off between 8/10 and 15/2; and a **Sanderling** at Tutaekuri River mouth near Clive on 11/10 plus another at Ashley Estuary on 25/2. A **Long-toed Stint** was found at a new wetland called "The Big Pond" on 14/1 which stayed to 17/12. The wetland has been created close to Waituana Lagoon (Southland) by a local iwi trust. A **Terek Sandpiper** was at Embankment Road/Clarke's Road (Lake Ellesmere) from 20-23/10; 1 was at Eastern Rabbit Island (Nelson) on 29/11; and 1 at Motueka Spit on 13/2. A **Hudsonian Godwit** was at Manawatu Estuary from 30/9 to 3/10; 1 in breeding plumage was at Walker Island (Far North) on 30/11; 1 at Little Waihi estuary (Bay of Plenty) on 3/12; and 1 with circa 600 **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Warrington Peninsula (Otago) on 14/12. A **Wandering Tattler** was at Proctors Beach (Whangarei Heads) from 3-5/11; and 1 was at Tapotupotu (Far North) from 11-21/11. A **Little Whimbrel** was a lucky find during a wader survey at the New River estuary (Invercargill) on 23/2.

A **Shore Plover** was seen at the end of Beach Road (Spinnaker Reserve) in Te Atatu on 18-19/8. Another Shore Plover was seen at Manawatu Estuary on 20-21/9, with leg bands WR-WB. Dubbed "Maddy", she was a captive-reared bird that had been released at Motutapu Island (Auckland) in August 2022. She was resident there through 2023 until she left sometime after 2/9 and flew to Manawatu Estuary. She then flew all the way back to Motutapu and was photographed there on 29/9 after making a journey of more than 400 km each way.

Checking for unusual terns among flocks of White-fronted, Black-fronted and Caspian terns proved productive over the summer season. An **Australian Gull-billed Tern** was seen at Manawatu Estuary from 4-20/9; up to 5 were at the Piako wader roost from 2/9 to 11/2; 1 was at Tauherenikau Delta by Lake Wairarapa on 11/10; and 1 was at Embankment Road (Lake Ellesmere) on and off between 20/10 and 11/1. A flock of 13 was seen at Clarks Beach on the south Manukau Harbour on 15/10, followed by 6 at the Waiuku channel of Manukau Harbour from 16/11 that were still present on 25/2. Another 2 were seen at Motueka Spit from 13-18/2.

A **White-winged Black Tern** was seen at the Tukituki River mouth from 19-21/10; 2 were at Kaitorete Spit tip on 18/10; 1 was seen in breeding plumage on the Ashley River near the Okuku confluence on 18/12 and at the Ashburton River mouth on 29/12 along with **Black-fronted Terns** (BFTs) on 5/12; 1 was at Jim's Wetland (Whangarei Heads) on 2/11; 1 was seen in breeding plumage at the Upukeroa River near Te Anau with 4 BFTs on 21/12; 1 was seen in near complete breeding plumage at the Tukituki River mouth on 11/1 with a flock of WFTs; 1 was at Walker Island (Far North) on 13/1; 1 was at Coopers Lagoon near Lake Ellesmere on 28/1; 2 were at Waituna Lagoon (Southland) on 22/1 followed by a 3rd paler adult-type bird on 30/1, plus a 4th (southern cycle) bird transitioning out of breeding plumage on 3/2; and 1 at Nelson Boulder Bank on 10-11/1, followed by 2 there on and off from 20/1 to 18/2.



▲ Brown Booby, "Coromandel Coast" (29/12): Bevan Walker.



▲ Arctic Tern, Walker Island (9/2): Bradley Shields.



▲ Lesser Frigatebird, Whangapoua (19/11): Aiden Kerr.



▲ Antarctic Tern, Aramoana Mole (7/12): Nick Beckwith.



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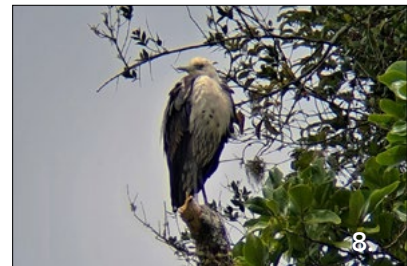
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▲ 1. Eastern Rockhopper Penguin, Long Beach (13/12): Dan M; 2. Chatham Albatross, off Poor Knights Islands (3/11): Scott Brooks; 3. Gould's Petrel, off Chatham Islands (30/1): Steve Wood; 4. Kermadec Petrel, off Poor Knights Islands (28/1): Scott Brooks; 5. Eleven Chestnut-breasted Shelducks, Campbell Island (23/12): Bradley Shields; 6. Wandering Tattler, Tapotupotu (21/10): W. Abbott; 7. Hudsonian Godwit in breeding plumage, Walker Island (9/2): Bradley Shields; 8. White-necked Heron, Waitangiroti (8/1): White Heron Sanctuary Tours.

An **Eastern Common Tern** was seen at Ray's Rest (Pukorokoro Miranda) on 22/10; 1 at 90 Mile Beach reported on 10/11; 1 at Bluff on 5/12; 1 at the Ashburton River mouth on 29/12; 1 at Nelson Boulder Bank with a flock of **White-fronted Terns** (WFTs) from 3-4/1; 1 at Burke Street Jetty in Thames on 7/1; 1 at Waikanae Sandspit with WFTs on 18/12, 12-17/1 and 25/2; 1 near Argyle Beach (Invercargill) on 9/1; 1 at the Tukituki River mouth on 11/1 with a flock of WFTs; 2 at the Ashley River estuary on and off between 13/1 and 29/2 (1 with bright red legs, 1 with darker legs); 1 at Manawatu Estuary on 8/1 and 10/2; 1 at Pakawau Beach (Golden Bay) with WFTs on 21/1; 2 with a large mixed flock of terns at Walker Island (Far North) on 9/2; and 1 at Plimmerton fire station rocks with a WFT flock on 18/2.

Other tern species reported included a **Whiskered Tern** (latterly in breeding plumage) at the Piako wader roost on and off between 31/12 and 12/1. Two **Sooty Terns** were reported at Tom Bowling Bay (Far North) on 22/11 followed by 1 at Walker Island on 30/11 that was still present there on 13/1. An **Arctic Tern** was reported in Tory Channel on 10/11 and another at Bluff on 13/12.

The following month, 1 **Arctic Tern** and 3 **Eastern Little Terns** were reported at Walker Island on 9/2 with 35 **Caspian Terns** and 700 WFTs, including an unusual bird with orange bill and orange legs. An **Antarctic Tern** was photographed roosting with WFTs at Aramoana Mole (Otago) that stayed from 7-9/12, and 1 was seen near Lake Ellesmere outlet with WFTs, BFTs and 2 WWBTs on 27/2.

An unusual record was a **Kea** found grounded on the beach at Clutha River mouth that was taken into care on 13/1. Another was seen perched on a large flax stem in a garden in Oamaru on 24/1. Three **Fork-tailed Swifts** were seen at Opihi River (Canterbury) on 19/8; 1 **Australian Fairy Martin** at Whenua Hou Codfish Island on 15/10, and 2 **White-throated Needletails** at the Snares Islands on 7/12. Lastly, an unusual record for Dunedin was a **Common Myna** reported at 36 South Road on 8/12.

Sources: eBird NZ, Unusual Bird Reports, [BirdingNZ.net](http://BirdingNZ.net) Forum, New Zealand Birders Facebook group, Regional Roundup, iNaturalist NZ, DOC Hoiho Team.



■ Auckland eBird workshop, Ambury Regional Park (5/11): Ian McLean.



■ Pectoral Sandpipers, Hokio Beach (27/2): Michael Szabo.

**FAR NORTH**

CJ and Carol Ralph reported that Grey-faced Petrels and Little Penguins had a successful breeding season on Moturoa Island in the Bay of Islands. On Waitangi Day, 50 Little Penguins were seen on the water between Black Rocks and Whale Rock. NZ Tomtits have been seen repeatedly in Ponga Hollow on the island so they seem to be settling in, but NI Robins no longer seem to be present there with none seen for a year now.

Derry Godbert saw a large flock of 1000+ petrel-sized birds in the Piercy Island area between Net Rock and Bird Rock at the entrance to the Bay of Islands on 9/1. After discussions with Kevin Matthews and CJ Ralph, it seems most likely they were Grey-faced Petrels, based on their size, colour and flight behaviour. Unfortunately, no photos were taken. Kevin Matthews also reported hearing an Australasian Bittern in the Kaimaunau wetland area and Shining Cuckoos near Kaitaia recently, and finding a Westland Petrel on 90 Mile Beach.

Jochen Zaeschmaer reported 2 Sooty Terns at Tom Bowling Bay on 22/11, and Mathieu Poot reported 1 at Walker Island in Rangaunu Harbour on 30/11 that was still present on 13/1 along with a White-winged Black Tern (WWBT). Mathieu Poot, Scott Brooks and Bradley Shields returned there by boat on 9/1 and reported 1 Hudsonian Godwit, 1 stilt hybrid, 11 Whimbrels, 500 SIPOs, 2500 Bar-tailed Godwits, 1 Arctic Skua, 2 Common Terns, 1 Arctic Tern, 1 WWBT, and 3 Little Terns with 35 Caspian Terns and 700 White-fronted Terns, including 1 with an orange bill and orange legs. The next day they saw a Gould's Petrel and a White-naped Petrel during a pelagic trip up to North Cape.

We also received a report of a Whimbrel and a Red Knot on the Purerua Peninsula in November, and a Lesser Frigatebird at Hihi Beach near Mangōnuī on 8/2. Lastly, our branch did a bird count along 90 Mile Beach on 9/2 and we were pleased to see plenty of birds, including 405 Sth Black-Backed Gulls, 290 Red-billed Gulls, 380 SIPO and 10 NZ Dotterels.

- ISABELLA GODBERT

**NORTHLAND**

In November, 8 members enjoyed working with Paul Fisher to catch Fernbirds at 3 sites

including Hilton and Melva Ward's wetland by Old Mill Lane in Ngunguru for his national study on Fernbird moult and aging. There will be further work with Paul this autumn. It was surprising to see how young the population was and how reliant it must be on annual breeding success.

In November, I spoke at our branch meeting about the factors leading up to and the consequences of red algae *Spiridia filamentosa* and *Plocamium* spp from Bream Bay entering Waipu Estuary in March 2021. The breakdown of this material caused a major deoxygenation event, hammered the invertebrate community and seagrass beds, and part of the estuary was deserted by NZ Fairy Tern Tara Iti in the 2021-22 breeding season.

At least 3 reports of dead and dying seabirds have been sent to MPI as potential responses for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Pat Miller first reported strange behaviour in Southern Black-backed Gulls on Ocean Beach, and recently a substantial number of Red-billed Gulls at the refinery breeding site have died, and various species have washed ashore in Bream Bay. HPAI has been ruled out, but we do not know the cause of these losses yet. Anything happening in Bream Bay is of concern due to the high number of birds breeding on the coastline in summer and the proximity of the Tara Iti breeding grounds.

I first detected NZ Scaup in Whangarei in February 2019, and since then, distribution has steadily increased. Breeding has occurred in Whao Valley Dam and Lake Road, Tikipunga. A Eurasian Coot was seen at Lake Ora on 21/11. 'The Petrel Station' pelagic trips from Tutukaka out past the Poor Knights Islands recorded the first live NZ record of a Streaked Shearwater plus a Chatham Albatross (1/11), a South Polar Skua (1/12), 5 Mottled Petrels (2-3/12), and a Kermadec Petrel (28/1). Organiser Scott Brooks has more trips planned: <https://www.thepetrelstation.nz/>

- TONY BEAUCHAMP

**AUCKLAND**

Our branch hosted an eBird Workshop with the NZ Bird Atlas team at Ambury Park on 5/12. Tom Auer and Ian Davis from Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology provided an excellent presentation on eBird and the Merlin App. It was attended by over 50 people,

who had plenty of questions. Thanks to the Auckland Council staff at Ambury Regional Park for providing the venue. On 17/12, we had our 4th public guided walk of the year at Ambury which was attended by 35 people including guides. Birds seen included 2,500 Bar-tailed Godwits, 700 Red Knots, 400 SIPO, 40 Pied Stilts, 11 VOCs, 6 Nth NZ Dotterels, 30 Black-billed Gulls and 32 Caspian Terns.

Matuku Link was the venue for our annual summer picnic on 20/1 where 15 members enjoyed an excellent walk guided by John Staniland. Birding highlights included 2 separate Shining Cuckoo juveniles being fed by Grey Warblers, and a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flew over. Matuku Link was also the venue for the Wetlands Festival on 3/2 to help celebrate World Wetlands Day. Our branch had a display stand and provided 2 guided bird walks. Despite poor weather, 300 people attended the event.

A shorebird census of south Kaipara Harbour by 19 participants on 25/11 recorded 15,314 Bar-tailed Godwits, 6,934 Red Knots, 334 Ruddy Turnstones, 36 Pacific Golden Plovers, 2 Whimbrel, 1 Eastern Curlew, 1 Great Knot, 1 Sanderling, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 1 Red-necked Stint, 43 Black-billed Gulls, 11 Little Terns and 1 NZ Fairy Tern. Due to continued limited beach access from storm damage, our Muriwai beach patrols have been restricted. On 9/12 we found 1 Red-billed Gull, 1 Australasian Gannet, 5 Sooty Shearwaters, 1 Hutton's Shearwater and 4 Fairy Prions.

The number of rarities seen in Auckland has been relatively limited this summer, possibly due to access still being restricted to places like Muriwai gannet colony. A NZ Tomtit was seen by John MacKenzie on Rakino Island on 27/1, a Little Egret by Trina Smith in Te Atatu on 11/2, and Marsh Sandpiper has been at Ambury Park since November.

- IAN McLEAN

**SOUTH AUCKLAND**

At our November meeting, Daniel Thomas gave a talk on bird fossils found around the Ohawe-Waihi Beach area of south Taranaki. His research group's investigations into the biology of penguins have led to the discovery of adaptations for foraging and visual communication. The oldest fossil penguins (62 million years old) are found in Canterbury, while the most recent common ancestor of all



modern penguins is believed to have existed about 14 or 15 mya. It spawned the 6 genera of penguins we have today.

The same month, South Auckland and Waikato members took a boat trip around the outer Coromandel Harbour to boost atlasing effort in that area. Highlights included 3 Reef Herons and about 1200 Australasian Gannets, mostly on Gannet and Bush Islands. The only other seabirds seen were 6 Little Penguins, 1 Buller's Shearwater and 4 Fluttering Shearwaters. The 22 Spotted Shags we saw was fewer than we had hoped for. Other November sightings included 1,085 Bar-tailed Godwits at Matarangi Spit on 6/11, including 4RBRB and 153 juveniles, a Reef Heron and 128 Spotted Shags on the Thames Coast on 6/11, and about 150 pairs of Black-billed Gulls and at least 12 VOCs on nests at the Ambury radio mast.

Our annual Christmas BBQ was delayed until 20/1, when 15 of us got together on an Awhitu Peninsula farm. After lunch, we drove down to Pokorua Gap on the west coast and took a walk up the beach to view the Sth Black-backed Gull colony, with many nesting adults as well as juveniles settled on the cliffs. Among a group of about 100 White-fronted Terns on the beach were a number of juveniles as well as adult D-166768, banded on 10/1/1998 at Miranda, one of 326 pre-fledged chicks banded that season. This was its 11th sighting/reading and it is now the oldest of its age group still alive. On 4/2 at Kaiaua on the east coast, it was seen again among a small group of 33 birds, making it 26 years and 26 days since banding. At the top of the peninsula, several beaches have seen successful fledging of chicks over summer including 7 NZ Dotterels and 4 SIPO.

Also seen at Kaiaua on 15/1 was a Black-billed Gull that was banded as a pre-fledged chick 29 years and 1 day previously, extending the recorded longevity of this species by 2 years. Other notable sightings include 2 Pectoral Sandpipers on flooded paddocks at Meremere in mid-January.

- SUE FROSTICK

## WAIKATO

Over the summer period, local birds and visitors have enjoyed tramping in the foothills and volcanic plateau, taking in the beautiful scenery and expected array of native birds. At this time of year here, we see peak numbers and diversity of migrant shorebirds. In addition to the always eventful offerings at Pukorokoro Miranda, wader surveys were conducted in November and December around our western Harbours at Raglan, Aotea, and Kawhia. Both censuses noted 3 Whimbrel on Te Motu Island in Kawhia, and 1 at Aotea, and it was encouraging to see successful Caspian Tern breeding at Kawhia. Several Red Knots were noted at Aotea in February (rare on the west coast) along with small numbers of Wrybill and a Reef Heron.

In addition to coastal harbours, flooded paddocks can be quite fruitful for waterbirds during the summer months. The best example of this was a pair of Pectoral Sandpipers that hung around for over a week near Meremere (North Waikato). This is possibly the first inland record of this species for the Waikato since a bird at Lake Whangape in the 1970s. Presumably this may actually be an annual occurrence, however with so many ephemeral

pools to choose from it's a matter of keen eyes being lucky enough to spot them! This area, including the wider Whangamarino Swamp, has hosted the usual variety of waterfowl, shags, and herons, along with good numbers of Caspian Terns. Even better was a single Gull-billed Tern (presumably Australian) seen along the Waikato River at Meremere in mid-December, and also notable this far inland was a pair of White-fronted Terns in Mercer in early February. Royal Spoonbills continue to be seen in a variety of locations throughout the region this summer, with breeding attempts continuing at Lake Kimihia (Huntly) and the Howarth Memorial Wetlands in Te Aroha.

There have been several Kakapo 'jailbreaks' at Maungatautari which has raised concerns about their long-term viability at this mainland sanctuary. Hopefully fence upgrades can prevent further escapes and birds may settle in further uphill. Not confirmed at the time of writing, however it is notable that an eBird user reported a pair of Rooks near Maungatautari in February.

- RUSSELL CANNINGS

## BAY OF PLENTY/VOLCANIC PLATEAU

Birding reports have been somewhat quiet in the region apart from the usual residents on land and at sea. Weka continue to be regularly seen in the outskirts of Whakatane and appear to be growing in numbers further east including reliable reports from the Cape Runaway area. The highlight of the summer thus far has been a pair of Little Egrets that have been at Maketu Estuary, along with at least 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and the usual group of Pacific Golden Plovers. Another Little Egret reported in February from the Omokoroa Estuary has yet to be confirmed. Speaking of Omokoroa (Middle Tauranga Harbour), observers have been noting around 50 knots roosting with godwits at Cooney Reserve (somewhat scarce in the area), and a Little Tern was seen roosting with White-fronted Terns closer to Athenree (NW Tauranga Harbour). Finally, a Kotuku (White Heron) was present for a number of weeks in the late spring/early summer along the Ohau Channel (NE corner of Lake Rotorua).

- RUSSELL CANNINGS

## GISBORNE/WAIROA

A rare sighting for our region was an Australian Gull-billed Tern seen at Te Wherowhero Lagoon, first noted by John Kyngdon and Geoff Foreman on 25/10. It has been seen there regularly since then, as well as at Waipaoa River mouth. Malcolm Rutherford heard a Kākā up the Waimata Valley in early December. Then a Kākā was reported on the Tairāwhiti Birds Facebook page on 26/12 which shows the public interest in and value of the page. Once reported it was seen by multiple people around the city over the next 2 weeks.

Malcolm also heard a Spotless Crane on a farm wetland in the upper Waimata catchment. One of his 5-minute bird counts on farmland, included 48 Spur-winged Plovers, and 13 White-faced Herons all disturbed by a Swamp Harrier. Another rare species here, heard by Malcolm was a Cirl Bunting; his audio of it later confirming the ID. Apparently, some have been released locally over the years. Interesting sightings offshore from Gisborne (from Atlas checklists) have included numerous Cook's Petrel, White-faced Storm Petrel, Buller's Shearwater, Hutton's Shearwater, Grey-

headed Petrel, and a Pycroft's Petrel. Reports of Weka indicate that they are re-establishing themselves closer and closer to Gisborne City. Malcolm Rutherford also reports an Australian Coot with chicks at the Poverty Bay golf club.

- RAEWYNN & GEOFF FOREMAN

## TARANAKI

At our November meeting I tabled the fold-up pocket-sized field guide to seabirds and shorebirds, produced by 'Wild for Taranaki' and funded out of proceeds from the 2023 Birds New Zealand annual conference. It has been well-received; Dan Burgin used them for a recent bird identification course. Our field trip was a pleasant morning's ramble along the upper Huatoki Stream that runs through New Plymouth and we recorded a range of species from Common Pheasant to Shining Cuckoo.

Members had been out and about during the month. The Pied Shag colony at Awakino is going well, although counting birds and nests is a little tricky now that the poplar tree is in full leaf. Banded Rail have been seen at Mokau and Royal Spoonbill have been present all year, but still show no inclination to breed. We know of another site in South Taranaki where breeding may have occurred. Access is a bit tricky but we hope to get there for a look in July for the census. At our final meeting in December our Atlas Coordinator, Steve Purdon reminded us this is the last summer of the Atlas project. Seven squares have no summer data, and all squares need more nocturnal records. The meeting concluded with the annual cuppa and supper.

January was our 25th annual Beach, Birds & BBQ at Waiongana, a fine sunny day was enjoyed by 20 of us, our biggest turnout. Those who wandered the beach saw a range of species including 5 Pacific Golden Plovers, 11 Banded Dotterels, 1 NZ Dotterel and a noisy flock of 27 Spur-winged Plovers. Those who didn't, enjoyed a few rounds of fresh pikelets, jam and cream. All in all, it was another great day out.

Vaughn Turner spent a month birding in the USA where he saw 175 species, including 105 'lifers', including flocks of sandpipers, Sanderlings and Marbled Godwits at a beach in San Francisco.

In mid-December I had a trip of a lifetime, joining Heritage Expeditions on a 'Beyond Fiordland' voyage to Campbell, Auckland/Enderby, the Snares, and Stewart/Ulva islands, then onto Dusky, Doubtful and Milford sounds. It was a dream come true. The weather was so benign that we even managed a trip down the western chain of the Snares. It was everything I hoped for and much, much more on so many levels. We lost half a day and a visit to see Rockhopper Penguins due to the weather. Apart from missing out on Subantarctic Snipe I saw everything on my 'hit list', from huge Southern Royal Albatross soaring close overhead at Enderby Island to tiny flowering native orchids. A truly unforgettable experience.

- PETER FRYER

## HAWKE'S BAY

Our November field trip had to be postponed until early December due to the weather. Some exciting sightings made during our (albeit partial) summer census included an Australasian Bittern, a couple of Reef Herons, a Marsh Sandpiper, and a Whimbrel.



■ Eastern Curlew, Ashley River estuary (8/10): Samuel Amaris.



■ Dawn Palmer, new Canterbury & West Coast Regional Representative.

Our January field trip to Ahuriri Estuary found a lot going on there, despite rain disrupting the plan somewhat. It ended up being "a game of two halves", with observations made both morning and afternoon around the showers. The Southern Marsh was the first stop, where we found 5 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (a high count of 6 has been seen there at other times) and a Pectoral Sandpiper. Also present were plenty of Pied Stilts and 62 Banded Dotterels. Unfortunately, we missed the 2 Marsh Sandpipers that had previously been reported. The Scrapes had a full complement (200+) of Bar-tailed Godwits as well as an unusually high number of Black-billed Gulls, which had most likely moved over from their nesting site at Pandora Pond. Here we also saw a single Red Knot (2 had previously been reported) and a Whimbrel sitting among a scattered group of Pacific Golden Plovers. The SIPO count equated to the same number of birds found in the nearby Ngaruroro River during a November river survey completed for HBRC by contractors.

Ron Jackson thought he heard 2 Spotless crakes in the wetlands at Haumoana in November 2023. Haumoana also appears to be "tern central", with a Little Tern, a Common Tern, and a juvenile Black-fronted Tern all reported from this area, along with a White-winged Black Tern and about 200 White-fronted Terns. Two Black-billed Gull colonies nested in Hawke's Bay, one on the Ngaruroro River and the other at Pandora Pond, with a total of some 442 nests counted as part of the national census. Sadly, the nesting colony of Black-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns at Pandora Pond suffered much disturbance, and in some cases deliberate interference, requiring the involvement of DOC, Ahuriri Estuary Protection Society, Mana Ahuriri Trust, and the police. On a more positive note, we have a "mini Okarito" at Anderson Park, with at least 2 dozen Royal Spoonbills and Black Shags nesting on an island in a pond in this suburban park.

- THALIA SACHTLEBEN & BERNIE KELLY

**WHANGANUI**

Paul Gibson, Jim Norris and Michael O'Shea, along with several others, continue monitoring the waders on the Whanganui Estuary. Bar-tailed Godwit are the focal species (max. number 67 in early November, stabilised now

at 25-32), but some rare species have also been recorded: 1 Red-necked Stint (3/11), 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (30/11) and 1 Marsh Sandpiper (22/12). Paul, Jim and Ormond Torr also found a Pectoral Sandpiper on Koitiata Lagoon on 24/1; 2 were recorded there almost 2 weeks later.

'Our' Bar-tailed Godwit, AJD, returned to the Whanganui Estuary from Foxton Beach on 19/12, repeating the pattern followed for the previous 15 summers since being banded. As in almost every previous year, he arrived first at the Manawatū Estuary before moving to Whanganui. We expect that he will stay until the last week of March, his usual period of departure for his northern breeding grounds. Presumably this site fidelity is advantageous through providing prior knowledge about food distribution and abundance, predators and the risks they pose, and which sites provide safe shelter. But all this relies on a degree of predictability in the environment or where change is sufficiently gradual to be tracked. If habitats become degraded or disappear entirely, individuals showing extreme site fidelity may be too tied to their patterns of movement to make timely adjustments. It is a topic that deserves more attention.

Jim, Michael and Paul are also keeping tabs on the numbers of Nankeen Night Herons breeding at Ūpokongaro. The exact number of nests is still an open question but there appear currently to be at least 4 and possibly 5 active nests. Chicks have fledged from the first couple of nests, while the others are still either incubating eggs or feeding young. This activity has provided a field day for photographers. Paul Gibson recently published a fine book of photographs and facts about the Nankeen Night Herons: *RARE BEAUTY Nankeen Night Heron in New Zealand*. This book, locally produced, is available at several bookshops in the region or from Unique Pictorials ([info@upics.co.nz](mailto:info@upics.co.nz)).

Further inland, interest has focused on Long-tailed Cuckoos. For the past few years, we have noted an upsurge in calling, and possibly also in numbers, in late-January/early-February in the forests at Waitahinga. This year has been no exception with 4 or more birds being recorded there on several occasions. A recent atlasing trip along the Whanganui-Waitōtara watershed found cuckoos calling and counter-calling widely in native forests and mature

pine plantations, often involving several birds at a time. Is there a social dimension to these aggregations and associated calling, given that it is outside the breeding season of their hosts (Whiteheads, also calling prominently), and just prior to their departure for their south-west Pacific island wintering grounds?

- PETER FROST

**WELLINGTON**

We started 2024 with our Annual Members night. During this event, we don't have a dedicated guest speaker presenting, but instead our Wellington members share their ornithological work and/or any exciting birding experiences with each other. This is always a highlight of the year, as it really showcases the wide variety of work and birding undertaken by our members, and 2024 was no different!

We heard from Ian Armitage on 50 years of Pauatahanui Inlet surveys, Geoff de Lisle and Dallas Bishop on a variety of high-profile band re-sightings from around our region, NZ Young Birders gave a brief presentation, Maria Dussler provided insights into the diving behaviour of petrels, and the Wellington 'Big Day' record was broken by Igor Debski and I with 91 species in 24 hours. The Wellington region is truly a diverse and busy region and I couldn't be prouder as an RR!

Notable recent sightings included a Juan Fernandez Petrel seen passing off Pukerua Bay during a seawatch on 3/2. Thousands of young prions were also seen passing offshore, with Arctic Skuas preying some of the prions. Several Spotless Crakes were seen at Pauatahanui in late January, and a Common Tern was seen at Waikanae Sandspit with the White-fronted Tern flock there on 18/12 and 12-17/1. The White-fronted Terns bred there for the third summer in a row during December/January. On 13/1 there were 780 adults and 170 chicks and juveniles present near the end of the sandspit. Further north at Hokio Beach a pair of Pectoral Sandpipers stayed through January and February.

- JOHANNES FISCHER

**MARLBOROUGH**

In November, 4 members helped with the summer wader count for Lake Grassmere. We had a perfect day for wandering around the lake and the evaporation ponds. Highlights



included 5 Pacific Golden Plovers and a breeding colony of Caspian Terns with chicks. Just before Christmas, 10 members got together to get some summer Atlas effort in around Lake Jasper in the Awatere Valley. Five NZ Dabchicks were present on the lake (2 pairs and 1 chick) plus a Pūteketeke/Crested Grebe. We managed to record a total of 37 species on our checklist but the highlight of the day was unexpectedly flushing an Australasian Bittern from the raupō at the eastern end of the lake, a rare sight in Marlborough.

Members from around the region participated in the Pūteketeke census on 27/1 and we managed to cover all lakes around the region that have been known to have Pūteketeke present on them in recent years. This included: Lake Sedgemere, Tennyson and McRae on Molesworth; Lake Rotorua near Kaikōura; Lake Elterwater near Ward; Lake Matiri near Murchison; and Lakes Wentworth, Delta, Pinot, Jasper and Grovetown Lagoon near Blenheim. In total we recorded 19 Pūteketeke on the survey including a pair with 3 chicks at Delta Lake on Bankhouse Estate Vineyard.

A further highlight from the census was finding a pair of Australasian Grebes on a pond on the same vineyards, the first record of the species on eBird in Marlborough since 1977 at Lake Elterwater. It was a great effort by members to get solid coverage of the lakes in the regions, so many thanks to all members from around Marlborough (and further afield) who helped with surveying!

In mid-January, several members helped out with transferring Fluttering Shearwaters from Picton marina to Picton airport. This was part of the translocation project moving birds from Long Island in the Marlborough Sounds to Wharariki Ecosanctuary near Farewell Spit. In late January, myself and Dan Burgin visited Te Pākeka/Maud Island to band the Fluttering Shearwater chicks before they fledged. Four of the 7 breeding burrows had chicks in them meaning a 57% breeding success rate this season, a very similar rate to other recent breeding seasons.

The Royal Spoonbills have bred successfully at the Blenheim Wastewater Treatment Plant and at least 3 pairs have also bred at Lake Elterwater. This is great to know in preparation for the upcoming nationwide spoonbill census!

- PATRICK CROWE

### CANTERBURY

Sightings of grebes in our region over summer included some notable appearances of Australasian Grebes, including sightings at Franz Josef oxidation ponds and Lake Murray near Tekapo. There was a sighting of a NZ Dabchick at St Anne's Lagoon in September. Other noteworthy sightings included their return to Lake Forsyth and a record further south at Lake Poaka near Twizel in January.

Wader sightings at Lake Ellesmere dwindled as the lake's water level dropped significantly, impacting the habitat and birds, with no Pectoral Sandpipers recorded for the year. A pair of Whio Blue Ducks bred in an accessible part of the Otira River called Pegleg Creek for the first time since the viaduct was built. They had 2 small ducklings on 9/11 and the pair moved away in early January, having lost 1 of their 2 young. Whio may be expanding their

range in Arthurs Pass NP with other birds reported in the Hawdon Valley.

Throughout the season, Little Egrets have continued to be spotted, with 2 still frequenting the Ashley Estuary. Elsewhere, 1 was at Lake Forsyth on 16/9 and it is probable that this bird moved north. The number of Cattle Egrets present has continued to rise, with sightings near Lakeside. Despite their abundance, breeding behaviour is yet to be observed. A White-necked Heron made a brief appearance at the Waitangiroto Heron Colony but did not stay for long.

Our best wader sightings for this season included a Terek Sandpiper at Greenpark Sands and an Eastern Curlew at the Ashley Estuary with both birds providing fantastic viewing and photographic opportunities. The Ashley Curlew was spotted during mid-November and returned in early February.

White-winged Black Terns have teased again, showing signs of breeding behaviours inland and near the coast, though no-one has seen nesting or any young. Other tern sightings include an Australian Gull-billed Tern at Greenpark Sands and a Common Tern at the Ashley. The long-staying Common Myna near the New Brighton roundabout is still there.

Anita Spencer has stepped up to become our new Regional Representative since Don Goodale stepped down after many years of dedicated service. Our branch concluded 2023 with a quiz night and we are looking forward to an exciting lineup of talks and meetings in 2024.

- SAMUEL AMARIS

### OTAGO

Members have been busy during summer as the Atlas project approaches its final month. The final Spring survey period has finished, and the end of the final summer approaches. There was a great effort to survey the less visited squares. The final spring square coverage increased late in the season to 87%, with 130 species observed. Summer has the highest seasonal square coverage, with 95% of squares having some coverage, totalling 144 species.

Records of interest included a headline grabbing Adelie Penguin at St Clair Beach, our reigning 'Bird of the Century' at Papanui Inlet, Long-tailed Cuckoo at Papatōwai (anecdotally records becoming increasingly scarce), and 668 Bar-tailed Godwits at Warrington and 850 at Cabbage Point. A Marsh Crake was seen with 3 chicks at Glenorchy Lagoon and Spotless Crake at Fleming wetland. A juvenile Antipodean Albatross was at Tokatā/Nugget Point, an increased number of Buller's Shearwaters were seen close offshore, and we had an influx of Little Black Shags. There was also a Nankeen Night Heron at Waitati, a possible Cattle Egret at Dunedin Airport, and a possible Nankeen Kestrel in Lindis Valley.

The 8th season of SI Robins outside Orokonui finished with a late nest just fledging. There was great engagement from local members, and while more robin territories were found, only 6 nests from 3 pairs were monitored, of which 2 successfully fledged. The ORC funded Otago wetland birds project had a successful season with 71 acoustic monitors deployed for a minimum 40 days across wetlands in Central Otago, Coastal Otago, and Catlins. Additionally, a further crake survey at Tautuku once again recorded Spotless Crake, possibly

resident. The summer wader count on 26/11 recorded no outstanding changes with decent numbers of godwits at the most reliable sites. After being crowned 'Bird of the Century', the Pūteketeke Crested Grebe census took place on 27/1. Two coordinators in Central Otago rallied wonderful volunteer participation to survey sites around Wānaka and Queenstown.

The December eBird seminars were well attended in Queenstown and Dunedin. The end of year quiz night in December was as popular and fun as ever and there has been a summer break in our indoor meetings, but we look forward to a varied programme starting in late February. We are doing ongoing summer scoping for Royal Spoonbill nesting sites to inform monitoring plan for upcoming census in summer 2024/25. See the Birds Otago Facebook page for more details if you want to join us:

[www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/)

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

### SOUTHLAND

The Sutton Lagoon, formally the Invercargill Tip Lagoon, has continued to provide some rarities with 4 Chestnut-breasted Shelducks in late December and a local Marsh Sandpiper turning up for its 4th year in a row. A new wetland "The Big Pond" has been created close to Waituana Lagoon by a local iwi trust to add to the Pikirauahi wetland they developed several kilometres away a couple of years ago. This site is proving to be very productive for birders with 2 Marsh Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper being recorded there along with a Long-toed Stint identified by Sean Jacques on 14/1, which is only the 4th NZ record. Sean also saw 5 Cattle Egrets there on 30/12, now a rare sighting in Southland. If visiting this site please remember it is private land and to view from the gate or the top of the windrow (the best site). Our branch is keen to work with the trust to develop birding opportunities for this site and we don't want to get off side with them.

An Adelie Penguin turned up on the Southland coast at Monkey Island briefly on 3/1, a species that seems to be reaching NZ more often. It didn't hang around for long. We had an influx of Little Black Shags in December, a species which is being more frequently reported in the region. Kit Hustler reported a Common Tern at Bluff on 9/1 and Anja Kohler saw a White-winged Black Tern (WWBT) in breeding plumage at the Upukeroa on 21/12. Sean Jacques also saw a WWBT in transitional plumage at Waituna on 3/2, and Shawn Herron saw a likely Little Egret at Fortrose on 8/1.

Southland lost one of its biggest bird supporters when Phil Rhodes died in December. His knowledge and friendship as well as his work for the local branch as Regional Representative will be greatly missed.

Following the interest in Forest and Bird's 2023 'Bird of the Century' poll, Southland had its own Bird of the Year 2023 poll. It was no big surprise that the Southern NZ Dotterel won with over 50% of the local votes (no parochialism whatsoever!).

- PETE McCLELLAND

All of our regional newsletters can be viewed here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/resources/regional-newsletters/>

## Reviews

### Swarovski NL Pure 8 x 32 RRP: \$4,210

Being the smallest (158 x 131mm) and lightest (840g) in the NL Pure range, with a large field of view (159m/1000m) and a rapid focus wheel, these compact binoculars are well suited for watching fast-moving seabirds.



A recent trip to the Chatham Islands was a chance to put them through their paces in sometimes challenging conditions. Starting at The Pyramid just after dawn, the misty conditions couldn't have been worse. As the mist abated, I started to make out some albatrosses flying around at the edge of visibility. I could see they were either Buller's or Chatham, but working out which one was quite tricky. As the sun brightened, I could make out the pale crown that sets apart a Buller's from a Chatham. Then, as the light continued to increase, I was able to tell the paler yellow bill of a sub-adult Chatham from the banana yellow bill of an adult Chatham.

It was trickier to identify the smaller fast-flying prions, whose pale blue-grey plumage closely matched the mist, but despite the mist the binoculars never fogged up. I also saw storm petrels feeding nearby. It was quite easy to see they were White-faced but they were joined briefly by two smaller, darker Grey-backed, some Cape Petrels and a Black-winged Petrel. Within an hour of arriving, it was clear that the light gathering ability of these binoculars was dazzling.

Eventually the mist lifted off the Pyramid so our boat approached closer. The huge scale of this mountainous island and sheer number of seabirds on it presented a new challenge. Once the skipper stopped 150m offshore, I could see two Brown Skuas flying near some White-fronted Terns about 30m up the coastal rocks, and was able to follow one of them as it flew closer to the boat, showing off its white wing flashes as it passed. There were also Chatham Albatrosses on their nests, dotted around the nearest vegetated slope. Taking all this in, I was struck by the sharp clarity of the view at this distance and the smooth action of the focus wheel.

Our next stop was off Mangere Island. Looking up a slope, watching a Forbes' Parakeet in flight about 100m away, I could see the yellow patch on its forehead and the luminosity of its green feathers, and I was able to identify a Tui flying higher up over a nearby ridge, and a flock of four Common Starlings.

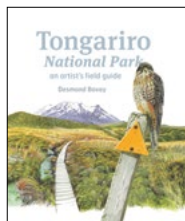
Despite the initially challenging viewing conditions, I found these binoculars to be outstanding, with their pin-sharp focus, remarkable light gathering, and powerful range. This model comes in dark green and burnt orange. As always, try them for yourself at a local stockist before making a decision.

### Tongariro National Park Desmond Bovey Potton & Burton RRP: \$39.99

This very handsomely produced soft-cover "artist's field guide" to our first national park adopts the style of a set of interpretive panels. Across 200 pages it creates a multiplex effect through its five chapters, 400 illustrations and about 100 extended captions. The expertly executed watercolour paintings and sketches of landscapes, plants, birds, reptiles, fish, insects, and (mostly introduced) mammals are highly attractive. About 100 illustrations depict birds, or include them, and while most are reproduced quite small, the NZ Falcon, Long-tailed Cuckoo, Whio, Kaka, Ruru, Kahu and Mottled Petrel get more space.

The text has a strong focus on descriptions and explanations of the landscapes and habitats. Most species covered are described in circa 60-word extended captions each with a few nuggets of information. Despite the compact 13 x 13cm format, the book's user-friendly approach deftly manages to pack 786 square kilometres of volcanic plateau into 200 pages.

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



▲ Ana Menzies presents results from her MSc research on song dialects in Miromiro/Ngirunguru NZ Tomtit.

## 2023 Fledgling Fund recipient reports

Over King's Birthday 2023, I was lucky enough to attend the 2023 New Zealand Conference in New Plymouth, with support from Birds New Zealand's Fledgling Fund. It was an inspiring and educational weekend with talks covering a wide range of disciplines, species, and conservation issues. A highlight for me was learning about projects in Taranaki, such as monitoring of Kororā Little Penguin. It was also an excellent opportunity to learn about projects from all around the country that I would otherwise not have heard about. I was also inspired by the countless examples of initiatives and individuals working towards protecting threatened native species.

I also enjoyed sharing preliminary results from my Master's thesis on song dialects in Miromiro/Ngirunguru NZ Tomtit during the conference.

This was my first time presenting at an academic conference, and I appreciated the enthusiasm and support for my research. I found conference participants to be welcoming, knowledgeable, and passionate. Attending it was also a great way to connect with new people from different organisations and learn about various career paths. I had many great conversations and learned something new from everyone that I met. I now look forward to attending the 2024 conference in Nelson to learn more and reconnect with old and new friends.

ANA MENZIES

Being awarded a Fledgling Fund grant allowed me to travel to New Plymouth for the 2023 New Zealand Bird Conference. I presented a five-minute 'Speed Talk' and poster, which was my first time presenting to a conference audience. It was amazing getting to share my research with so many people and having the opportunity to practice my presentation skills.

It was also wonderful to hear from the wide range of interesting speakers, there was something for every bird enthusiast. I particularly enjoyed the chance to hear from and meet postgrad students from other universities, who I would not have met otherwise. I was also able to catch up with a few people from last year's Christchurch conference and make some wonderful new connections.

Outside the conference, I had an amazing time on the field trip to Lake Rotokare. It was inspirational to hear about the incredible work done by volunteers and the Lake Rotokare Scenic Trust to protect and restore the area. The highlight was seeing a Mātātā Fernbird by the lake. I greatly enjoyed the conference and am grateful to Birds New Zealand for facilitating my attendance.

KATIE VANDERSTOK

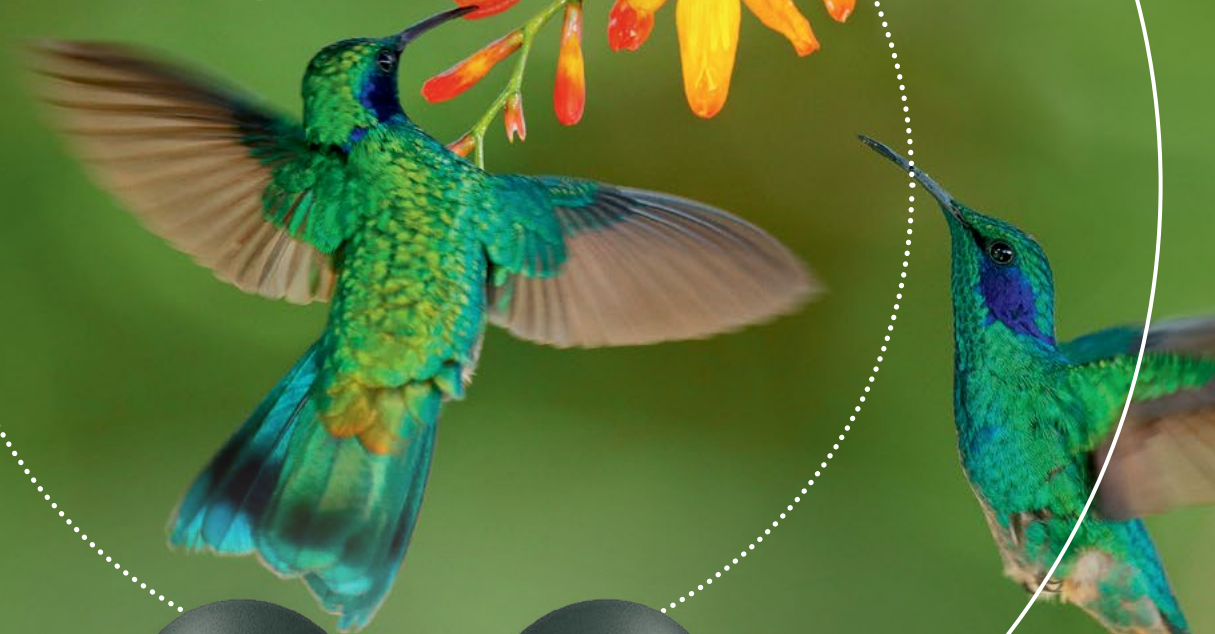


▲ Katie Vanderstok presents results of her MSc research on anti-predator behaviour in the Eurasian Blackbird.

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