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## *Otago Region Newsletter 3/2024*

### *March 2024*



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/>

### **Ornithological Snippets**

A **Weka** of unknown origin was seen in a Dunedin garden on 18 March. 4 **SIPO** flying over Balclutha on 3 March were unseasonal at this location. Tim Jowett saw a **Little Penguin** in Dunedin's Steamer Basin on 11 March, along with 5 **Royal Spoonbill** by Portsmouth Drive over the last few weeks, while Maureen Howard counted 41 **Royal Spoonbill** at Hawksbury Lagoon on 22 February. A **White Heron** continues to be seen on a regular basis at Glenorchy.

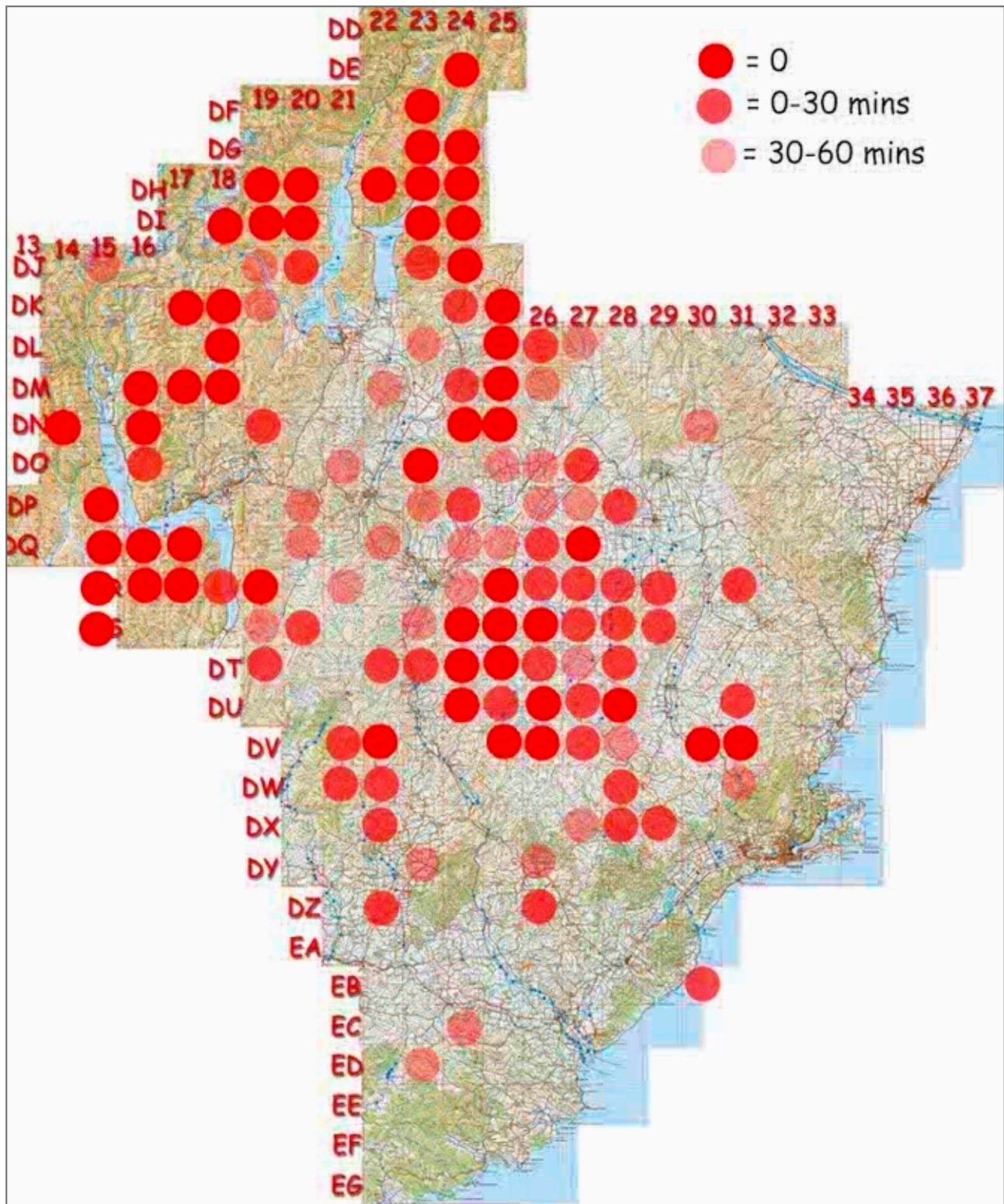
A late record was of a **Kea** at Heyward Point on 8 December, and 25 **NZ Pipit** were around Coronet Peak base station on 18 March.

Please send any interesting reports to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

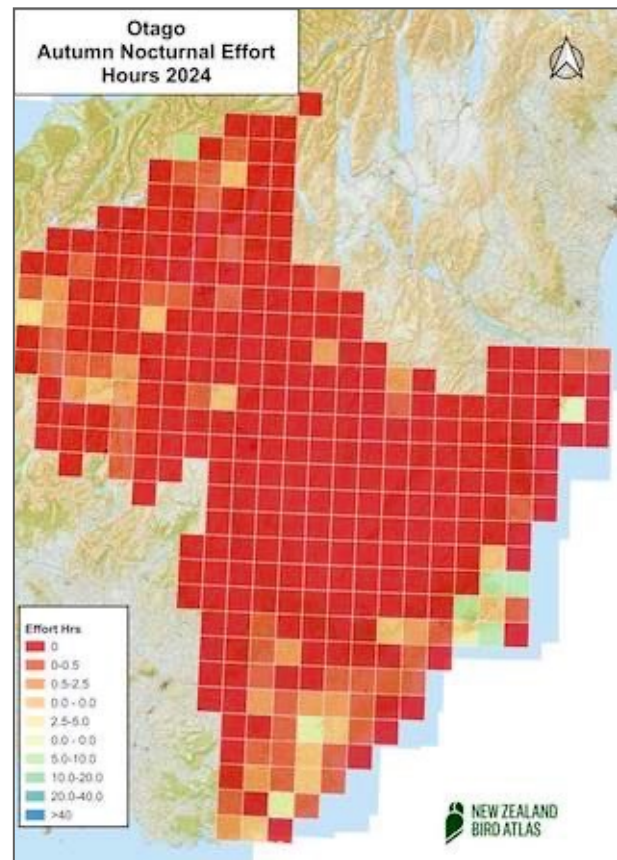
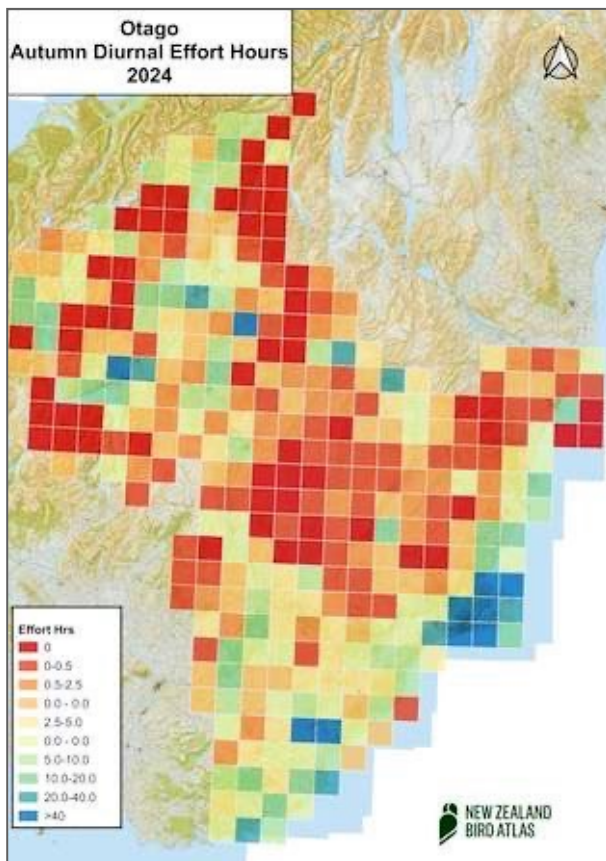
**Richard Schofield**

## eBird News

The conclusion of the Atlas fieldwork is not far away, but there is still plenty to be done. The map below shows which squares have had less than one hour of coverage in autumn, so if you have chance to get to any of these areas, this will give you a guide as to where best to spend your time.







Maps supplied: Dan Burgin

## Pelagic Filters

Until late last year any areas more than 200km offshore were covered by a single High Seas filter, while areas closer to shore were subject to the nearest land-based filter. As such many records from pelagic trips were being flagged, despite the species being not unusual offshore. A recent eBird development has allowed the creation of pelagic filters, meaning these can be dedicated to the species more likely to be actually seen in these regions. There is now a filter for Otago pelagic waters, for any locations more than 10 nautical miles (around 20km) offshore. As a result for any checklists with locations greater than this distance from land, there should be many fewer records being flagged, which should make life easier for observers (and the reviewer!) Comments and photographs are still welcome, however. Also please use the pelagic protocol when offshore, and bear in mind that locations should be plotted accurately, and with relatively short distances for travelling counts (this also applies to land-based counts).

**Richard** 027 281 8701 or [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

This year, Birds NZ Otago meetings will return to the **Benham Seminar Room**, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street, Dunedin.

A reminder for members, the ground floor doors to the Zoology building **will be locked at 7.30**. Please ensure you arrive in time to enter the double doors, at the rear of the car parking area.

### Outside Orokonui Robin Project: Season Summary 2023/4

The seventh full season of monitoring for the Outside Orokonui Robin|Kakaruai project started in mid-August 2023 with teams of volunteers recording the location of robins along the tracks of our study site. There is no doubt that a large robin population exists at the study site, with our mapping indicating at least 30 territories.

#### *Resightings of banded birds*



Erin putting colour bands on an adult.  
Photo credit: Bruce McKinlay

Between 2019 – 2022, 25 robins have been individually colour banded, 20 of which have been territorial adult birds. Despite good numbers of robins being found at the study site in the 2023/4 season, we resighted only 6 banded birds. One of these was a robin that we had banded as a nestling in 2021 and had not seen since it fledged – further evidence for recruitment back into the population. Information from NZ Birds Online says South Island robins can live for 16 years (presumably with few mammalian predators), but DOC suggests robins have an average lifespan of 4-5 years, so indications are that our robins' lifespan are nearer the average.

#### *Nest survival*

We followed 6 pairs over the course of the season. The earliest nest found is estimated to have started at the beginning of September, and the last nest we found finished in the first week of February 2024. It seemed an unusual nesting year compared with previous years. Breeding attempts were only observed for 3 of the 6 pairs. Courtship feeding was observed occasionally in the other 3 pairs but nests were never found and, in many weeks, the male birds of the pairs did not even feed their partner. Of the 3 nesting pairs, 2 pairs (older birds

that we had monitored in previous years) successfully fledged nests, whilst the 3<sup>rd</sup> pair abandoned their first nest (a nest camera indicated the adults might have been disturbed at the nest one night, but no evidence for the cause of nest disturbance was captured) and did not breed again.

Our final tally for the season was 6 nests found from 3 pairs: 1 nest failed (abandonment); 3 nests fledged; 1 nest had an uncertain outcome but probably fledged; 1 nest was not used. Nest survival rates for those pairs where nests were found was much higher than in the 2022 season, but overall it is difficult to say whether it was a successful year for the robin population at our site.



Oscar with a robin nestling after banding.  
Photo credit: Brian Hyland

### *Banding*

Banding opportunities were reduced during the 2023/4 season due to overseas trips and Covid.

Despite this, 4 Birds NZ banders received training and were able to catch and band robins at the site this season, which was a very rewarding result. Four birds were banded in total.

### *The Robin Team*

The project's real strength continues to be the amazing people who volunteer their time to come out every other Saturday for 4 months of the year. A total of 26 people helped on the project this season, contributing about 300 hours of time as well as their good company.



Robin team 2023. Photo credit: Erin Drummond

Thank you to all of you! Thanks are especially due to Bruce, Adrienne and Nick for stepping in to lead the trips when I was away and to Nick for growing our mealworms. Thank you also Jill and Ruth for continuing to support our work on their land, and ORC and The Halo for loaning trail cameras.

**George Pickerell**



## Surveying Otago wetlands for Spotless and Marsh Crakes

One way of doing this is to play crake calls at likely wetlands and look and listen for a response. Autumn is a good time to do these surveys and we are planning a training field trip soon, but any time during the year is OK.

DOC has devised a scheme of calls with 30 second pauses for listening in between playing the various calls. This is part of their standardised crake survey methodology.

Play=30sec + Listen=30s + P=15s + L=30s + P=15s + L=30s + P=15s + L=30 + P=15s + L=2 minutes (End) note: the pauses for listening are built into the sound file.

Upload to your smartphone (see link below) and if you have a Bluetooth speaker, then place this a few metres away and play the sequence for one of the crakes. You can really only try for one species at one wetland at one time and come back another day to try for the other species. Of course calm weather is preferable. Listen for other swamp birds at the same time (e.g., bittern and fernbird) and record their numbers. And why not do an eBird checklist too!



Photo Credit: Nick Beckwith

So as part of our crake survey, anyone can help. When you are out and about, whenever you come across even a small patch of wetland with reeds or raupo and shallow muddy edges, it is worth spending 5 minutes playing calls and listening and looking.

Record the date, time, and the GPS location of the wetland and result – the presence of a crake would be very exciting but even a nil record is important to note. If you are walking along a track through wetland, try the call playback every 150 m or so.

This is the google dropbox link for crake folder to download call files.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2i1evaidmiyowoc1236hv/h?rlkey=oi2p9xnl31fse8a9hieokhupg&dl=0>

If this doesn't work for you, please email Mary [nzmaryt@gmail.com](mailto:nzmaryt@gmail.com) for link to files.

## **Partial Summary of the Distribution of Australasian Crested Grebe / *Pūteketeke* in Otago; January 2024**

The third national census of the Great Crested Grebe was undertaken on January 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 2024. This volunteer event was once again initiated and coordinated by Rosalie Snoyik and Leslie Jensen who also organised the 2004, and 2014 census efforts. The 2009 census of Central Otago occurred in memory of one of our own Otago members, the late George Chance. This census was organised by Mary Thompson and Peter Schweigman.

Conditions in Otago for the 2024 national census were blustery with a sweep of heavy rain and very strong winds on Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> resulting in the postponement of surveys on the more exposed Lakes Wanaka, Hawea and most of the Whakatipu to the 28<sup>th</sup> of January (with the exception of the Mount Nicholas Lagoon and Whites Bay which were counted on the 27<sup>th</sup>).

In total 27 volunteers took part in the Whakatipu catchment surveys, and 29 in Lakes Hawea and Wanaka while at least 11 volunteers counted the Central Otago lakes - Lake Dunstan, Butchers, Conroys and Manorburn Dams.

Petrina Duncan organised the counts on Lakes Wanaka and Hawea, Dawn organised the counts for the Lake Whakatipu/ Kawarau River Catchment while Central Otago lake counts were organised by Andrew Anderson, with assistance from Rosalie, Petrina and Dawn. Peter McClelland from Southland was able to count the Mount Nicholas Lagoon on the 27<sup>th</sup> February with the support of Dunedin OSNZ member, Will Perry following access permission being granted by Mount Nicholas Station.

Volunteers were supported by boats on lakes Hawea, Wanaka, Whakatipu, Dunstan and Lake Hayes.

The final in-depth results will be written up for publication, but Rosalie Snoyik reports that most grebe were counted on the Otago, Mackenzie and Waitaki Lakes.

Volunteers were given advice on how to distinguish between chicks, juveniles and adults. However, this breeding season nests were impacted by spring and summer flooding events, and our expectations for a low count of juveniles were confirmed and balanced by a higher number of chicks counted compared to previous years.

The counts are partial counts as they did not include the entire margin of the larger lakes due to limits on boats available, weather conditions and an assessment of the likelihood of finding grebe. Available resources were focused on areas where grebe have been reported or sighted over the past few years, a useful check of eBird records and consideration of the habitat conditions.

Over the past 10 years there has been considerable growth in the Upper Lakes populations of Otago which have grown from 78 adults in 2004 to 340 in this year's count. If adults

suspected to be present based on territorial behaviour and calling to unseen birds are taken into account, the adult population can be increased by a further 43 to 383.

The number of adults on Lake Hawea has risen to 31 adults in 2024, none were recorded in 2004 and just 3 were recorded in 2014. The Lake Wanaka and likely Hawea population has been significantly bolstered thanks to the efforts of John Darby and his introduction of nesting platforms in Roys Bay. There is little habitat considered to be suitable around Lake Wanaka so the increase on this lake is the result of the grebe population use on the nesting platforms supplied. Petrina reports that the 3 Lake Hawea platforms are also “oversubscribed”. Petrina also notes that at the time of the census, 22 grebes were incubating eggs on the platforms at the Wanaka Marina, many have hatched and dispersed with their parents since the survey. The Lake Wanaka population has therefore grown from 2 adults in 2004 to at least 167 in 2024, 171 counting estimates.

Lake Hayes continues to be a naturally productive lake with 101 adults in the 2024 count compared to 57 in 2004; another 10 adults were estimated to be present on nests under the cover of willows lining the margins of the lake resulting in a count of about 111 adults.

The tables below provide the counts for the previous and 2024 census, summarising data from Jensen and Snoyink (2005), Thompson, M. and Schweigman, P. (2009), and Snoyink (unpublished, 2014).

The comparatively low number of juveniles (Table 2) and high number of chicks 29 on the Central Otago Lakes and 18 on the Waitaki Lakes recorded in the 2024 census is likely to be a consequence of the spring and summer flooding events that have impacted the nesting season of 2023/2024.

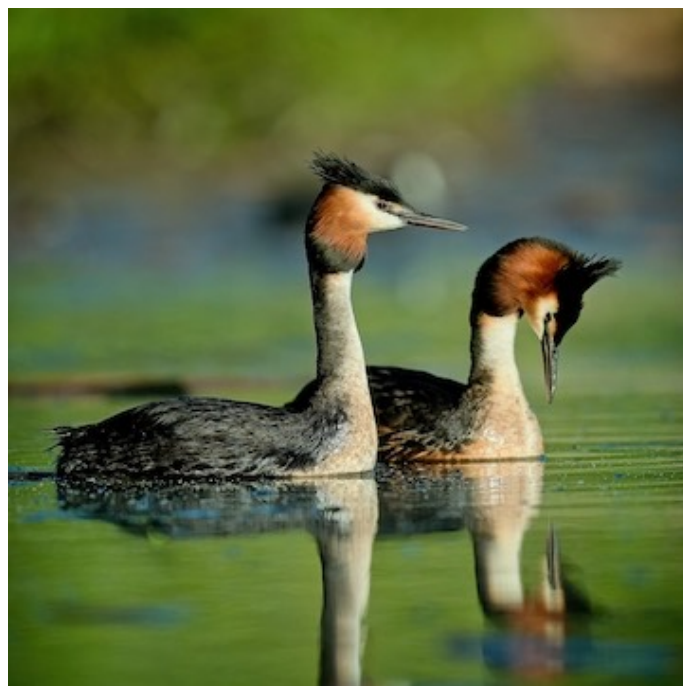


Photo supplied: Martin Barwood



Table 1 Count of Adult Australasian Crested Grebe / *Pūteketeke* from 2004 to 2024

<b>Adults</b>	<b>Year</b>						
<b>Lake</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2024 Estimate</b>	<b>2024 TOTAL</b>	
Dispute	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Hawea	0	3	3	31	2	33	
Hayes	57	66	86	101	10	111	
Johnson	6	9	8	9	0	9	
Kawarau River - below Lake outlet	nc	nc	nc	2	0	2	
Kirkpatrick	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Moke	0	3	0	4	0	4	
Mt Nicholas Lagoon	9		6	7	0	7	
Reid	nc	nc	nc	0	0	0	
Wanaka	2	12	18	167	4	171	
Wakatipu	4	10	15	28	6	34	
Anderson's Lagoon	0	nc	0	0	0	0	
Butcher's Dam	1	0	0	8	0	8	
Conroy's Dam	nc	nc	nc	2	0	2	
Dunstan	10	52	37	34	0	34	
Lower Manorburn Dam	nc	nc	nc	0	0	0	
<b>Otago Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>415</b>	
Benmore	15	46	77	89	2	91	
Avimore	1	12	4	22	6	28	
Waitaki	0	7	0	0	0	0	
<b>Waitaki Group Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>119</b>	



Photo credit: © Oscar Thomas

Table 2 Count of Juvenile Australasian Crested Grebe / *Pūteketeke* from 2004 to 2024

Juveniles	Year			
Lake	2004	2009	2014	2024
Dispute	0	0	0	0
Hawea	0	0	0	1
Hayes	17	15	34	0
Johnson	0	2	0	1
Kawarau River - below Lake outlet	nc	nc	nc	2
Kirkpatrick	0	0	0	0
Moke	0	2	0	0
Mt Nicholas Lagoon	2		3	0
Reid	nc	nc	nc	0
Wanaka	2	6	2	3
Wakatipu	0	4	3	4
Anderson's Lagoon	0	nc	nc	0
Butcher's Dam	0	0	0	0
Conroy's Dam	nc	nc	0	3
Dunstan	5	38	6	0
Lower Manorburn Dam	nc	nc	nc	0
<b>Otago Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>14</b>
Benmore	1	6	30	1
Avimore	0	12	4	4
Waitaki	0	2	0	0
<b>Waitaki Group Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>

Compiled by Dawn Palmer

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Rosalie Snoyink and Leslie Jensen for organising the 4<sup>th</sup> census, Petrina Duncan for coordinating the Lake Hawea and Wanaka counts and providing suggestions to support volunteers in their identification of chicks, juveniles and adults and logistical support offered to Central Otago efforts.

Thanks to Million Dollar Cruise for their continued enthusiastic surveillance of grebe in the Frankton Arm and for offering transport for the census again, RealNZ for offering transport on their staff boat and the TSS Earnslaw to access Beach Bay and to DOC who assisted the survey of Lake Wanaka.

Thanks also to all the individuals who offered their boats to facilitate the counts and to Richard Bowman who has so reliably undertaken monthly population counts and freely shared his data from Lake Hayes so that we may try to understand the dynamics of the local population better.

## References

Jensen, L.A. and Snoyink, R.J. (2005): The distribution and numbers of Australasian crested grebe (Kāmana) in New Zealand, January 2004. Notornis Vol 52: 34-42 OSNZ

Thompson, M. and Schweigman, P. (2009): The George Chance Memorial Census of Great Crested Grebes in Central Otago, February 2009. Short report for the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Otago Branch

Snoyink, R.J. (unpublished): The distribution and numbers of Australasian crested grebe (Kāmana) in New Zealand, January 2014.



## **Kia ora fellow QI/KT bird counters**

It's time for the 2024 Quarantine Island/Kamautaurua ngahuru/ Autumn bird counts.

Over the past 6 - 7 years we have carried out about 4 fortnightly 5 minute bird counts on the island's 9 bird count sites during April/May.

It usually takes about 2 hours to do all 9 bird count sites around the island. We do a 5 minute count at each site, starting around 10am or 10.30am, depending upon boat transfers. I will make a call the day or so before, as the counts are weather dependent, and we won't go if it's too windy or raining. I will make an alternative date if the weather isn't favourable, or if we don't have viable numbers for the boat.

I book the boat transfers (\$20pp return, or there may be a possible subsidy). The boat leaves from Back Beach, Port Chalmers, (or Portobello pontoon if viable numbers). Returning at about 1pm or 3.20pm.

Possible dates (weather & boat transfer dependent):

**Saturday 30 March or Sunday 31 March (coincides with Community Welcome Day)**

**Saturday 13 or Sunday 14 April**

**Saturday 27 or Sunday 28 April (coincides with Community Welcome Day)**

**Saturday 11 or Sunday 12 May (I'll be back for this)**

**If you think you might be interested in joining in, please let me know and let me know your current contact phone number.**

Please pass on to anyone you think might be interested.

Kā mihi nui, nā **Claire**



## **DCC Reserves Management plans**

I made a short submission on the Town Belt Reserve Management Plan and the Otago Harbour Management Plan on behalf of the region.

For the town belt I made the points:

- the important uses for the town belt are Education and Conservation
- the biggest issues are management of pests and rubbish and improving the sustainable management of the town belt.
- I pointed out that they had not really identified the town belt as an important natural habitat for birds, and an outdoor classroom.
- I pointed out that the Town bird nature trail is present in the town belt and we would like it to be promoted so citizens can record bird observations.

For the Harbour I made the following points:

- the important uses for the Harbour and reserves are Conservation and use by wildlife
- the biggest issues for the Harbour are recognition of Otago Harbour as nationally important habitat for birds and the shortage of high tide roosting sites around the harbour, which should be rectified by future planning.
- I said Birds NZ have bird count data for the last 40 years which is available to explain the values of the Harbour and why recognition of the habitat values are important.

If any one else wants to make submission you have until 31 March.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## **Call for Applications (Closing date 30 March)**

- David Medway Scholarship (DMS):  
[birdsanz.org.nz/news/david-medway-scholarship/](https://birdsanz.org.nz/news/david-medway-scholarship/)
- Marj Davis Scholarship (MDS): [birdsanz.org.nz/news/marj-davis-scholarship/](https://birdsanz.org.nz/news/marj-davis-scholarship/)
- Pacific Is Bird Conservation and Research Fund (PIBCRF):  
[birdsanz.org.nz/news/pacific-is-bird-conservation-and-research-fund/](https://birdsanz.org.nz/news/pacific-is-bird-conservation-and-research-fund/)
- Project Assistance Fund (PAF): [birdsanz.org.nz/funding/paf/](https://birdsanz.org.nz/funding/paf/)

## **Autumn Atlassing camp at Alexandra**

As we approach the conclusion of the Atlas project, there will be a final trip over the weekend of 13/14<sup>th</sup> April, based at Alexandra. As you will see from the autumn needs map, there are plenty of gaps in that area, and with a good turnout we can hopefully remove most of those red dots. We will be based at Alexandra Holiday Park, so could anyone who is interested in coming please let me know asap, so that I can book the accommodation; can you also let me know if you would be bringing a vehicle (2/4WD), or if you would need transport to Alexandra.

This trip will be subsidised by Toi Toi Wines, so hopefully there will be minimal expense involved for participants.

There will also be a day trip (possibly the last formal branch outing for the Atlas) to the Middlemarch/Pukerangi area on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April (back up day Sunday 28<sup>th</sup>).

Richard Schofield

[cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

Ph 027 281 8701

## Birdwatching at Tomahawk Lagoon



**Sunday 28 April: 10 am - 12 pm**

Birds NZ run this annual event showcasing the birds of Tomahawk Lagoon to members of the public as part of Wild Dunedin.

Please email George if you can help [gpickerell@outlook.com](mailto:gpickerell@outlook.com)

## Bar-tailed Godwit at Yalu Jiang

A Bar-tailed Godwit [W1BWRB] banded on 28 Feb 2006 at Blueskin Bay/Warrington was seen by Mr Bai at Yalu Jiang yesterday - the first day that he has been out to look for birds. There were quite a few 'droopy winged' birds in the flock.



Mr BAI Qingquan at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve, April 2019  
Photo supplied: David Melville



**NZ BIRD CONFERENCE & BIRDS NZ AGM**

**Nelson, 1 to 3 JUNE 2024**

**The Trafalgar Centre, Nelson**



The scientific days will be held on **1 and 2 June 2024**.  
For all conference details and online registration please visit  
[birdsNZ.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/](https://birdsNZ.org.nz/nz-bird-conference/)

Abstract submissions close **31 March 2024**, but it would help the Conference team if you could provide your abstract as soon as possible

## The Ninth Wild Dunedin Festival is Coming in April

**The Wild Dunedin team are thrilled to announce that our popular Festival is on again in the school holidays 19 - 28 April.**

This year our Festival is focusing on huarere/weather. What makes Dunedin's weather special? How can I plan my vegetable garden and orchard for the changing weather? Why are clouds important for Orokonui Ecosanctuary? These and many other questions will be answered for you along with the opportunity to visit many home and community open gardens, workshops on composting and permaculture, deals on wildlife tourism trips, and much more.

Because it's in the school holidays, the Festival is a great opportunity for friends and family to visit Dunedin for 10 days of fascinating events celebrating Ōtepoti as the wildlife capital of Aotearoa.

Old favourites such as Suzy Cato's event for children with the Wildlife Hospital, Wildlife ER, sessions on bees, yoga, plogging, diving in a kelp forest, deals on indoor bouldering, bird watching and sessions on bird photography – there's something for everyone at this year's Festival.

A highlight of the 2023 Festival, the hugely popular Art Play in Nature at Chingford Park is on again, bigger and better. Artists Janet de Wagt, Pamela Brown and Kerry Mackay will work with all ages to create a giant tapestry/collage on the Bridal Lawn using nature's materials such as autumn leaves, twigs and cones. Conservation groups, musicians, displays, and food and coffee will make for a wonderful day celebrating nature.

Libraries, Tūhura Otago Museum and Toitū are all hosting many events, there will be fine dining at three restaurants, boat trips, a session on making gin, and opportunities to help yellow-eyed penguins. Bookings are open for a Wild Night Masquerade at Larnach Castle with transport provided from town, in support of yellow-eyed penguins.

To book for the Wild Night go to [www.wilddunedin.nz](http://www.wilddunedin.nz).

The programme will be launched on 15 March, printed and online, and bookings for all other events can be made then. We'll be handing out programmes and doing free face painting at the South Dunedin Street Festival on Saturday 16 March. Programmes will be available at all public libraries and mobile libraries.

To keep up to date and see the programme when it's live, become a Friend of Wild Dunedin on the website. Follow us on Facebook NZ Festival of Nature.





## Programme 2024

Birds NZ Otago meetings will return to the **Benham Seminar Room, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street, Dunedin**

Birds NZ Otago Monthly Meeting Zoom Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83922655184?pwd=QapM32iZ0YWPrKuNYdCKPWwaYS36eg.1>

Meeting ID: 839 2265 5184

Passcode: 633186

March	Tuesday 26	Nick Beckwith	Bird Photostories
April	Sat/Sun 13/14	Atlassing based at Alexandra	
April	Tuesday 23	Quinn Berentson	Moa: New Zealand's legendary bird <b>Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum</b>
April	Saturday 27	Atlassing Middlemarch/Pukerangi area (back up day Sunday 28)	
April	Sunday 28	Tomahawk Lagoon	
May	Tuesday 28	Bradley Shields	ZIP predator control and bird monitoring
June	Tuesday 25	Dr Emma Williams	Birds beyond borders: Mobile threatened species
July	Tuesday 23	Vanessa Barry	Buller's albatross population genomics
Aug	Tuesday 27	Shanta McPherson	Titipounamu on Otago Peninsula

**Regular Field trips** are held, usually on first Saturdays or Sundays. Check for details within the newsletters. We carpool for these trips and share expenses.

Suggestions for locations for field trips and atlassing trips, and offers to help lead trips would really be appreciated, please contact Dawn [birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz)

Contributions for the next newsletter should reach the editor by **16 April** [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

### Disclaimer

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