



Birds New Zealand  
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## *Otago Region Newsletter 4/2024*

### *April 2024*



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

### **Ornithological Snippets**

A long-staying **Mute Swan** was present on Lake Waihola on 26 March. 60 **Indian Peafowl** were counted in a paddock near Chatto Creek on 14 April. 2 adult and 1 immature **Great Crested Grebe** were on Upper Manorburn Dam on 13 April. 2 **African Collared-Dove** were reported from Ngapuna on 22 March. A **Marsh Crake** was seen at Bannockburn Inlet on 19 & 24 March. An unseasonal **SIPO** was heard over Omakau on 14 April. A **Caspian Tern** was seen flying upriver in Balclutha on 11 April.

Francesca Cunninghame reports **Tawaki /Fiordland Crested-Penguins** have moulting along the Otago coast recently, with birds at Tahakopa Beach and Surat Bay among other sites. 2 **Eastern Rockhopper Penguins** appeared, one at Allans Beach Otago Peninsula and one at Long Beach. A few **Erect-crested** and **Snares Crested-Penguins** were also found along the Otago coast

A **Reef Heron** was at Kaka Point on 20 March, and a continuing **White Heron** Kinloch on 1 April. Finally 2 **Kea** were seen flying over Wānaka on 21 March.

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

**Richard Schofield**

## eBird News

There is just one month to go before fieldwork for the NZ Bird Atlas finishes, on 31<sup>st</sup> May. Check the Atlas effort map to locate squares that could use more coverage – I recommend filtering by species, as well as effort hours. Nocturnal coverage is also still required, and don't forget that the April Atlas challenge is nocturnal grid-square related. To qualify, all you have to do is submit complete nocturnal checklists to grid squares that have had no nocturnal effort so far year round in the Atlas eBird portal. Each unique grid square on this list that you enter nocturnal data into gives you one entry into the draw. So if you submit data to five grid squares that have had no year-round nocturnal effort, your name goes in five times. Remember your checklists must include counts for every species reported (no X's!) and should follow the best practices outlined [here](#). If you don't hear any species, that is still valuable data, so please do submit those lists!

As previously mentioned, there will be a field trip on **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April** to the Pukerangi/Middlemarch area, meeting at Bunnings at 8am. Please let me know if you are interested in coming along.

**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.

**Reminder:** Tuesday 23 April Quinn Berentson Moa: New Zealand's legendary bird is at the **Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum**

## Wader Count

There will be a high tide of 2.01M at 10.57am at Dunedin on Sunday June 30th. In case of bad weather the reserve day is July 21st at 3.49pm at Dunedin when high tide will be 2.04M. Contact: **Maree Johnstone** [mareej@kinect.co.nz](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz)



## NZ BIRD CONFERENCE & BIRDS NZ AGM

Nelson, 1 to 3 JUNE 2024

The Trafalgar Centre, Nelson



**Regional Representatives** will be meeting prior to BirdsNZ Conference – this is an opportunity for me to raise and discuss anything of particular interest or concern on behalf of Otago members. If anyone has a matter of concern or interest that you would like me to raise or at this meeting, please get in touch with Dawn Palmer [birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz) or 0274427348.

In preparation for the approaching meeting of the BirdsNZ Regional Representatives at Conference, I've prepared my first Annual Report for Otago. Our membership has hovered around 140 over this year with most of our membership based in the Dunedin and Coastal areas and about 5% in each of the Central Otago and the Western Lakes areas. The challenge is on to increase our membership throughout these inland areas!

It's been an active year for members with Atlassing trips to Pleasant River and the Eyre Mountains, along with the regular events that mark our calendar of activities which have been well supported. These include our monthly meetings with guest speakers, 5MBC in the Town Belt, Winter and Summer Wader Counts, Beyond the Fence Robin monitoring, Tomahawk Lagoon bird watching (as part of the Wild Dunedin festival – on now!), the Bittern and Marsh Crake Inventory project. We've run 22 field trips!

Added to these projects has been the successful Makarora/ Aspiring Biodiversity Trust Field Camp in January and the approaching winter Royal Spoonbill survey.

It's nice to see our monthly meetings being so well attended, including those (like myself) who attend online via the Zoom link. Being based in Queenstown provides a challenge for my in person attendance, but I will attend in person whenever possible.

If you are a Facebook user, Committee member Oscar Thomas has set the Birds Otago Facebook page which many of our members and others follow.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank our active and supportive Otago Committee – Oscar Thomas, Georgina Pickerell, Mary Thompson, Sue Odlin, Bruce McKinlay, Richard Schofield, Maree Johnstone, Will and Holly Perry, with support from Franny Cunninghame, Graeme Loh, Nick Beckwith and Hamish Spencer. Many very helpful hands are carrying Otago Birders!

Otago birders should feel free to call 0274427348 or send me an email on [birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz) with suggestions, requests and feedback.

Happy Birding  
**Dawn Palmer**

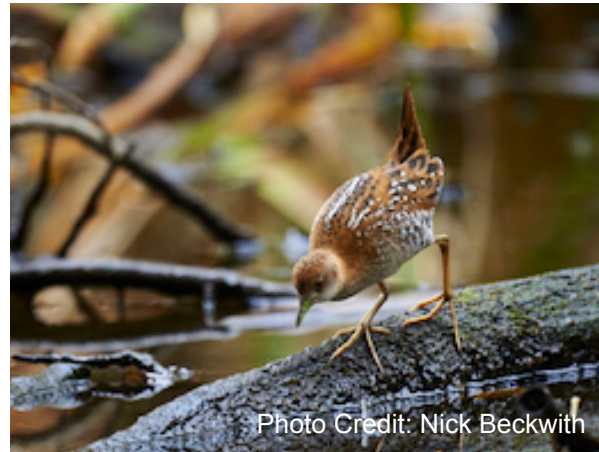
## Surveying Otago wetlands for Spotless and Marsh Crakes

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!



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 the 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.

## 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)

## Winner!

Our very own Richard Schofield won the February Atlas Challenge and fittingly his win was published in the eBird website on 13<sup>th</sup> April in the midst of our Atlassing weekend at Alexandra that Richard had organised and was leading to get some more Atlas squares surveyed for autumn. Huge congratulations to Richard.



The February Atlas challenge was a grid square themed challenge, with the goal of submitting to as many grid squares as possible in order to try increase the Summer season grid square coverage before it ended.

The Atlas team commented that “Richard submitted a total of 261 checklists detailing 123 species to the Atlas eBird portal during February, which included **submitting checklists to 150 Atlas Grid Squares many of which had little effort in previously**. All of these observations were submitted as part of complete checklists, with accurate abundances for all species, greatly increasing his chances of winning. Richard has continued to put in a massive amount of time and effort in to gathering valuable Atlas observations throughout the project, as well as being the Otago Atlas coordinator, and volunteer eBird reviewer for the Otago region.”

Throughout the Atlas project, Richard has submitted over 10,100 checklists and seen 188 species.

Read the full account here:

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/news/february-2024-atlas-challenge-winner-richard-schofield>



## Alexandra Atlassing Weekend (12 - 14 April 2024)



Most weekends I get out of the city with the help of my thumb to do some bird watching around Dunedin. This weekend's Atlas Trip to Alexandra was a bit more adventurous than my usual, as I hitched westward on Saturday morning 13th April to join the Birding Group in Alexandra.

The journey there was a hitch-hikers dream – with all my waiting times less than 5 minutes. I arrived at the Alexandra Holiday Park in plenty of time to join Maree and Mary for the after lunch birding they'd planned. It's always a treat to see the autumn colours of the trees



of Central Otago. In addition, none of our group of three had travelled on the Upper Manorburn Road that's situated south east of Alexandra. As we ascended 700m above sea level we were treated to a panoramic moonscape of rocks and bare hills. The merino sheep farmed here look athletic, their signature dirty fleece blending perfectly into the greys and tans of the landscape. Only their long white noses and nervous dispositions betrayed their presence on the land as they sprinted en mass across the path of our vehicle.

Many of the layered schist boulders we saw were balanced precariously on top of each other. They made excellent lookout perches for the occasional pipit, harrier and a barrel chested California Quail guarding over 22 birds who were foraging on the ground beneath.

A total of 25 NZ Pipits were seen on this Atlas Trip. I saw and heard enough individuals to significantly improve my ID skills from the much more common skylarks. In this arid landscape of rock, dirt, tussock and thorny scrub - we also saw good numbers of yellowhammers, skylarks, redpolls and goldfinch.



We hoped to get to the Upper Manorburn Dam and were about 4.5 kms from irrigation storage reservoir before we passed two fishermen in a 4WD who warned us that the road ahead was already getting slick with mud and our 'wee thing' (Maree's car) would be almost certain to get stuck. We heeded their caution and gratefully accepted their gift of a glistening Rainbow Trout they'd caught.

We retraced our steps and then headed to the Lower Manorburn Dam. This lovely irrigation storage reservoir hosted a small population of six Australasian Coots and not much else. Despite our Marsh Crake playbacks, none were seen or heard. However, Mary spotted a Karearea NZ Falcon preening in a tree across the reservoir (4 seen in total on this trip!).

With stomachs grumbling and darkness looming, we had the dilemma of whether to eat first at the local Mexican restaurant or to do our nocturnal bird counts first. The decision was made for us by busy staff who asked us to return later. The evening was calm, cool and a sliver of crescent moon made it perfect nocturnal birding weather for our 10 minute checklists that each included two playbacks for Little Owl. Collectively on this Trip we heard 11 Little Owls, not a bad score from 10 checklists.

Next morning we spied an enormous group of 30 plus California Quail foraging outside our cabin window. Apparently up to 90 birds have been seen at this holiday park at one time.

We split again into two groups. This time I joined Richard's vehicle with the hope of reaching the Upper Manorburn Dam. The weather was much drier than the previous day and we got to 1.5kms from the reservoir before the track turned into a puddle with muddy margins. A resourceful cyclist, Richard pulled his bike out of the back of the car and pedalled off to circumnavigate the lake while I did a couple of walking travelling bird counts along the road to the reservoir enjoying the stillness and a magical close up of a Pipit calling from a nearby post. Richard had his own welcome surprise amongst the birds he saw, finding a couple of Crested Grebe in the irrigation reservoir.



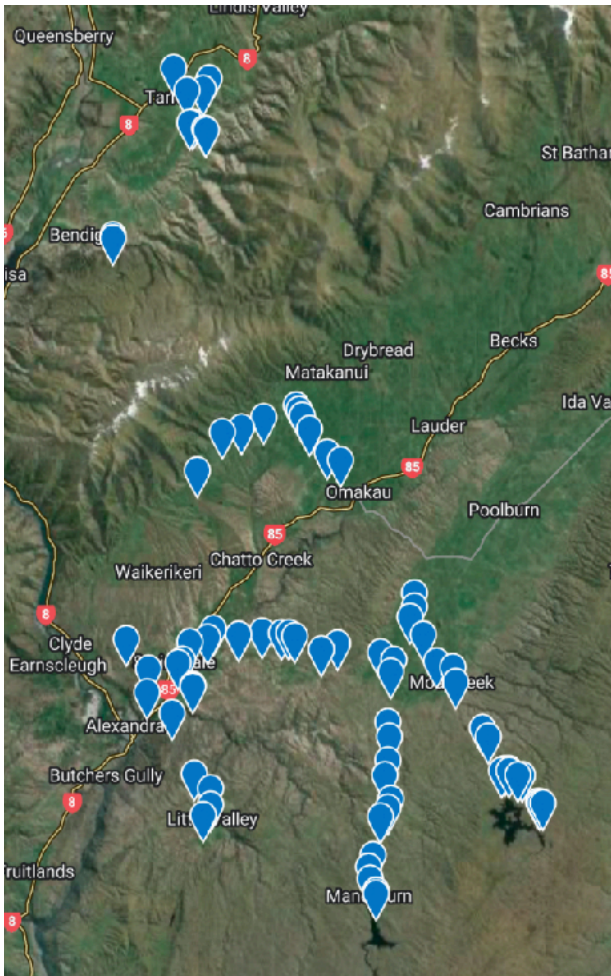
On our return we saw a flock of 25 house sparrows and pondered how they could survive here in this barren landscape. Lower down we saw a kingfisher on a wire, also unusual in these parts.

By 2pm I was back on the highway out of Alex to hitch back to Dunedin. I made the error of letting a well-meaning woman deposit me at Rae's Junction. The speedy blind corner was clearly impossible to hitch onward from so I hitched back to Ettrick to a better spot. With a further detour to a kind couple's holiday house in Roxburgh to join them while they packed their belongings, it took me seven hours to reach Dunedin. Hitching is always unexpected and usually interesting - and contrary to popular opinion it only confirms my faith in humanity. Still, I was relieved to make it home – happily to a hot meal and cosy fire.

For me, this trip had all the ingredients of a perfect Atlas weekend– new eBird Year Birds (Little Owl and NZ Pipit), improving my birding skills, adventure, dramatic new landscapes and camaraderie with my birding friends. I didn't get to see every species I'd hoped too (think Wild Turkey). However I'll leave that for another day. Anticipation is an essential part of the joy of birding.

**BIRD STATS:** 41 species seen/heard across 79 checklists, totalling approximately 3500 birds.





ATLAS SQUARES: “We visited 15 squares in total, 6 of which had no previous Autumn visits, while a further five had only sparse coverage. In addition, nocturnal visits were made to 7 squares, with Little Owl recorded in 6 of them.” Richard.

AREAS VISITED – Moa Creek, Manorburn dams (Upper and Lower), Galloway, Bendigo Goldfields, Omakau.

For details go to <https://ebird.org/tripreport/222161>

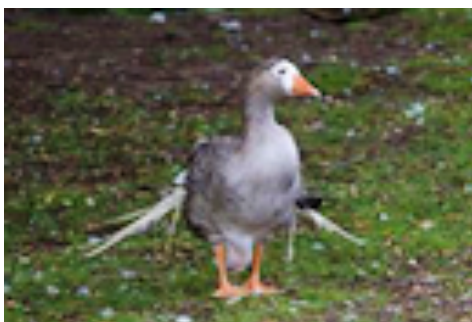
Thanks to Richard for organising this trip and many thanks to Toi Toi Wines for covering our accommodation and transport costs.

**Maureen Howard**

## What is this?

This swan was photographed by Nick Beckwith at Hawksbury Lagoon.

We contacted Ian McLean who is Auckland RR and has an interest in deformed birds. His reply: “Yes, it looks like angel wing, with the flight feathers pointing downward similar to the photo of the goose that I have attached. The swan also looks to have a bit of a belly that is typical of birds in this condition.



You will notice the awful distended hanging stomach in the goose photograph.

Unfortunately when adult waterfowl get this condition, there is no recovery and they live a short and miserable life!

**Mary Thompson**

## Kia ora fellow QI/KT bird counters

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

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 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.**

Kā mihi nui, nā Claire Hagglund

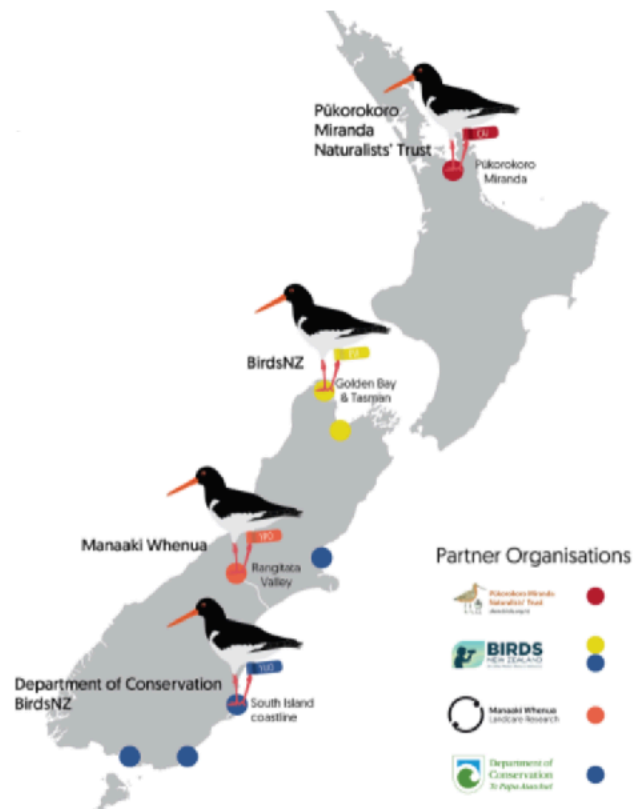
[clairehagglund@gmail.com](mailto:clairehagglund@gmail.com)

  <p><b>Birds New Zealand Research Fund</b></p> <p>This important national fund is managed by Birds New Zealand on behalf of a New Zealand Charitable Trust. We invite applications from individuals or organisations prepared to make a difference through ornithological research, with outcomes likely to provide for better management of New Zealand birds or their environment. This year's closing date is <b>15 June 2024</b>. For details visit <a href="http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/">www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/</a></p>	<p><b>Are You Interested <u>In</u> Birds?</b></p> <p>Birds New Zealand is a voluntary charitable society that depends on the enthusiasm, active participation, knowledge and financial support of its members.</p> <p>We encourage and promote the study of birds by organising projects and activities at national and regional level. We help fund studies and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds. We encourage members to learn more about birds, where to find and how to study them. We publish the quarterly scientific journal <i>Notornis</i> and the popular magazine <i>Birds New Zealand</i>.</p> <p><b>Please Join Us!</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive <i>Birds New Zealand</i> and <i>Notornis</i> for FREE!</li> <li>• Participate in bird activities</li> <li>• Membership fees start from \$40</li> <li>• Help make a difference!</li> </ul> <p>Visit us on <a href="http://www.birdsnz.org.nz">www.birdsnz.org.nz</a></p>  <p><b>BIRDS</b> NEW ZEALAND <small>Te Kaitiaki Māori o Te Whenua</small></p>
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## Banding of Tōrea in different areas of NZ

### Connecting sites and people – you can help!

We are marking birds across New Zealand with small coloured flags. If you spot a tōrea with a flag, please report the sighting to us through email or to DOC's [banding database](#) . This information informs us about the survival of individuals throughout the year, and which wintering and breeding sites are connected.

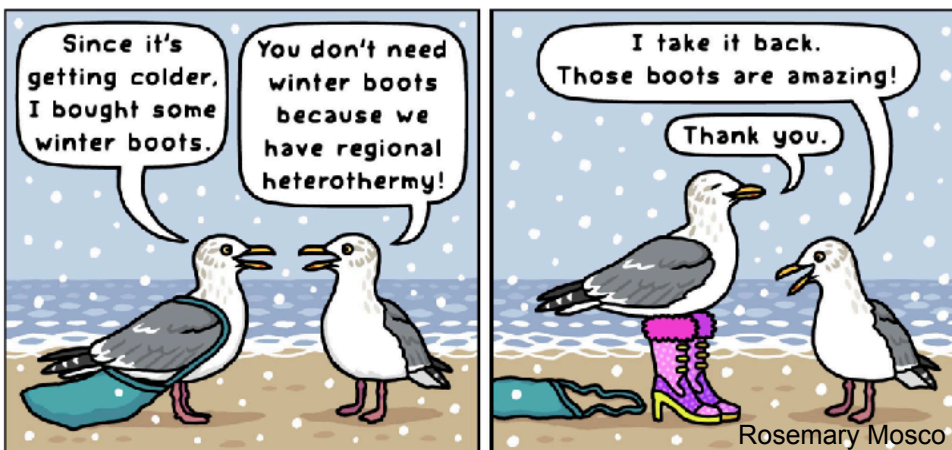


<https://app.birdbanding.doc.govt.nz/sightings>

## Call for Applications - 2024 Birds NZ Research Fund

We are now inviting applications for this year's "Birds New Zealand Research Fund". Applications close on **15 June**.

Details are available on [birdsNZ.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/](https://birdsNZ.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/) and a news item is available at [birdsNZ.org.nz/news/bnzzrf/](https://birdsNZ.org.nz/news/bnzzrf/)



*Regional Heterothermy*: n. The capability to let some parts of the body get cold while keeping core body temp. Here's more about [how seabirds keep from getting cold feet](#).

## 2024 Global Big Day

This year's event is on Saturday 11th May. As the goal of the Big Day is to get as big a list as possible, the idea is to get into numerous different locations and habitats. However, as you will be aware, we are nearing the end of the Atlas, so what I would like to suggest is to combine the two by going to a birding location of your choice, but also see if you can find a nearby square that needs some extra coverage.

So some suggested locations are as follows.

### For the Queenstown/ Lakes Area:

- Lake Hayes
- Bobs Cove
- Coronet Peak
- Glenorchy Lagoon
- Moke Lake
- Arawhata Track
- Makarora



### Coastal Otago:

- Otago Peninsula and the many beaches, bays and inlets
- Blueskin Bay
- Warrington Spit/ Beach
- Waihola / Sinclair/ Waipori wetlands

### The Catlins

- The Wisp
- Nugget Point
- Cabbage Point



Feel free to let me know of where you'd like to go, and I can coordinate to enable as many locations/habitats to be visited as possible.

**Richard Schofield** [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

## 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

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	Bird watching 10am to 12 noon (Wild Dunedin)
May	Tuesday	30	Bradley Shields	ZIP predator control and bird monitoring
June	Tuesday	25	Dr Emma Williams	Birds beyond borders: Mobile threatened species
June	Sunday	30	Wader Count	High tide 10.57am Dunedin
July	Sunday	21	Wader Count	Reserve day High tide 3.49pm Dunedin
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 **21 May** [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

Thanks Martine for the cartoon.

### Disclaimer

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