

BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

No.42 June 2024



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BIRDS

NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

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

Replica eggs help save Tara Iti nests

The Department of Conservation and partners achieved a breakthrough in using 3D printed replica eggs to safeguard the nests of critically endangered NZ Fairy Terns Tara Iti last breeding season. With funding from the Endangered Species Foundation, DOC commissioned Shaun Lee to produce 3D replica Tara Iti eggs in 2023, which were hand-painted by artist and marine biologist, Carina Sim-Smith. The success of the replica eggs was pivotal in protecting Tara Iti nests, ensuring the birds continued their incubation without disruption. The real eggs were temporarily taken for incubation at Auckland Zoo while the replacement eggs were successful at holding nesting sites during risky periods when storm damage could have destroyed the real eggs. Doing so allowed DOC to improve productivity and save nests.



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COVER IMAGE

Keokoeā Long-tailed Cuckoo, Aratakawa Forest.
Photo by Tony Stoddard.



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2024 TOURS

JULY	Ultimate Top End Birding Adventure	10 Days
JULY	Kakadu Birdwatching Tour	4 Days
AUG	Top End Finch Frenzy Ex. Darwin	7 Days
AUG	Kakadu Birdwatching Tour	4 Days
SEP	Top End Bird & Wildlife Photo Tour	6 Days
SEP	Kakadu Birdwatching Tour	4 Days
OCT	Borneo Birding & Wildlife Tour	16 Days
	Private Tours (Australia & Sri Lanka)	Various

2025 TOURS

MAR	Sri Lankan Birding & Wildlife Tour	15 Days
JUNE	Wild Kakadu Photography Workshop	5 Days
JULY	Ultimate Top End Birding Adventure	10 Days
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From the President's Desk

Council Meeting

Since my last column, Council has had another online meeting with a full agenda. We continue to make progress with the membership promotion and fundraising strategy which is being led on behalf of the Society by Michael Szabo. A set of new membership promotion designs have been produced and are now being used in our magazine, regional newsletters, social media, and the Society's e-newsletter. These are helping to recruit more new members and grow the Society's income.

After some further work, the management of the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research Fund has now been transferred from friends at Forest and Bird to Birds New Zealand, and Council has signed-off the criteria on applications for future funds.

Annual General Meeting

Preparatory work has continued for the adoption of a new Constitution for the Society and changes to subscription rates at the AGM, to be held on 2 June in Nelson.

Royal Society of New Zealand Meeting

In March, Natalie Forsdick and I attended an online meeting of the Biological & Environmental Sciences Constituent Organisations of the Royal Society of New Zealand. We met with representatives of nine fellow scientific societies that are also members of the Royal Society. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss items of mutual interest such as the use of professional conference organisers to facilitate annual conferences and investigating whether Tourism NZ funding for future Australasian Ornithological Conferences is worthy of investigation.

Annual Conference in Nelson

Mention of the AGM reminds me how much I'm looking forward to the Society's 2024 annual conference in Nelson, although it will be tinged with a bit of sadness for me as my term as President comes to an end, and I move over for Natalie Forsdick.

During my term on Council and as President, the Society has managed a wide variety of partnerships with commercial and not-for-profit partners. Additionally, the Society has continued to do what we do best, which is the study and understanding of birds throughout New Zealand. A highlight of my time as President is the completion of the third New Zealand Bird Atlas. At the same time, the regions have maintained a wide range of projects and continued to contribute to national databases such as the nationwide Wader Count Scheme. We have also worked to increase the online resources provided by the Society, such as the digital encyclopaedia 'New Zealand Birds Online' and the Unusual Bird Reporting Scheme.

My work as President has been supported by Councillors who have given feedback, and undertaken work on behalf of the Society nationally. The network of regional representatives has been essential to give structure to all our work and provided a vital link between the members and Council. I am grateful for all their work. I am mindful that as President I followed in the footsteps of a number of great leaders who have laid the building blocks of the Society that we have today. It has been a privilege to build and carry on their work over the last six years or more.

I cannot finish without reminding you all that the success of the Society and its important work for New Zealand birds depends on members taking on and fulfilling these roles. I encourage you all to consider where and how you can provide leadership in the Society.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, PRESIDENT

From the New President's Desk

After serving for six years on Council, it is a privilege to step up as President of Birds New Zealand – Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa. Bruce's strong and efficient leadership as President has ensured the core functionality of the Society has continued despite the challenges and uncertainties that we've all experienced over the past few years. I look forward to his continued support in the short-term as Past-President. I'm also grateful for the support of Council as I step into this role, and to all those who have encouraged me as I've become increasingly involved. Through that, I've also had a huge range of opportunities to work behind the scenes on a number of Society committees, which has given me greater appreciation for how we are supporting local research and projects.

Now the data collection for our third New Zealand Atlas project has ended, I'm looking forward to turning our attention back to Birds New Zealand's core projects, and in particular to our regions. I'd especially like to acknowledge the hard work of our energetic regional representatives who are responsible for delivering activities that many of our members are actively engaged with. You are our direct connection with the Society's members. I look forward to working together to support the RRs in delivering activities in the regions, and with our committee and project leaders to support the generation of high-quality scientific knowledge about Aotearoa's manu birds.

By the time you read this, we will have had a brilliant conference weekend, adeptly hosted by our Nelson Region. I warmly acknowledge the local conference organising committee for all their efforts in running a great weekend, which is always an excellent opportunity to connect and reconnect, to share, and to learn. I always find our conference weekend illuminating and inspiring, as a showcase of the wide array of ornithological work being carried out across the country, with many projects supported thanks to your support as a member, as well as our partners such as T-Gear Charitable Trust and Toi Toi Wines.

Lastly, as we continue our work in a changing research environment, I want to thank you for your membership of Birds New Zealand. Here in *Birds New Zealand* magazine, we will continue to showcase the work we are delivering thanks to your support. This includes a wide range of local and national projects such as the NZ Bird Atlas, the Beach Patrol Scheme, and regular surveys; publishing the latest scientific knowledge in our acclaimed journal *Notornis*; and providing funding to support research via the Projects Assistance Fund. With your support, we will continue to be a key player in providing data to local and national government, and other organisations contributing to evidence-based change for a better environment for all.

NATALIE FORSDICK, INCOMING PRESIDENT



➤ Outgoing President, Bruce McKinlay.



➤ Incoming President, Natalie Forsdick.

2024 NZ Garden Bird Survey

Birds New Zealand members are once again asked to contribute to the annual Garden Bird Survey. Just choose any day between 29 June and 7 July 2024 and spend an hour watching the birds in your garden. For each species, record the highest number you see or hear at any one time. The survey is led by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research and the instructions are here:

<https://gardenbirds survey.nz/>

Making a difference with a donation

Birds New Zealand is working to ensure a better future for birds, but we need your help. We are a registered charity (CC 41020) so tax credits are available for donations made in NZ. You can donate in two ways:

* Deposit funds into the Birds New Zealand bank account: 02-0290-0164715-00

* or make an online credit card payment into the account: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/donate/make-a-donation/#form/Donation>

Moult Recording Scheme Convenor

We have a vacancy for the voluntary role of Moult Recording Scheme Convenor. It mainly involves collecting information on the moult patterns of NZ bird species and promoting the Scheme, which was set up in 1981. A role description is available online (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Moult-Recording-Scheme-Convenor-Role-Description.pdf>).

If you are interested, please contact: eo@birdsnz.org.nz

Longevity data from banded birds

The Banding Office longevity project, led by Imogen Foote, has found new longevity records for 108 bird taxa in New Zealand based on bird banding data, and has summarised published longevity records or estimates for 150 taxa. These new records provide updated information for threat classifications both in NZ and globally. Given the small numbers of birds banded in NZ and low recovery rate for many species, the longevity for many NZ bird species is likely underestimated, so we encourage people and researchers to report and publish records of banded birds, especially any new longevity records.

ANNEMIEKE HAMILTON, DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

New Members

We warmly welcome Todd Landers, Chloe Loomes, Donna Channings, Bowen Liu, Rachel Klein, Isabelle Beaudoin, Jim Geekie, Michael Anderson, Chase Zane Leathard, Sue Noble, Janey Taylor, Alanah Grassick, Michele Rogalin Henderson, Sonya Galbraith (Auckland); Elena Marais, Erin Kennedy, Helena Wright, Isabelle Hughes-Cooper, Sarah Nightingale (Bay of Plenty); Braedyn McHugh; Edith Smith; Noah Fenwick, Ruby Sumner, Andrew Thiele, Emma, Luke Southorn, Shayla Rigg, Donald Scott (Canterbury); Rebecca Thompson, Andrea Craig, Lucia Hains (Hawkes Bay); Linda Bell (Manawatu); Simon Hoyle; Deb Corbett; Malcolm Francis, Andrew Aldridge, Ron Moorhouse, William Hennessy, Simon Field, Gareth Parry (Nelson); Wendy Ambury (Northland); Zunaira Noreen; Jonathan Thomas, Harriet Hartley Pollard, Jo Tilson (Otago); Neville Parminter (Volcanic Plateau); Marie Doole, John Keating, Adele Bentley (Wairarapa); Archer Lamason, Sandra Taylor, Lynne Bulloch, and Hamish Johnston (Wellington).

Donations

We warmly thank Elizabeth Taylor, Ian Armitage, Bowen Liu, Greg Balla, Oliver Aughton, Liz Brown, Sue Henley, Lara Gilks, Marshall Clark, Malcolm Francis, John Troost, Maria Rosa Dussler, Pascale Lubbe, James Russell, Kathryn Legrove, Abdul, Luke Southorn, Stephen Sharp, Eddie Bright, and Jo Tilson.

Leaving a gift in your will

If you would like to discuss leaving a gift in your will to Birds New Zealand, please contact our Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: eo@birdsnz.org.nz



▣ Royal Spoonbills, Foxton: Alan Tennyson/NZ Birds Online.

How many Royal Spoonbills are there in New Zealand?

Kōtuku Ngutupapa Royal Spoonbill is a species that has successfully, naturally colonised New Zealand from Australia. They have become a spectacular and enjoyable addition to our estuary birdlife. They are striking large white waders which hunt for small fish and aquatic crustaceans and insects by swinging their characteristic long, spoon-shaped bill from side-to-side through the water. If you think these birds are more common than they used to be, then you are right. Fifty years ago, there were no more than 50 royal spoonbills in NZ. Birds New Zealand has been monitoring their increase here. At the last count in 2012 there were 2,361!

If you would like to help to find out how many Royal Spoonbills live in New Zealand in 2024, you are welcome to join one of the teams of counters during June and July to help with the 2024 nationwide census of Royal Spoonbills being organised by Birds New Zealand. For details contact your Regional Representative (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/contact/>) or Survey Coordinator Mary Thompson: nzmmaryt@gmail.com



▣ Kirsten Olsen atlasng.

New Manawatu Regional Representative – Kirsten Olsen

I started my birding career in Denmark in 1998, when I was 40-years-old, with my teenage son as a way of dragging him away from the computer and TV. He is now an experienced researcher in ecology in Sweden and I am an amateur birder in New Zealand. I regularly go back to Europe to catch up with family and birds. I have been the NZ Bird Atlas Coordinator for Manawatu since 2019 and have enjoyed getting around the country to find out what birds I could see. I enjoy helping other birders getting to grips with the eBird app and using the many functions in eBird. I am no an expert in bird identification, but do my best to identify the birds I see and hear. The Atlas project has helped me to improve my skills immensely. I have also been involved with pest trapping in the Ruahine Range through the Ruahine Whio Protectors Trust. I aim to re-establish our regular meetings (planned for the second Wednesday in the month) and regular field trips. I will share the RR tasks with willing members of our region to help establish continuity and ensure that activities will be maintained.

KIRSTEN OLSEN



❑ Tara Iti pair: Darren Markin.

Good news for NZ Fairy Terns

There was good news for Tara Iti NZ Fairy Terns in April when the Environment Court declined consents for an offshore sand mining operation in the Mangawhai-Pakiri Embayment. Forest & Bird opposed the consents, highlighting the inadequacy of information supplied by the mining company about ecological effects. The case highlighted the uncertainty of sand mining and associated discharges in habitat used by Tara Iti.

Forest & Bird worked alongside the Department of Conservation, community groups and mana whenua, including Friends of Pakiri Beach, Te Whānau o Pākiri, Ōmaha Marae, Ngāti Manuhiri, the Environmental Defence Society, and others in efforts to protect the local marine area from sand mining. The Environment Court's decision shows how valuable such processes are in allowing expert evidence and community voices to be heard. But there is a catch; the company involved could potentially re-apply under the government's proposed new Fast-Track Approvals Bill. If that is passed in its current form, it would empower three ministers to ignore the expert evidence and approve the sand mining operation there.

Scientific societies write to Cabinet about the proposed Fast-Track Approvals Bill

Birds New Zealand has joined with nine other scientific societies which together represent thousands of scientists and written to the Cabinet saying the government's plan for fast-tracking consenting is retrograde and values development over the environment. The legislation – which passed its first reading in late March – proposes to give three ministers the power to bypass normal consent processes and have the final say on approvals for special infrastructure projects.

The ten scientific societies, which each conduct research on biodiversity, said that New Zealand's plants, animals, fungi and ecosystems are globally unique but are also threatened with extinction. In the letter sent to ministers on 13 March, they said the proposed changes will cause further degradation, and mean that development projects will be at the whim of political decision-making and ministerial discretion, without appropriate checks and balances.

The letter was signed on behalf of: New Zealand Ecological Society; New Zealand Freshwater Sciences Society; Society for Research on Amphibians and Reptiles in New Zealand; The New Zealand Microbiological Society; The Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Birds New Zealand); New Zealand Entomological Society; Australasian Systematic Botanical Society; Australasian Wildlife Management Society; Fungal Network of New Zealand; New Zealand Botanical Society.

Link for full text: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/open-letter-to-the-coalition-government-from-nz-scientific-societies/>



❑ Photos by Ian McLean.

Possible Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo found by Muriwai beach patrol

Birds New Zealand's Auckland Regional Representative, Ian McLean, reported the discovery of a beach-wrecked species of Australian cuckoo at Muriwai South by a beach patrol there on 13 March which may be a first NZ record: "While returning south on the wet sand, Miguel A. Mejias (visiting researcher from Bermuda) and Ariel-Micaiah Wijaya found what we had initially thought was a juvenile Rufous Fantail from Australia. The rufous colouring, small size, relatively large tail and lack of any barring had made us think of a Rufous Fantail, but interestingly, the ventral tail feathers were very rufous and appeared similar to that of a Little Bronze Cuckoo (*ssp minutillus*). When taken home, Ian McLean then had a more detailed look and took some measurements. The feet are definitely those of a cuckoo, while both the wing length and bill length appeared to fit that of a Little Bronze Cuckoo. The bird was taken to the Auckland War Memorial Museum for formal identification by Dr Brian Gill with measurements compared to those noted in HANZAB, the result being that the bird is most likely a juvenile Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo. DNA testing is still to take place, but this may be the first NZ record of a Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo. The finding of this bird also reconfirms the important value of the Birds New Zealand beach patrol scheme."

Cameras reveal under-reporting of by-catch

New data released by the Ministry for Primary Industries in April shows that commercial fishing companies were under-reporting their catches of dolphins, albatrosses and non-target fish species prior to the government's surveillance cameras-on-boats programme which came into force in August 2023. For the 127 inshore commercial fishing vessels that now have surveillance cameras, reporting of dolphin captures increased nearly 7-fold while reported albatross interactions increased 3.5-fold and the reported volume of fish discarded increased by almost 50%.



❑ Drowned albatross caught on longline hook: Graham Robertson /Forest & Bird.



▲ Adult female Kiwi-Nui named Haumia at the powhiri:
Photo by Michael Szabo.



▲ Powhiri participants, front row L-R: Jess Fancy (Community Kiwi Ranger, Taranaki Kōhanga Kiwi, Rotokare) Terese McLeod, and Pete Kirkman (Operations Lead, Capital Kiwi Project). Middle row: Wellington Mayor Tory Whanau, Sue Hardwick-Smith, Fiona Gordon, Holden Hohaia, Aroha Moeroa Rangiwhaiao, Annie-May Mohi, Christine Stockum, Siobhan Lynch, Jeff Hall, Paul Ward (Project Lead, Capital Kiwi Project). Back row: Tāne Houston, Rawiri Walsh, Celine Filbee, Katie Zeier, Adrian Cleary:
Photo by Michael Szabo.

More Kiwi-Nui released in the capital

Ten Kiwi-Nui North Island Brown Kiwi were welcomed to the capital at a powhiri held at Te Papa marae on 12 April. The birds had been brought from Taranaki by Ngāti Tupaia and Taranaki Kōhanga Kiwi at Rotokare (a partnership between Taranaki Kiwi Trust and Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust). Welcoming the birds were the Capital Kiwi Project and mana whenua Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika and Ngāti Toa.

After the powhiri the birds were taken to be released into the wild at a location south of Mākara village in regenerating native forest. The birds were welcomed there with kapa haka by a class from Mākara Model School and local residents before handlers from Taranaki Kōhanga Kiwi and Ngāti Tupaia helped the Capital Kiwi Project team to release the birds into their new burrows beneath a grove of tree ferns. More than 70 birds have been released in the Mākara area since 2022 out of a planned 250 to be released over five years. Another milestone was reached on 1 May when the Capital Kiwi Project announced the first two Kiwi-Nui chicks hatched in the wild after one of the earlier releases near Mākara had reached 1.2kg, the critical weight at which a kiwi is considered 'stoat proof'.



▲ Tititipounamu Rifleman: Michael Szabo.

Tititipounamu dispersing around the capital

Tititipounamu Rifleman were extinct as a breeding species in the capital from the early 1900s until 60 were reintroduced to Zealandia in 2019. They soon started breeding there, and since then have been found breeding at nearby Waimapihi Reserve and Te Ahumairangi Reserve. In April, birds were reported in the Wellington suburb of Ngaio for the first time, about 5km north-east of Zealandia. Predator Free Ngaio spokesperson Judie Alison told RNZ that this showed the benefits of having every suburb in Wellington engaged in pest trapping and having corridors of trees and native bush for the birds to move through. She said the birds are now in Ngaio Gorge and have been tracked from the gorge, higher up above it. "If anyone knows Ngaio, it's up in the bush area around the reservoir up the top over-looking Ngaio."



▲ Black-footed Albatross: Ian Wilson/NZ Birds Online.

Black-footed Albatross eggs moved from Hawai'i to Mexico

To help ensure the future of the Black-footed Albatross, scientists transported 36 eggs from Hawai'i in the USA to Guadalupe Island in Mexico last year and placed them with Laysan Albatross foster parents. They aim to establish a new colony of Black-footed Albatrosses that will be safe from the rising sea-levels that threaten the species' survival on low-lying islands and atolls in the Pacific region. Guadalupe is a 243 square kilometre island off the Pacific coast of Mexico with a chain of mountain ridges rising to a height of 1,298 metres, so there is plenty of open land well above sea-level. Although the species breeds at a dozen sites around the Pacific, 97.5% of the total population breeds colonially on isolated low-lying north-western Hawaiian Islands, such as Kure Atoll, Laysan, Midway and French Frigate Shoals. The latest global population estimate is 129,000 adult birds. There are also small populations on a few Japanese islands (Tori Shima, Bonin, Senkakau), and off Mexico's Pacific coast, primarily on Guadalupe Island, where there are just a few hundred birds left. The species is vulnerable to being caught on commercial longline fishing hooks. The most recent estimate is that about 6,000 are killed this way per year. All the Hawai'ian nesting sites are protected and have a 93km buffer zone within which commercial longline fishing is banned.



Portion of gannet colony at tip of Farewell Spit.



Mixed flock of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots.

Identification and counts of roosting shorebirds

This study aimed to examine the suitability of fixed-wing aircraft as a platform to gather high resolution vertical imagery to count aggregations of shorebirds. This approach can then be assessed as a viable alternative or supplementary to observer-based counts at high tide roosts, particularly where access is difficult and/or ground-based observers are unavailable. In February 2024 we were able to overfly the high tide roosts of shorebirds on Farewell Spit in the presence of ground observers. An initial attempt to do this in February 2023 was cancelled due to cyclone Gabrielle.

With assistance from the 2022 Birds New Zealand Research Fund (BNZRF), a fixed-wing Cessna 180 aircraft fitted with a Phase One medium format digital camera was flown over the spit on 11 February 2024, timed to coincide with a spring tide in the middle of the day. An initial pass was made at 300m altitude along the northern side of the spit with observers placed to count flocks prior to the arrival of the aircraft and to note any disturbance. Unfortunately, birds were observed to take flight well before the aircraft was anywhere near overhead making planned comparative counts with ground observers impossible. The northern side of the spit was covered a second time at 210m altitude as was the Australasian Gannet colony at the tip. As the aircraft was available, the opportunity was also taken to cover the southern side of the spit to collect images of Black Swans adjacent to the high tide line.

Although the level of disturbance to the roosting shorebirds on Farewell Spit was largely unanticipated, a total of 2,861 images were captured of flocks of shorebirds on the ground and in flight. A rapid preview was able to identify Variable Oystercatchers, South Island Pied Oystercatchers (SIPO), Red-billed Gulls, Southern Black-backed Gulls, White-fronted Terns, Bar-tailed Godwits, Red Knots, Australasian Gannets and Black Swans. The large job of counting individual birds in the images has now commenced.

The impacts of aircraft disturbance appeared to vary depending on the species with the most sensitive being Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots. SIPO and White-fronted Terns were much less so. Most birds were observed to land back at their roosts within a few minutes of the aircraft passing. No disturbance was noted to the gannet colony nor was any seen for Black Swans. In retrospect, the observed disturbance wasn't that surprising given the low flying ban that has existed over the nature reserve from more than 40 years. We suspect similar flights over estuaries near airports without such protection would be significantly less disturbed. Further work on disturbance by aerial platforms, particularly as UAVs (drones) become more ubiquitous, is clearly required. We thank the BNZRF 2022 for funding assistance.

TERRY GREENE, ROB SCHUKARD,
DAVID MELVILLE, BIRDS NEW ZEALAND



Weka with tracker: Etienne Ossona De Mendez.

Titi and Weka: A conservation conundrum on Kāpiti Island

With no Titi Sooty Shearwater chicks recorded fledging in the two years prior to November 2023, the Kāpiti Island breeding population is declining fast. Located at the summit of the island, the remaining colony is heavily impacted by Weka, which predate on Titi chicks. The importance of preserving both species as part of the island ecosystem creates a conservation conundrum. Previously introduced endemic Weka negatively affecting seabird burrowing species is a recurrent problem throughout Aotearoa.

With assistance from the 2022 Birds New Research Fund (BNZRF) we were able to carry out GPS tracking to understand the impact of Weka on the Kāpiti Titi colony. This incorporated two fundamental aspects: i) developing a procedure to capture and harness Weka, and ii) design a robust, lightweight tracking system. Our pilot study conducted in September/October 2023 included capturing eight Weka that had been fitted with a tracking system. Geospatial data was gathered for 10-14 days before recapture. This pilot study confirmed the efficiency of the capture method (ground-noose) and the robustness and reliability of the tracking system operating under the dense canopy. It also confirmed the importance of radio telemetry transmitters for recapture and will serve as a basis to repeat tracking of Weka during the breeding cycles of Titi in January 2024.

In January 2024 a tracking study will be carried out on Weka holding territories around Titi burrows and Weka holding territories away from the colony. The study aims to understand whether Titi chick predation by Weka is carried out by specialised individuals capable of navigating Titi burrows, or potentially by all Kāpiti Weka. This question arises from the hypothesis that Kāpiti Titi burrows are very long and complex, so navigating such networks may be a behaviour that requires learning. These unusually long burrows are likely a response to Weka predation, forcing Titi breeding pairs to dig deeper every season to escape Weka. This work will provide valuable knowledge to inform a mitigation strategy. For instance, it may point towards strategies such as burrow entry modification or the annual removal of Weka that specialise in predating on Titi.

Field observation from 2022/2023 indicate that most of the clearing of Titi nests likely occurs soon after hatching. Out of 37 burrows with an egg in early December 2022, 73% had been cleared out by 24 January 2023, and no chick was recorded fledging in April. The Weka predation likely occurs soon after the beginning of the rearing period when adult Titi leave the nest unattended to go at sea to forage. A video shot in 2018 shows a Weka dragging a Titi chick outside its burrow.

We thank the Birds New Zealand Research Fund 2022 for helping to enable significant progress in understanding this conservation conundrum. This work will provide valuable knowledge to implement more in-depth tracking in January 2024, at the peak of Titi breeding when their chicks are most vulnerable. This tracking could eventually inform decision making for a mitigation strategy on Kāpiti Island.

ETIENNE OSSONA DE MENDEZ, JOHANNES FISCHER,
GRAEME TAYLOR, SARAH BURY,
KRISTAL CAIN & BRENDON DUNPHY



▲ Colin Miskelly with a map of his route: Kate McAlpine.



▲ Colin Miskelly tramping on Telford Tops: Gordon Miskelly.



▲ Dark morph NZ Fantail: Michael Szabo.

Te Araroa Trail – Te Anau Highway to Bluff

Te Papa Curator and Birds New Zealand Council Member **Colin Miskelly** finished his marathon 124-day walk in March 2024 after covering 3,200km along the full length of Te Araroa Trail from Cape Reinga to Bluff. In total he saw 111 bird species, counted 104,429 individual birds, and submitted 1,790 complete eBird checklists. In his final blogpost, covering the last section, he reports on what he saw:

A Department of Conservation ute pulled up beside us as we walked down the long, dusty Mavora Lakes Road north of State Highway 94. The Takitimu Mountains loomed ahead of us as the DOC ranger lowered his window to offer a lift into Te Anau, and asked if we were planning to take a 'zero day' the next day.

'Zero day' is the term used by Te Araroa walkers when they take a day off, whether to recharge their batteries, seek resupplies, or avoid bad weather. As committed 'Every Last Inch' walkers, accepting a lift was not an option, unless we could return to the same spot before resuming our walk. But we were concerned that the ranger thought the impending southerly storm could be bad enough for us to consider spending the next day sitting in a hut.

We decided that there would be enough shelter from the forest and valley floors the next day, and so we slogged on through the bogs between Princhester and Aparima Huts while being pelted by wind-blown rain and hail that alternated with occasional patches of sunshine. Conditions worsened as we descended from the Telford Tops in gale-force winds the following day, though the blowing low cloud concealed how much snow had fallen on the surrounding peaks.

The cloud lifted by the following morning, revealing not only the snow, but also our first glimpse of the sea since Tasman Bay from the Richmond Range, 44 days previously.

After departing Telford campsite, we had the unusual

experience of walking for an entire day (28km) on a single farm. At 12,145-hectares, Mt Linton Station is one of New Zealand's largest privately-owned farms. It is claimed to carry more stock units than any other New Zealand farm, with 3,000 Angus breeding cows plus replacements, and 42,000 Texel-Romney ewes plus replacements.

The warm welcome at Birchwood Station after leaving Mt Linton was a welcome change from the cold, minimalist Telford campsite. A roaring fire and homemade pizzas were much appreciated, plus the owners invited us to call in at the shearing shed before hitting the trail the next morning. They, their staff and the record-breaking Forde Wainders shearing gang were part way through shearing 12,000 sheep in the 7-stand Birchwood woolshed.

Mud and trail magic in the Longwood Range

From Birchwood, Te Araroa traverses Woodlaw Forest before entering the notorious Longwood Range. For almost the entire length of the country, we had used the 5-point Raetia (Kaitaia) scale to score the muddiness of trail sections. This soon became a subset of the 8-point Longwood scale as we slogged and slogged for 36 km southward, leaving another two points available to be added following significant rain events.

About 7km before the end of the Longwood mud, we were astonished to find another superb example of trail angelism floating in the cesspool outside Turnbull's Hut. Three large chilly bins labelled 'TE ARAROA TRAIL MAGIC' were filled with soft drinks, beer, chocolate bars, and fresh fruit.

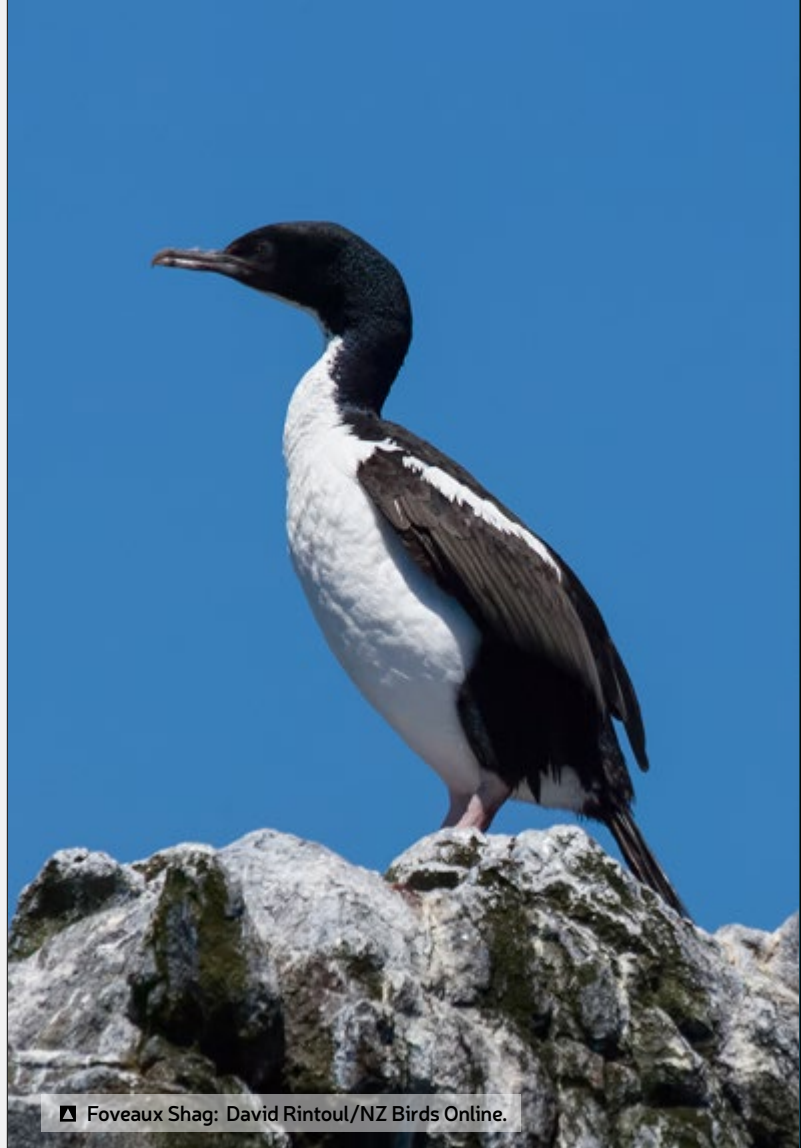
Te Araroa rejoins the coast at Colac Bay and follows it eastward for about 35km towards Invercargill. This includes the Tihaka Beach Track around the picturesque rocky headlands and



▲ Colin Miskelly at Stirling Point: Kate McAlpine.



▲ Sooty Shearwater: David Boyle/New Zealand Birds Online.



▲ Foveaux Shag: David Rintoul/NZ Birds Online.

embayments southwest of Riverton Aparima, and about 22km along the great sweep of Oreti Beach.

Te Araroa trail notes make very few references to birds. However, the notes for the 10km or so of stopbanks on the east side of the New River Estuary state “you’ll be treated to an area teeming with birdlife”. The sheer number of birds (mainly waterfowl, waders and gulls) slowed our progress towards Bluff, as I made frequent stops to identify birds and estimate the size of flocks.

The end

Te Araroa runs along Te Ara Taurapa pathway/cycleway beside State Highway 1 for 16km north of Bluff before crossing the base of the Bluff peninsula to the outer (western) coast at the iconic rusty metal Bluff sign. Rather than following the coastal track around to the track terminus at Stirling Point, Te Araroa takes in one last gratuitous summit (Bluff Hill Motupōhue) before disgorging walkers at the full stop.

A notable feature of these forests was the higher proportion of black fantails than encountered elsewhere on Te Araroa (15%). Takitimu forest was the only place where another Te Araroa walker commented on seeing a black morph NZ Fantail, asking if it was a different species to the usual pied morph NZ Fantails, which have largely white tails (it is not – the black morphs are a rarer colour morph of the same species).

Live and dead birds of Jacobs River Estuary (Riverton) and Oreti Beach

Oreti Beach has far more coastal birds than most sandy beaches around the country. The sheer numbers of birds at the western end of the beach and in the adjacent Jacobs River Estuary were

a challenge to count into the glare of the low morning sun – especially as there were two species of small gulls and two species of oystercatchers.

The most abundant species counted were 1,170 South Island Pied Oystercatchers Tōrea, 440 Red-billed Gulls Tarapunga, 269 Black-billed Gulls Tarāpuka, 132 Black-fronted Tern Tarapirohe, 72 Banded Dotterels Pohowera, 67 Ruddy Turnstones, and 36 each Royal Spoonbill Royal Spoonbills Kotuku Ngutupapa and Variable Oystercatchers Tōrea.

The Ruddy Turnstones were a particular highlight, as Oreti Beach was just the second site where we had encountered them on Te Araroa, after Ambury Farm Park on the Manukau Harbour. They are the third most abundant Arctic-breeding wader species that migrates to New Zealand, and several of the birds had started to moult into their colourful breeding plumage.

The 30km of exposed coastline between Colac Bay and Invercargill provided a further opportunity to collect data for Bird New Zealand’s Beach Patrol Scheme. We found 25 dead seabirds, with Little Penguin Kororā the most frequent (11 corpses). Like the Kororā, most of the other species found are commonly seen from the coast or in Foveaux Strait (including three Fairy Prions Tītī Waunui, two Mottled Petrels Kōrure, and one each of Black-billed Gull Tarāpuka, Sooty Shearwater Tītī, Common Diving Petrel Kuaka, and Spotted Shag Kawau Tikitiki. More southern (subantarctic) seabirds were represented by a White-headed Petrel and a White-chinned Petrel Karetai Kauae Mā.

Birds of New River Estuary

If the waders of Jacobs River Estuary were challenging, the waterfowl, waders, and gulls of New River Estuary were almost overwhelming – and required frequent halts to the 5km/h pace

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that we could otherwise maintain on the excellent walkways around the estuary.

The most abundant species were 2,058 Grey Teal Tētē Moroiti, 1,489 Canada Geese Kuihi, 522 Black Swans Kākānau, 304 Mallards Rakiraki, 268 Spur-winged Plovers, 161 Black-billed Gull Tarāpuka, 144 Australasian Shovelers Kuruwhegi, 134 New Zealand Scaup Pāpango, and 132 Pied Stilts Poaka.

A high-flying Foveaux Shag Mapo was a highlight as we crossed the isthmus between Bluff Harbour and New River Estuary, and became the penultimate species added to the trip list. Foveaux Shags are marine specialists, and I didn't expect to see one so far from an exposed rocky coast.

The last bird

There are several possible ways to define the last bird of Te Araroa. It could be the last (111th) species to be added to the overall trip list; it could be the final species name that I added to my notebook as part of the final 0.9km transect as I descended Tōpuni Track from the summit of Bluff Hill Motupōhue to Stirling Point; or it could be the last individual bird that I saw before lowering my binoculars, announcing 'Enough!'

As it happens, all three definitions produced the same result: Sooty Shearwater Titī, the famed muttonbird that is gathered as a cultural harvest from islands around Rakiura Stewart Island. The annual muttonbird season begins on 1 April. However, Rakiura iwi who hold traditional rights to be muttonbirders are able to access their islands to prepare for the harvest from 15 March, which was only a few days after we reached Bluff. I counted 154 Titī off the Bluff coast during the last 5km of Te Araroa.

Titī are remarkable birds. In addition to being capable of diving to depths in excess of 60 metres to catch their prey, they often travel 2,000km each way to the Polar Front when feeding their

chicks, and their annual migration to the North Pacific (reaching Japan, Alaska, and California) means that an individual breeding bird can travel 74,000km in a year (and more than 3 million kilometres in its lifetime), averaging more than 500km a day.

They are a perfect species to put a mere 3,200km walk into perspective.

Notable bird species seen on this section: Sooty Shearwater Titī, Spotted Shag Kawau Tikitiki, Foveaux Shag Mapo, Little Owl Ruru Nohinohi.

Summary statistics for the final section with cumulative totals in brackets:

Days on the trail = 9 (124)

Kilometres travelled = 239 (3,225)

eBird/Atlas checklists completed = 136 (1,790)

Number of bird species = 59 (111)

Total birds seen or heard = 11,435 (104,429)

Most abundant species = Grey Teal Tētē Moroiti (2,058 at New River Estuary)

Most abundant endemic species = SIPO Tōrea (1,169 from Riverton to Invercargill)

Most frequent species = (the endemic) Bellbird Korimako (45% of checklists) and NZ Tomtit Ngirungiru (34%).

Read all 19 of Colin's Te Araroa blogposts here: <https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2023/10/30/every-last-bird-the-birds-of-te-araroa-trail/>



New Zealand Bird Atlas finishes on a high note

On 31 May 2024, the New Zealand Bird Atlas project came to an end after five years' worth of collective atlasing. The project brought together an amazing community of people united by a shared passion, and we've been blown away by how everyone contributed so generously to help meet the aims of the project.

A key aim was to collect up-to-date information on bird species in Aotearoa New Zealand to help inform conservation decision making in the future, and ultimately try to prevent more species from coming as close to extinction as species such as the Kākāpō. An important output of the project will be the ability to compare bird occupancy estimates between the previous two Atlas project datasets, enabling us to describe nationwide changes in bird distribution over the past 45 years. This will help mitigate against the potential negative impacts of 'shifting baseline syndrome'.

Milestone after milestone

The Atlas community has achieved an incredible feat: helping to amass a vast amount of valuable bird observation data from

across the country in the Atlas *eBird* portal. We are over the moon with how the project has progressed and helped to inspire such a large community of people to come together and gather a nationally significant dataset.

A strong partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology allowed this Atlas project to be a digital-first. With *eBird* offering real-time data entry and outputs, the Atlas community was able to enter observations directly through the *eBird* app and to follow it as more data was uploaded. This was a far cry from the paper-based days of previous Atlas projects! This allowed everyone to continually get an up-to-date picture to identify which areas needed more attention (day and night) to better target local efforts across the country.

An impressive 450,000 complete *eBird* checklists have been submitted by over 1,700 Atlasers. That's an average of 88,000 checklists per year over the project's lifespan. An incredible 97.2% of grid squares (3,141 of all 3,232) received some Atlas data in them year-round, even if it was only five minutes' worth. The addition of the Department of Conservation's national tier



▲ Mike Bell and Pat Crowe atlasing from a Cook Strait ferry: Dan Burgin.



▲ Samantha Ray atlasing in Taranaki: Dan Burgin.



▲ Blackbird Manu Pango, the third most commonly reported bird species: Michael Szabo.



▲ Tauhou Silvereye, the most commonly reported native bird species: Michael Szabo

1 bird count dataset into the Atlas portal was a welcome boost, providing vital observations from those harder to reach spots.

Over 145,000 effort hours went into the project, equating to over 6,000 effort days, worth nearly \$3.5 million dollars if paid out at the Living Wage rate. This doesn't include the time spent planning and travelling, nor does it take account of the cost of that time and travel. To add to that, the community navigated a global pandemic with lockdowns, as well as the rising costs of fuel. Everyone carried on, determined to collect this expansive dataset. Looking back, it is increasingly apparent what a significant achievement this was, over a relatively short space of time.

The power of community science

New Zealand's bird species face a myriad of threats on a daily basis from introduced predators to global climate change, with many species sadly teetering towards extinction. We desperately need regular information on where bird species are, and in what numbers, to better inform effective conservation management and research. Birds are valuable sentinels of the environments they reside in. So, by taking observations of the birds we see and hear in our daily lives, and logging them into

a centralised place such as *eBird*, we can help better monitor the state of our ecosystems. This is where the Atlas project, and community science initiatives such as *eBird* can be of such value. Bird conservation increasingly needs more eyes, ears, and perspectives than any single scientist, or organisation, possesses.

Community science can empower people to provide those extra sets of eyes and ears, and help to create stronger collaborations between scientists and those of us who want to make a difference. The Atlas dataset has already been utilised for a myriad of research and conservation avenues. We know this will continue beyond the current Atlas project and are excited to see what the community's efforts will help to inform in future. Over the course of the project, we worked with various stakeholders who had requested Atlas data to upload the large bird datasets they were working with. This included the Department of Conservation (DOC), Environment Canterbury, Environment Southland, and other regional councils.

Funding acknowledgements

The Atlas project was lucky to receive funding over its lifetime from various sources. Thanks to the Lotteries Grants Board and the DOC Community Fund for providing funding for the coordination of the project for its first three years.



▲ Anna Harris, Bowls of the Earth, Eyre Mountains Atlas Expedition, February 2023: Joe Bliss.

The final two years of coordination were all voluntary, and so we are grateful to Toi Toi Wines for providing valuable funding to support targeted Atlas expeditions around the country. This resulted in successful expeditions to Gisborne, Northland, the West Coast, Southland, Otago and Wairarapa.

Thank you

I and my colleagues at Wildlife Management International (WMIL) have felt privileged to coordinate the Atlas project on behalf of Birds New Zealand. We are confident that the results will guide and influence national and regional government conservation policy planning for decades to come. Data quality was of critical importance and to ensure that data collected by participants was as scientifically valuable as possible, we came up with the 'Atlas essentials' for the community to follow.

As a result, the quality of the majority of data flowing into the Atlas eBird portal was of high scientific value, namely through being complete checklists with accurate abundances for all species, and of high resolution over time and distance. The eBird team have praised the project as having one of the best datasets globally for national spatial coverage and data quality. With

that in mind, those essentials are something we want people to adhere to in future, so that we don't have to wait another 20 years for the next Atlas project to understand how birds are faring in Aotearoa.

Thanks also to Choir (previously Novo Advertising and Design) who came up with the distinctive Atlas logo. The marque is reminiscent of a Kākāpō, or a Ruru which are both sometimes referred to as Te Manu Huna a Tāne (the hidden bird of Tāne), due to their nocturnal habits. This was a nod to one of the aims of the Atlas project, which was to reveal patterns and trends in bird distribution that are currently hidden to us.

Huge thanks go to the eBird team for their continual support of the NZ Bird Atlas project over its lifetime. The custom-made Atlas portal was of immense value over the course of the project.

As always, we can't thank enough everyone who participated for contributing so much of their time and effort to the project. Community science projects such as this thrive on the dedication of volunteers, and the amount of support and passion the collective Atlas community has provided has been phenomenal. We know many regions undertook regular atlasing outings, and continually advocated with their local communities to get



▲ Christopher Tuffley (centre) off the Chatham Islands with Jodi Webber (left) and John Kyngdon (right): Michael Szabo.



▲ Gisborne Atlas Expedition team at Tikapa Marae, February 2023: Malcolm Rutherford.



▲ Solo atlasing in the Moawhango Valley, Kaimanawa Southern Access Corridor: Christopher Tuffley.



▲ Moawhango West River, Kaimanawa Southern Access Corridor. Christopher Tuffley contributed 44 checklists here 6-7 April 2024: Christopher Tuffley.

involved with the project. We also appreciate that there have been some huge individual efforts to gather data over the past five years around the country at locations near and far, including Colin Miskelly's marathon walk along the length of Te Araroa Trail. These have been key drivers of the success of the project.

Post-Atlas

Many of you might be thinking, 'now what'? Do we just hang up our binoculars and wait for the next Atlas project? Far from it! We strongly encourage members to continue to submit valuable bird observations on a regular basis to the New Zealand *eBird* portal. This will help continually update the impressive and cutting-edge Status and Trends updates that the Cornell Lab of Ornithology produce each year.

We have made a strong recommendation to Birds New Zealand Council to create an *eBird* Coordination team and for 'eBird Aotearoa New Zealand' to be set up as an official Birds New Zealand project. This would help regularly facilitate engagement with the membership and wider birding community in New Zealand to advocate for *eBird* use, support the voluntary team of

eBird reviewers, and help promote *eBird* data entry and data use with organisations such as DOC, Landcare Research Manaaki Whenua, and regional councils.

There is a lot going on in the world right now in the aftermath of a global pandemic, global climate change, and global biodiversity loss, which can leave some people wondering how best to make a meaningful contribution to achieve tangible change.

If you take anything away from participating in the NZ Bird Atlas project, please let it be that we can all make a positive difference to conservation by regularly submitting our bird observations and photographs to *eBird*.

Let this be something that empowers you, simply by doing something you love -- watching and taking note of the birds around you.

We can't wait to see what more we can achieve together as a community. Have fun out there and please keep in touch.

Happy birding!
NZ Bird Atlas Team
nzbirdatlas@wmail.co.nz



▲ Tarakoikoia The Pyramid, where the entire global population of Chatham Albatross breeds: Michael Szabo.

Chatham Islands Atlas Adventure

Article by Michael Szabo

My first visit to the Chatham Islands earlier this year felt like stepping into a familiar yet different version of New Zealand. The endemic birds were subtly different to their mainland New Zealand counterparts, and while I recognised some of the dramatic landscapes from photographs, it was all so much bigger than I expected, from the many high volcanic cliffs to the vastness of Te Whanga Lagoon.

That's probably because Rekohu, the main Chatham Island, and the adjacent islands of Rangiauria/Pitt, Mangere, Rangatira/South East, Tarakoikoia/The Pyramid and Motuhara/The Forty Fours comprise about 800 square kilometres – an area larger than Auckland and Tauranga combined. Located 800km east of Banks Peninsula, they are the eastern-most land in New Zealand, where they straddle the Subtropical Front that separates warmer subtropical waters from colder, nutrient-rich subantarctic waters.

The islands are also steeped in ornithological history. Ernst Dieffenbach, Henry Forbes, Charles Fleming, Brian Bell, Don Merton, David Crockett, and Manuel and Evelyn Tuanui have all left their mark. Others continue in their footsteps. For example, I met Mike Bell, Bruce Tuanui, Adrian Riegen, Johannes Chambon and Ela Hunt while I was there, who are all engaged in avian research and conservation work on the islands.

I visited there in late January as part of a share-cost group of eight self-guided birders organised by Steve Wood and hosted by Owenga Charters, with a focus on seeing the endemic birds and pelagic seabirds. Over seven days we recorded a total of 68 species, including nine endemics, and 25 pelagic seabird species

including Pyramid Prion, Gould's Petrel, Snowy Albatross and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross. The 58 complete checklists we contributed to the NZ Bird Atlas project can be viewed here: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/200258>

Endemic hot spot

The large size and remote location of the Chatham Islands help to explain the wealth of avian endemism. There are more endemic breeding bird species there than at any of New Zealand's other remote offshore island groups. Twelve endemic species survive today: Chatham Albatross, Chatham Taiko, Chatham Petrel, Chatham Shag, Pitt Shag, Chatham Oystercatcher, Chatham Snipe, Parea Chatham Pigeon, Forbes' Parakeet, Black Robin, Chatham Warbler and Pyramid Prion. Formerly treated as one of three subspecies of Fulmar Prion, the Pyramid Prion was described as a new endemic species by Lara Shepherd, Colin Miskelly and Alan Tennyson of Te Papa and Mariana Bulgarella of Victoria University of Wellington in 2022.

Another 12 endemic species are known to have become extinct there: Imber's Petrel, Chatham Merganser, Chatham Duck, Hutton's Rail, Hawkins' Rail, Dieffenbach's Rail, Chatham Coot, Forbes' Snipe, Chatham Fernbird, Chatham Bellbird, Chatham Kaka, and Chatham Crested Penguin. While the Chatham subspecies of NZ Raven and NZ Swan Matapu have also been lost (as have both species), thankfully the New Zealand Shore Plover survived in the wild on Rangatira, which meant the species was able to be reintroduced to the New Zealand mainland.



▲ Pyramid Prion: Steve Wood.



▲ Chatham Albatross: Michael Szabo.



▲ Snowy Albatross: Steve Wood.



▲ Chatham Petrel: Richard Webber.

On main Chatham Island we found the endemic Chatham Pigeon or Parea and the endemic subspecies of Tūi at the Awatotara nature reserve. They were both significantly larger than the Kererū and Tūi on the New Zealand mainland. A sky-diving Parea clearly had a longer tail in comparison to Kererū and another on a nearby branch was paler and greyer than a Kererū. A Tūi perched in a Chatham Lancewood had a longer throat 'poi'. We also enjoyed close views of the dainty Chatham Island Warbler, which is whiter and browner than the Grey Warbler on the mainland, and has a faster, more upbeat song.

The Chatham subspecies of Red-crowned Parakeet, NZ Fantail and NZ Pipit were also quite easy to see at Awatotara. The parakeet is larger with more extensive red behind the eye and blue on the wing feathers, the fantail has an almost completely white tail, and the pipit looks larger and stockier than on the New Zealand mainland.

At Owenga near the south-east tip of main Chatham Island we had close views of roosting Pitt Shags near the wharf, which allowed us to see how they resemble the Spotted Shag of the mainland but are darker with greener facial skin. We also found a roosting flock of Chatham Shags on rocks by Manakau Reserve, some of them with colourful blue eye rings and orange facial skin, similar to the New Zealand King Shag and pied morph of Otago Shag on the mainland. A walk along the pale sandy beach just before Owenga brought us to a pair of Chatham Oystercatchers with their two youngsters. The adults had a visibly shorter bill and legs than both of the oystercatcher species on the mainland.

Point Munning seal colony at the north-east tip of main Chatham Island was also worth a visit. En route there from Waitangi we paused at the north end of Te Whanga Lagoon where we found some visiting Bar-tailed Godwits, Pacific Golden Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones with the local Banded Dotterels

and Grey Ducks. Among the numerous New Zealand Fur Seals at Point Munning, we found a pale-fronted Subantarctic Fur Seal, a Weka pair with chicks, and several Pitt Shags as Arctic Skua, White-fronted Tern, Sooty Shearwater and Buller's Albatross passed offshore.

We found it was quite easy to see the endemic Forbes' Parakeet from a boat about 80m offshore from Robin Bay at Mangere Island. Watching one bright green bird in flight over the scrub there I could clearly see the golden yellow on its crown. But if you want to have a realistic chance of seeing a Black Robin there you would need to get closer inshore in a zodiac inflatable. We also saw the distinct Chatham Islands form of Subantarctic Skua there, which is darker with a copperish hindneck.

A brief pause off the landing area at Rangatira provided brief views of Shore Plovers on the rocks, but it is only realistically possible to see the Chatham Snipe if you are able to land at Rangatira and walk into the forest there – which only Department of Conservation staff and volunteers are allowed to do.

Seabird hot spot

Chatham Albatross were constantly in view on the morning we visited The Pyramid, looking stylish with their dark blue-grey hood and banana yellow bill. We also saw Chatham Petrel and Pyramid Prion, both at sea south of Rangatira. Pyramid Prions breed at The Pyramid and The Forty Fours. Further research may throw new light on whether birds at The Pyramid and birds at The Forty Fours are in any way different from each other. Chatham Petrels survived at Rangatira and have now been translocated to Pitt, Chatham and Mangere islands.

Buller's Albatross was the most abundant albatross species we saw at sea. We saw hundreds of them wheeling around at The Forty Fours.



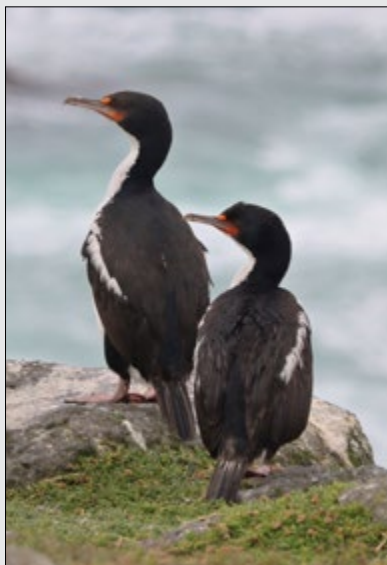
▲ The Forty Fours and Buller's Albatross: Michael Szabo.



▲ Black-winged Petrel pair: Jodi Webber.



▲ Chatham Shag duo front view, Manakau Reserve, Owenga: M Szabo.



▲ Chatham Shag duo back view, Manakau Reserve, Owenga: M Szabo



▲ Gould's Petrel: Steve Wood.



▲ Black-winged Petrel: Michael Szabo.

We only saw quite small numbers of Northern Royal Albatross there, despite the fact that 99% of their entire population of about 7,000 pairs breeds at the Chatham Islands (at The Forty-Fours and The Sisters). Thirty pairs breed at Taiaroa Head on Otago Peninsula.

During four days at sea with skipper Glenn King of Owenga Charters, we recorded nine species of albatross, seven of petrel, three of shearwater, two each of prion, storm petrel, skua, shag and gull, and one each of penguin (Little) and tern (White-fronted). The first of these was a round trip from Owenga to The Pyramid and Mangere Island. Our second was to a spot about 14 nautical miles (nm) south of Rangatira. In addition to good numbers of albatrosses, giant petrels and storm petrels, we saw a good diversity of *Pterodroma* petrels there, adding Cook's, Black-winged and Chatham to our checklists. Fairy Prions also flew past us but a closer look at Steve Wood's photos revealed at least one to be a Pyramid Prion.

For the third we were about 5nm off The Forty Fours when we saw the only Gould's Petrel of the trip. Closer to The Forty Fours we admired a pair of Black-winged Petrels as they engaged in their sublime synchronised flight courtship display at sea, during which they repeatedly made high-pitched whistling calls to each other. Checking her photos, Jodi Webber found she had snapped one of a local breeding pair of Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross as it flew over The Forty Fours.

The fourth was to a spot about 15nm off Cape Fournier where our main target was Chatham Taiko (a.k.a. Magenta Petrel). We did not see any there or at another spot a few nautical miles closer to land, but one was filmed south of main Chatham Island in December 2022 by Hadoram Shirihai aboard Owenga

Charters' Acheron II, so it is possible to see one out at sea.

We saw plenty of other seabirds flying around the boat at the second spot, including White-faced and Grey-backed storm petrels, another Chatham Petrel, and our only Snowy Albatross and Grey-faced Petrel of the trip, which helped boost our tally of albatross species that day to eight.

If you wanted to target Pyramid Prion, Chatham Petrel and Chatham Taiko at sea you'd need to do a dedicated pelagic trip out to deeper water. If you don't want to spend that much time at sea you could do a circuit passing Mangere, The Pyramid and Rangatira on a one-day boat trip for a good selection of seabirds. It is also possible to visit Pitt Island by plane or boat. It has the same bush birds at main Chatham Island plus you can arrange to visit a Chatham Petrel colony.

Looking up at The Pyramid was a breathtaking experience. Seeing and hearing hundreds of Chatham Albatrosses wheeling around was the 'Attenborough moment' of the trip. We saw so many natural wonders at the Chatham Islands, the whole archipelago must surely qualify as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Michael Szabo is editor of Birds New Zealand magazine.

Thanks to Steve Wood for organising a great trip, to skipper Glen King, Dave Boyle and Johannes Chambon for sharing their knowledge of Chatham seabirds, to Christopher Tuffley for compiling the checklists, and both Glenn King and Megan Lanauze-King of Owenga Charters for helping to make it such a successful trip – I highly recommend them.

Full trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/200258>

Owenga Charters: <https://owengacharters.co.nz/>



▲ Parea, Awatotara: Michael Szabo.



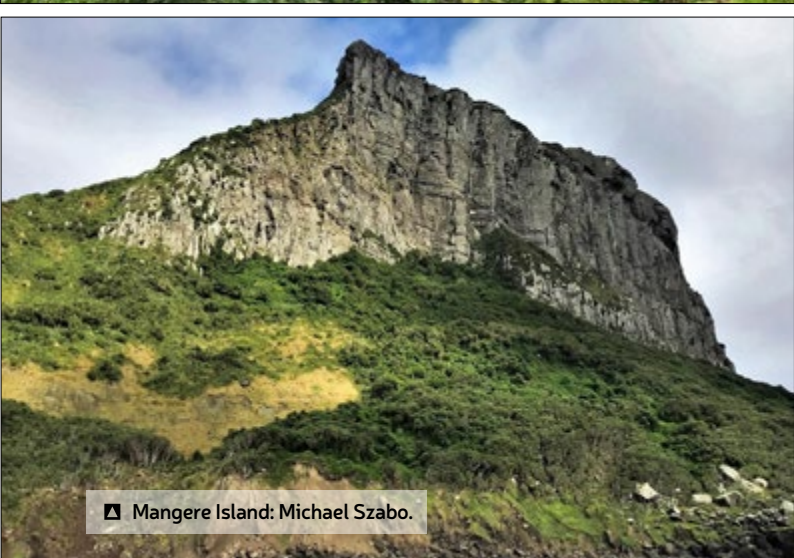
▲ Chatham Tūi, Awatotara: Richard Webber.



▲ Awatotara Nature Reserve: Michael Szabo.



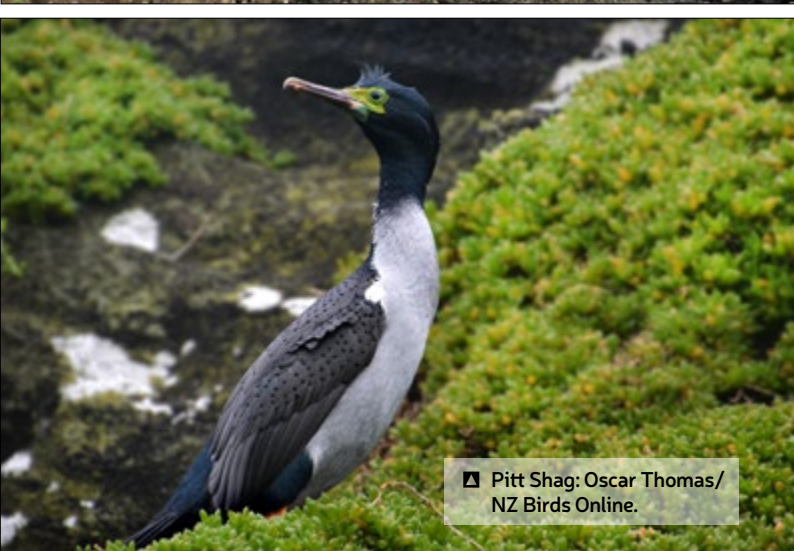
▲ Chatham Warbler: Oscar Thomas/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Mangere Island: Michael Szabo.



▲ Forbes' Parakeet, Mangere Island: Don Merton/Department of Conservation.



▲ Pitt Shag: Oscar Thomas/NZ Birds Online.



▲ Chatham Oystercatcher, Owenga: Michael Szabo.



▲ 17 Black-fronted Terns, Princess Bay, Wellington, 1 April: Sally Eyre.



▲ L-R: Reyane Hale (Yup'ik), Stelle Thompson (Yup'ik), Stelle's son [name not known], Tania Te Huna (Ngaa Rauru), and Paul Gibson at the Whanganui River Estuary farewelling godwit AJD.

FAR NORTH

Our NZ Bird Atlas trip on 5/4 along 90 Mile Beach was different as always. We counted a total of more than 2,000 birds along 30km of beach including 1,123 Southern Black-backed Gulls (our highest count of this species there), 201 Red-billed Gulls, 506 White-fronted Terns and 160 SIPO, but nothing more unusual.

Since then, we have visited Waitangi where we saw a lone Royal Spoonbill and 166 White-fronted Terns, but none of the NZ Dotterels reported there the previous month. The following day at Te Haumi we saw 96 White-fronted Terns, 4 NZ Dotterels and a good collection of the other expected shorebirds. There was a report of 2 Long-tailed Cuckoos at Mangonui in the first week of March and a Banded Rail was seen in Taipa on 12/3. We also visited the lake at Pakaraka where we saw 6 NZ Dabchicks. Another solo Royal Spoonbill was seen in Kaeo and we hope to find more arriving soon.

Kevin Matthews reports that he visited Walker Island in Rangaunu Harbour at the end of March where he counted 300 Bar-tailed Godwits, 200 Red Knots, 91 Ruddy Turnstone, 1 Eastern Curlew, 3 Little Terns and a Mongolian Plover. He also visited Lake Ngatu where he saw 20 NZ Dabchicks with young and Unahi where there were 2 Kotuku. Lastly, Matthieu Poot reports 1 Snowy Albatross (*exulans*), 1 Northern Royal Albatross, 1 Campbell Albatross, 3 Wilson's Storm Petrels and 1 NZ Storm Petrel at sea about 20km east of Cape Reinga on 25/4.

– ISABELLA GODBERT

NORTHLAND

In February, members started the year with a field trip to Tahi and caught 2 Fernbirds. In March, Paul Fisher talked to us about the data he was collecting on the Fernbirds in Nelson and what he expected to cover during his upcoming visit to Whangarei on 22-27/4. Luckily, the weather played ball and 5 members accompanied him to Tahi and Hilton and Melva Ward's wetland in Ngunguru, where we caught 22 new birds and had 6 recaptures.

Over the past decade NZ Dotterels have been declining at the Ruakaka Estuary winter roost site, while the number of birds has increased at the former NZ Refinery site (now CINZ tank farm). The location of the NZ Dotterel

refinery winter flock site was a mystery until data collected by consultants to support the Northport expansion located it in the existing Northport footprint. In February, Katrina Hansen and I located 87 NZ Dotterels and 52 Banded Dotterels within Northport, so it appears that they have been using sites there but are often hard to see from the margin.

Northland has been very dry, and the Whao Valley Dam is at least 4m below its normal level. Ducks are using the margins of the reservoir for feeding and roosting. There has been a substantial loss of Mallards, Paradise Shelducks, some NZ Scaup, an Australasian Shoveler, and a Black Swan at Lake Road, potentially due to avian botulism. The adult Australasian Little Grebes and NZ Dabchicks remain unaffected.

'The Petrel Station' pelagic trips organised by Scott Brooks continued to turn up interesting seabirds. A White-necked Petrel and 8 Black-winged Petrels were seen on 29/2; 2 Snowy Albatross (*exulans*), 1 Campbell Albatross and 3 Wilson's Storm Petrels on 23/3; and 1 Black-bellied Storm Petrel plus at least 50 New Zealand Storm Petrels on 22/4. These regular trips have now recorded a total of 68 seabird species since 2017. Future trips are notified here: <https://www.thepetrelstation.nz/>

– TONY BEAUCHAMP

AUCKLAND

Our branch hosted 2 public guided walks in March and April. On the 24/3, we had our first public guided walk for the year at Ambury Regional Park attended by 35 people including guides. Most of the Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots appeared to have departed on migration or were perhaps roosting elsewhere, as many roost sites had substantial weed growth. Birds seen included 4 godwits, 3 NZ Dotterels, 820 Pied Stilts, 800 Wrybill, 2 Grey-tailed Tattler, 130 Royal Spoonbills, 10 Little Black Shags, 42 Caspian Terns and 1 Reef Heron.

On 22/4 we provided a Children's Guided Bird Walk at Cornwall Park as part of a School Holiday Programme. We had 7 guides to host 27 children and adults for a classroom session about birds and then the guided walk. Three of the older children had a very keen interest in birds, their birding knowledge was excellent and they appeared to have the potential to

be the ornithologists and researchers of the future. Birds seen on the day included 4 Kereru and 5 Common Pheasants.

Puweto Spotless Crane monitoring took place at Orangihina in Te Atatu on 17/3. A total of 3 were heard, while numerous Fernbirds were seen and heard throughout the saltmarsh. No Banded Rails were seen, although numerous footprints indicated their continued presence.

The annual South Kaipara Lakes NZ Dabchick Survey took place in cooperation with South Kaipara Landcare on Anzac Day, 25/4. Twenty people attended the event, which was well organised by Denise Poyner. The number of grebes found was low with only 10 NZ Dabchicks and 1 Australasian Little Grebe; however, 4 Australasian Bitterns were counted. The number of rarities reported in our region was again relatively limited this autumn. A Brown Booby was seen by Michael Lawry at the Muriwai Gannet colony on 5/3.

– IAN McLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

Gaia Dell'Ariccia spoke at our March meeting, a seabird scientist who works for Auckland Council's seabird regional restoration programme. She outlined her monitoring and research work with various species where there is a major or partial knowledge gap. As part of this, shag breeding colonies have been identified around the region to be monitored. There is increasing concern at the number of shags getting caught and killed in fishing gear.

Adrian Riegen spoke to us in April. Since the 1980s he has been monitoring NZ Dotterels (NZD) and Variable Oystercatchers on Auckland's west coast, and has found the NZD population there has barely increased. To find out what happens to birds hatched there, metal bands and an engraved flag have been attached to 50 young birds. Of these, 37 have been seen at least once since fledging, with 'CHR' seen the most, 101 times. Only 2 of the 37 have been recruited to the west coast breeding population. Many seem to head south. Recently, 'JBE' was 1 of 3 chicks banded at Karekare on 25/01/24 and the first sighting was at Kidd's Beach on 30/3. Since 2011, 95 NZD have been banded and fitted with flags at other sites around Auckland and none has been seen on the west coast yet.



In February, Shining Cuckoos were heard calling at Duder's Beach and Ayrilies Wetland, and cuckoo young were seen being fed by Grey Warblers at Maratoto and on the Coromandel. A Long-tailed Cuckoo was also heard at Maratoto. On 7/3 a minimum of 12 Kereru were seen 'floating' around Totara groves at Mauku, and at least 30 in the same area on 12/3. A Great Knot has been present at Miranda, and godwit 4BWVB, fitted with a location transmitter, departed Miranda in March, stopped in New Caledonia and then returned to NZ on 09/4. A total of 83 Little Black Shags were seen at Wattle Downs ponds on 7/4, and at the same place a Black-billed Gull with band E-194219 was seen on 10/4. This was the first record since it was banded at Miranda on 21/12/97, 1 of 380 chicks banded, making the bird 26.4 years old.

– SUE FROSTICK

WAIKATO

While Pukorokoro Miranda continued to deliver summer rarities like Glossy Ibis, Whiskered Tern, and Great Knot, there was also exciting news of the successful breeding of Royal Spoonbills at both Lake Kimihia (Huntly) and the Howarth Memorial Wetlands in Te Aroha. A local farmer at Kimihia reckons that breeding was successful last summer as well so this is indeed great news, especially with the upcoming winter and summer census happening nationwide. With luck, we may find that there are other sites where nesting is being attempted. It seems clear that their numbers are increasing generally as inland sightings of flocks and singletons are now the norm, and winter roosts at places like Kawhia and Pukorokoro Miranda appear to be growing year-on-year.

As of the end of April, the main Cattle Egret flocks at Piako (not counting the summering birds) and Rangiriri haven't turned up, but a few Kōtuku have started to appear, with Huntly once again being a reliable spot for at least 1. Wintering NZ Dabchick flocks are growing, with 54 counted on the humble Huntly sewage ponds on 22/4. Iain Thorpe reported 1 on the Tongariro River at Tūrangī, quite an unusual record for that location.

Of the ten Kākāpō that were released at Maungatautari Sanctuary Mountain to trial the viability of a breeding population here, only 3 have not breached the fence and the difficult decision was made to send 5 back to an offshore island for their safety. It appears quite a challenge containing these inquisitive birds, but it is encouraging that they have maintained good health. All remaining birds are still favouring the perimeter track and adjacent bush but it is hoped they will go on to settle into territories on the maunga proper.

A Lesser Frigatebird spent much of the summer around Great Mercury Island and the Matarangi area, a likely Hutton's Shearwater (rare in Waikato) was photographed off Whangamatā by Caiden and Simon Binzegger, several grounded Cook's Petrels were reported inland at a few sites including Hamilton Lake and the Cambridge area, and NZ Falcons were seen in Parana Park in urban Hamilton and on the Kaharoa Kokako track near Rotorua.

– RUSSELL CANNINGS

BAY OF PLENTY/VOLCANIC PLATEAU

Our region hosted Makarora junior field course attendees during April, primarily to visit the

ōi/Grey-faced Petrel colonies on Mauao (The Mount). Our autumn Bird Atlas squares are slowly being whittled down, with the Volcanic Plateau being a focus of late. Our Tauranga and Maketu harbour counts will be in June. Please contact Warwick Buckman (buckmanw@xtra.co.nz) if you are keen to help, he is seeking more eyes!

A record of 31 Royal Spoonbills at the Yatton Park roost in April bodes well as we look forward to the national count this winter. An Erect-crested Penguin was photographed at sea during a pelagic trip from Tauranga with Dolphin Safaris on 14/1. An Eastern Little Tern turned up in Katikati for Russell Cannings in February, 2 Hudsonian Godwits were seen at Little Waihi and Ohiwa on the same day in April, says Tim Barnard, and Ken George uncovered a Far Eastern Curlew at Wainui Inlet also in April. A possible Marsh Sandpiper was also reported by an overseas visitor the same month.

– PAUL CUMING

GISBORNE/WAIROA

The late summer months have seen some interesting observations in our region. Notable were a Weka and a Whio recorded in a damp paddock 5 minutes out of Gisborne. There have also been a range of pelagic species reported from cruise ships. However, these highly unlikely records have prompted me to emphasise on the local "Tairāwhiti Birds" Facebook page the importance of getting a photo or audio recording for a rare sighting to be taken seriously. Shortly after doing this there was a spate of sightings of "Weka" in Okitu, with a photo finally confirming our suspicion that they were immature Common Pheasants.

A more credible record was a Marsh Crake (with its call recorded) on the Taruhuru River, and a Spotless Crake heard in a wetland in the Gisborne industrial area. Graeme Atkins in Tikapa near Ruatoria reported that the 6 Emu that live on the floodplain of the Waiapu River which survived Cyclone Gabrielle have increased to 14. Circa 200 birds were released in the late 1990s, and there are 4 known wild flocks in the lower Waiapu.

– MALCOLM RUTHERFORD

NEW PLYMOUTH

For our February field trip, we walked Rerekapa Track. Birds encountered included Whiteheads, Silvereyes, a Long-tail Cuckoo (heard calling), and a Bellbird pair. In mid-February I was at Pukorokoro Miranda where I saw 8 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at the Piako wader roost and at the godwit hide with Adrian Riegen, he found a Great Knot in a flock of Red Knots (a lifer for me).

In March we visited Mahood-Lowe Reserve where NZ Fantail and Grey Warbler and Silvereyes were most numerous. Returning home, 1 fortunate member had brief views of a Whio on the nearby river. At our April meeting and AGM all incumbents were returned to office.

Guest speaker Kat Strang from East Taranaki Environment Collective spoke to us about their work at Everett Park, a remnant lowland forest east of Inglewood. The area was heavily trapped with help from local volunteers and schools under guidance from DOC. She also told us about the long-running work further into

the eastern hill country where pest control has been organised for many years, with help from some local landowners. North Island Brown Kiwi and Kokako have been reintroduced and are breeding successfully.

Three of us headed to Dannevirke for the last Toi Toi Wines-sponsored Atlas expedition. Joining with other keen birders we covered a lot of territory. The birding was initially hard going but despite some windy, cold conditions we counted over 60 species and submitted hundreds of Atlas checklists between us.

– PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

It has been an uncharacteristically quiet time for the Hawke's Bay branch. Both our February and March field trips had to be cancelled. In April, 8 members went searching for the Kōtuku White Herons that have been reported regularly since early March in the Haumoana area. From an initial report of a single bird, there are now 3 that are often seen in Grange Creek-Tukituki Estuary. We didn't see all 3 together but did find a couple in different areas, as well as good numbers of Kōtuku Ngutupapa Royal Spoonbills and a flotilla of circa 40 Kawau Tūi Little Black Shags. Apart from the Kōtuku, there have been only a couple of sightings of note: 1 Tarapirohe Black-fronted Tern spotted by Ron Jackson on 21/4 at the Tukituki estuary; and 1 Miromiro NZ Tomtit at Puketitiri, only the second to be seen there by Pam Turner in her life.

– THALIA SACHTLEBEN

WHANGANUI

As the sun set on 29 March, Whanganui's famed male Bar-tailed Godwit, AJD, set off with 4 others at 7:10 p.m. on his 16th northwards migration since being banded in October 2008. His late departure was likely due to persistent northerly winds blowing around his normal departure date (circa 25 March), but he left on the first occasion that the wind shifted south. Prior to that, he had spent the previous 3 months on the estuary, latterly in the company of up to 28 other godwits. As a result of Paul Gibson's book, *FEATS BEYOND AMAZING The Life Story of a Bar-tailed Godwit*, AJD's exploits have now garnered both local and international attention. A delegation from Ngāa Rauru, exploring how traditional knowledge (Mātauranga Māori) might be applied to better environmental management, especially of the Whanganui River, had visited Alaska last year to connect there with representatives of the Yup'ik people to share ideas about using traditional knowledge in this regard.

They had taken a copy of Paul's book with them. This was of particular interest as the Bar-tailed Godwit or Kūaka ('tegeteguaq' in Yup'ik) is also a culturally significant species there. The migration of godwits from Alaska to New Zealand and back, as recounted in Paul's book, served to strengthen the link among indigenous people, birds and their environments at opposite ends of the world. Following this, a group of Yup'ik travelled to Whanganui in mid-March in a reciprocal cultural exchange. During this, they attended a Climate Change Forum organised by Ngāa Rauru and others, and also visited the estuary to see AJD and other godwits. There, Paul Gibson, at the invitation of Tania Te



REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Huna (Ngaa Rauru), acted as their guide and participated with them in several associated cultural events. The high point of their visit was observing AJD's departure and taking the opportunity to bid him farewell on his journey north.

Paul Gibson later spoke about this in a *Nature Talks* presentation that he gave in mid-April to an audience of 140. His talk, titled *Bird Photography - Rare Beauties on Our Local Patch*, focused not only on the story of AJD and the Alaskans' visit, but also on the breeding of Nankeen Night Heron at Ūpokongaro. Jim Norris, Michael O'Shea and Paul, with incidental inputs from others, kept track of the number and fates of nests in the trees around the 'Behind the Door on 4' café. Overall, in a nesting season lasting from mid-November 2023 to mid-March 2024, they found 6 active nests that, together, fledged 10 chicks. This is an increase over the 4 nests and 6 fledged chicks recorded during the previous nesting season (2022-23).

Other species of interest seen in the past 3 months included 2 Pectoral Sandpipers at Koitiata Lagoon, where they were present for almost a month; 3 large flocks of White-fronted Terns, totalling 1,058 birds, counted by Ormond Torr; several sightings and a photograph of a Black-fronted Tern with the White-fronted Terns; several banded Caspian Terns, originating from Bell Island, Nelson; and a melanistic NZ Fantail that kept a couple of our photographers as happy as Larry.

- PETER FROST

MANAWATU

Up to 3 Australian Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon macrotarsa*) were spotted by Neill Haggarty between 6-8/4 at Manawatu River Estuary. A Little Egret was seen irregularly there during March and April, but it is still around.

Manawātū Estuary Trust held their annual "Farewell to the Birds" on 16/3. There was a good turnout of Manawātū Branch members, with their binos and scopes. Phil Battley talked about the Bar-tailed Godwit's behaviour before they fly off to Alaska, pointing out that a group of 16 godwits were displaying this behaviour on the day. Half an hour later the group took-off.

We are re-commencing our regular evening meetings, which we will have on the second Wednesday of the month. The first meeting is to be held on 8/5 at the Palmerston North Community Leisure Centre, 569 Ferguson Street, Palmerston North at 19:15.

Stephen Legg and Kirsten Olsen helped organise the Wairarapa NZ Bird Atlas Expedition (24-28/4). It was a great success with more than 60 bird species reported on more than 600 checklists in around 80 grid squares. A handful of us have also been getting around the North Island to cover under-surveyed grid squares before the project ends.

- KIRSTEN OLSEN

WAIRARAPA

Our first outing of the year was a walk from Mt Dick which is an outlier of the Tararua Range. We progressed a few hours westward through regrowth to reach original beech forest and found a good number of Tui and Bellbird. NZ Tomtit and Rifleman occur here,

but we didn't hear any. In early March several of us were involved with the Wairarapa Moana wading bird survey organised by Nikki McArthur. Unusual birds seen included 3 Cape Barren Geese, Pacific Golden Plover and 1 Pectoral Sandpiper.

April found us on a beautiful still morning back on the Tauherenikau Delta. On the lakeside track were uncountable flocks of Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Welcome Swallows. Some of the birds seen on the delta included Black-fronted Dotterels, Banded Dotterels, NZ Dabchicks, Royal Spoonbills, Black Shags, Little Shags, Caspian Terns, and huge numbers of Feral Pigeons. The Variable Oystercatchers that are invariably there were absent. Altogether we encountered 37 species!

In late April a small group of us visited the Wildbase Hospital and Recovery Centre in Palmerston North where had a first class escorted tour of the Veterinary Hospital. Current patients included a Shore Plover, a very cute 16-day-old kiwi chick, a Kereru, and a Sacred Kingfisher. The facilities and dedication of the staff were very impressive. After that, we enjoyed a tour of their recovery aviary where current residents included a Swamp Harrier, a Ruru, a Red-billed Gull and a Kereru.

- OLIVER DRUCE

WELLINGTON

The Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington region had a very active and exciting quarter! Most notably, the fifth decade of the Pauatahanui Inlet survey came to its conclusion. A wealth of data has been collected and we look forward to seeing the emerging trends investigated and ultimately published in *Notornis*. A huge thank you goes to Birds New Zealand Council member and former Vice President Ian Armitage for his diligent coordination of this monumental survey effort!

Similarly engaging, we had several exciting meetings with very interesting guest speakers including the State and Trends of Wellington Birds (by Nikki McArthur), the Young Birders Camp at Makarora (by Dominic Ward), and Hoiho care at Dunedin Wildlife Hospital (by Jordana Whyte).

There was an increase in sightings of Black-fronted Terns moving through the south Wellington and Kapiti Coast on migration around Easter with a high count of 17 seen in Princess Bay reported by Sally Eyre. A Kōtuku that stayed at Waimanu Lagoon in Waikanae during April-May proved popular with bird photographers.

This is my final quarter as Regional Representative so I want to thank all members of this great region again. My 3 years as RR here have been enjoyable and rewarding. You all truly make up a caring, diverse, knowledgeable, engaged, and fantastic region. I look forward to continuing to be part of this great region as a member, while I leave you in the very capable hands of Annemieke Hamilton (née Hendricks).

- JOHANNES FISCHER

NELSON

Following the resignation of Paul Griffiths, I am the new regional representative. I am a professional bird guide and bring many skills and much enthusiasm to the role. My full profile can be found in the latest edition of our

regional newsletter, Tōrea Pango. As we are hosting the annual conference this year our conference committee has been working flat out to ensure its success.

Most of the core planning and organisation is completed, the numbers attending look good, and there is an exciting line-up of speakers and events. Our regular programme of meetings and events has continued. At our Jan/Feb meeting, I gave a talk on various aspects of my work as a bird guide. It might seem like the perfect job, but there are some catches! Robin Toy gave what might potentially be the last Atlas update, while Sandy Toy showed a couple of fascinating videos.

The first part of our March meeting was our AGM with the usual election of officers etc. After the AGM, Rob Schuckard spoke about godwit movements between the Motueka Sandspit and Waimea East. With the partial abandonment of the Waimea east roosts during king tides there is a need to synchronise counts to avoid double-counting. The April meeting, held in the Richmond Library, started with a talk by Harry Allard on 'Nelson Haven long-term habitat changes and future management'. He discussed changes to the Haven's ecosystem over the years and the Nelson City Council's responsibility and plans for future management. This was followed by a report from Paul Bennett about a visit to a vulture reserve in Cambodia and the threats to the birds there.

Field trips and survey work have continued regularly with an Australasian Crested Grebe survey sadly producing negative results. Regular trips to Motueka Spit have been a feature, and banding of both SIPO and Ruddy Turnstone has taken place over several days. While rarities have been few, many members have enjoyed the White-winged Black Terns that have been present on the Boulder Bank. See you all in sunny Nelson at the start of June.

- MARK AYRE

MARLBOROUGH

Members Dan, Sam and Simon carried out some nocturnal atasing along the north bank of the Wairau River, picking up Little Owl in many spots and Ruru in a few locations too. As the Atlas project nears its end, we continue to try to focus our final efforts on those grid squares with little or no effort for the Autumn season. There have been some strong individual and team efforts to reach Atlas grid squares in remote or harder-to-reach areas. One of the biggest rewards is finding an unexpected species in a location or turning up an "expected" species that hadn't been observed in that grid square yet.

A juvenile Hoiho/Yellow-eyed Penguin was found ashore at the Wairau Bar. The bird was taken into care by DOC due to being at risk in a popular dog walking area. It was found to be underweight at only 3.6kg so was sent to the South Island Wildlife Hospital for rehabilitation. A lone Mute Swan has been frequenting the Blenheim WTP ponds lately. NZ Fantails have become common around Blenheim and coastal parts of Marlborough through Autumn. More Tui have also been observed around Blenheim, particularly in gum trees and around the Taylor River. A lot of Arctic Skuas have been seen in the Marlborough Sounds in the period before



▣ Whio on Flora Stream, a conference field trip site: Rebecca Bowater.



▣ Farewell to the Godwits, Foxton, 16 April: Michael Szabo.

their migration back to their Arctic breeding grounds.

Marlborough members plan to join eBird's Global Big Day on 11/5. Members will split up into teams and compete to see which group can observe the most species within the Marlborough Region on the day.

- PATRICK CROWE

CANTERBURY

Despite the low lake level at Lake Ellesmere, there were reports of multiple Arctic Skuas, White-winged Black Terns, and a single Antarctic Tern seen at the lake outlet in late February and early March. The Ashley Estuary continued to host some rare birds with two Common Terns, an Arctic Tern, a Sanderling and continuing Little Egrets. The Arctic Tern stayed for a very short period on 4/4. The Common Terns sparked debate as one of them with a red bill developed into its breeding plumage at the end of the season and was closely scrutinised to see if it was the default subspecies found in NZ (*longipennis*), or possibly a different subspecies or species altogether (*hirundo*). It was last seen in early April.

The Northern Shoveler at Pegasus Wetlands has returned, the earliest it has been sighted in recent years. An Australian Chestnut-breasted Shelduck was seen on the Tasman Delta near Glentanner for about a week in late March. A second Common Myna has been seen near New Brighton roundabout, alongside another one that has been there since 2018. There was some concern at the possibility of establishment, so it is being dealt with by Environment Canterbury.

Kōtuku have returned to Canterbury with 2 different individuals seen in Christchurch near McCormacks Bay and the Linwood-Charlesworth canal. One has also been seen in the Pegasus area.

Ben Ackerley has assumed the role of Canterbury Regional Recorder. We thank Nick Allen for his years of service and great work in the role. Our branch started 2024 with a variety of interesting talks: The Population of NZ Scaup by Brenda Green, Bird Migration by Richard Holdaway, and a talk by Pete McClelland about some of the projects he has been involved in. Members also took part in the Farewell to the Godwits event run by the City Council and Bev Alexander's rambles. If you would like to contribute to the

Canterbury branch, either with a talk, newsletter article, or significant bird report, please contact me or our RR Anita Spencer.

- SAMUEL AMARIS

OTAGO

Late summer and autumn have been busy for our members. The final summer Atlas survey ended with the highest seasonal square coverage, with 96.26% of squares having some coverage, totalling 145 species. With just a month until the end of the final autumn it is sitting at 89.66% with 131 species and this is following the great effort from the April Atlas field trip to Alexandra region where 15 squares (6 of which had had no previous autumn coverage) were surveyed, resulting in 79 checklists totalling 41 species. A further field trip took place around Middelmarsh where the most notable record was a Tui on Old Dunstan Road. We were delighted that Otago Regional Recorder Richard Scofield, who has organised so many Atlas trips, won the February Atlas Challenge. The Otago region has also been updated with an eBird pelagic filter for records beyond 10 nautical miles, a great as many pelagic records are submitted in our region.

Records of interest: moulting penguins along the Otago Coast included Eastern Rockhopper (Long and Allans beaches), Tawaki Fiordland Crested at various sites in the Catlins, Snarcs Crested (Hoopers Inlet), and Erect-crested. While a few of these birds were injured and required attention at Dunedin Wildlife Hospital, many were reportedly in good body condition and unfortunately still needed uplifting to complete moult in captivity due to their chosen sites being unsafe for them due to human and dog disturbance. A Weka was seen in central Dunedin (no doubt irresponsibly released there); Reef Herons at the Nuggets, Kākā Point and Leith River mouth; 45 Royal Spoonbills at Hawkesbury Lagoon; more spoonbills at Steamer Bason Dunedin along with a Little Penguin; Kōtuku regularly at Glenorchy; a Marsh Crake at Bannockburn; Little Black Shags at Kingston and Wiakouaiti; a Kea at Hayward Point; 25 NZ Piptits at Coronet Peak; 60 Indian Peafowl at Chatto Creek; and 2 African Collared Doves at Ngapuna. A 2006 Blueskin Bay-flagged Bar tailed Godwit was recorded in April 2024 in Yalu Jiang in China.

On 28/4 the Birds New Zealand Tomahawk Lagoon birdwatching day was once again a successful part of the Wild Dunedin Festival.

Members are also being encouraged to carry out autumn crake playback surveys as part of the Otago regional wetland bird monitoring project. Our branch is also organising a Winter wader count on 30/6 and a Winter Royal Spoonbill survey on 13/7.

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

SOUTHLAND

Several Southland members had an enjoyable and informative time helping David Melville at the wader banding group cannon-netting event at Riverton in March. While they were targeting Ruddy Turnstones the site is unpredictable and the birds weren't playing ball so they ended up catching oystercatchers. Coincidentally a Ruddy Turnstone which had been banded in China on 7/3/18 was photographed by Kit Hustler at Howells Point near Riverton on 10/4/24, which is a great record.

The new wetland at Waituna Lagoon dubbed "Big Pond" continues to deliver with Sean Jacques observing a Whiskered Tern on 14/3. The local iwi has continued their restoration work putting in another scrape but unfortunately this one isn't observable from the road. We are working to get access. Joe Bliss recorded a White-winged Black Tern at the lagoon on 22/1 which hung around for a couple of weeks.

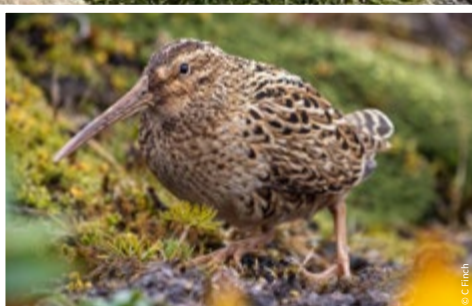
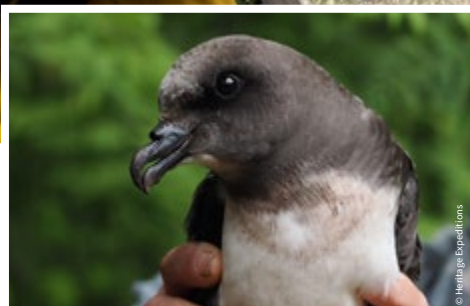
Glenda Rees has been helping out the Southern NZ Dotterel programme with recording bands and field work. Glenda has taken some great photos of this species and is a passionate advocate. This is crucial as the flock count looks like it is down on last year.

A Little Egret was recorded at Fortrose for 2 weeks in mid-March and a flock of up to 30 Cattle Egrets have been observed roosting at a smaller lagoon near the southern coast. This is the largest group seen in Southland for many years. Interestingly the birds haven't been reported anywhere else which probably reflects the low density of birders in the south and the number of dairy farms/suitable habitat in the area. Lastly, Little Black shags are being more commonly seen in the south with 6 reported recently in the Invercargill Estuary.

- PETE MCCLELLAND

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

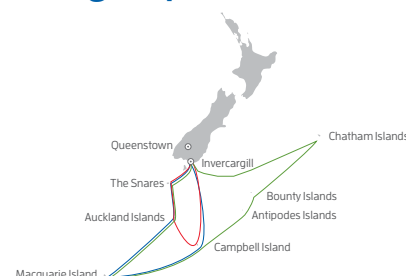
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