KUAKA







Welcome to the newsletter of the South Auckland Branch of Birds NZ

Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

Issue 57 – JUNE 2024

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Greetings Kuaka readers. The five-year Bird Atlas Project is complete. Thanks to everyone who supplied data for our region. It will be interesting to see how the results compare with the two previous censuses.

This month we are conducting the Manukau and Firth of Thames wader census and the spoonbill census. Contact Sue or Tony H if you are able to participate (see last month's kuaka for the dates).

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday July 9 at 7.30pm

A great kotuku ngutu papa/spoonbill photo from Big Bay, courtesy of our Awhitu correspondent Kate. On the right is a very alert kotare at Panmure Basin by Mike Clark.



Editor: Wendy Goad

Regional Representative: Sue Frostick. 09 2672495 suefro@xtra.co.nz

PROGRAMME FOR 2024

Monthly Meetings: held on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Papakura Croquet Club, 1 Chapel Street Papakura. Meetings start at 7:30. Visitors welcome. \$3.00 donation to cover costs please

Jul 9	Monthly meeting	Lucy Hawley on the work of Ak Airport wildlife rangers
Aug 13	Monthly meeting	Taneal Gulliver on bellbirds, dabchicks & mallee fowl

SO MANY WAYS TO HELP OUR BIRDS







taken by Mitch de Beer from Birds Auckland

SPEAKER FOR JUNE



Photo credit : Darren Markin

Alex Wilson is the Senior Ranger for the Department of Conservation's Tara-iti/NZ Fairy Tern Programme. Tara-iti are our most endangered bird with fewer than 40 surviving today (that figure includes only nine breeding females). These manu breed on the coast north of Tamaki Makaurau - Papakanui, Mangawhai, Waipu and Pakiri. They overwinter on the Kaipara Harbour. Whilst closely related to the fairy terns of Australia and New Caledonia, the tara-iti is a distinctive sub-species, with differing colouration and life style. In appearance they are very similar to the migratory little tern, indeed tara-iti were not recognised in NZ until the 1950's. The manu diet comprises juvenile flounder, gobies, elvers, shrimps and other small fish. Breeding takes place between October and February when the females lay one or two eggs in a scrape in a sand/shell bank. They can re-nest up to three times if the first nest fails.

Once wide-spread around the coast of Te Ika a Maui their numbers plummeted for all the usual reasons: loss of habitat (humans like summers on white sandy beaches too), predation (both introduced and native), environmental impacts (e.g. floods, storms, coastal erosion), and human impacts (e.g. drones, dogs, vehicles, horses, etc, etc, etc).



The plight of the manu was acknowledged in the 1980's when the then NZ Wildlife Service initiated protection (voluntary rangers and fencing of nest sites) which halted the decline.

A recovery plan was developed by DOC in 2005, but the hard mahi only got underway in 2017 when the recovery plan was reviewed, a new plan developed and a permanent recovery team established. The main aims of the programme are: Full management of current breeding; Over-winter management; Establishment of new breeding sites; Develop a captive rearing program for maximising productivity

Captive breeding trials commenced in the 2019/20 season with eggs from endangered nests (e.g. flooded, or deserted by parents) being taken to Auckland Zoo for incubation and hand-rearing, then transferred to a purpose-built aviary, at Te Arai, to develop their flying and foraging skills before a 'soft' release.

The 2023/24 season was a great success for the management programme with continued refinement of management strategies, the expansion of predator control initiatives, and notably, the absence of extreme weather events that have plagued the birds in previous years season. A total of 22 eggs were laid by nine females, resulting in the successful hatching of 18 chicks, 13 of which fledged (including four captive reared).

The option to not only rescue weather-imperilled eggs, but also to proactively increase seasonal chick production through intensive management [including captive rearing] holds great promise for elevating numbers and eventually seeing the tara-iti population reach the critical threshold at which they can again become self-sustaining.

One of the four zoo-reared birds was large enough to be equipped with a GPS tracker prior to leaving the aviary at Te Arai, and the data collected as to its movements between the Kaipara and the east coast is valuable for the researchers. Unfortunately, the harness for the tracker failed prematurely, limiting the data collected.



SIGHTINGS

- Kotuku seen at Port Waikato and Whitford
- Kotuku reported from Puhinui and Mangere presumably the same individual
- A matuku hurepo/bittern spotted on the Port Waikato Rd near Klondyke Rd
- > 25 kotuku ngutu papa/spoonbills seen at Meremere and 55 near Klondyke Rd
- > 2 tuturiwhatu/NZ dotterels at Port Waikato
- ➤ 8 pohowera/banded dotterels at the Port, including one with a transmitter that isn't working because the aerial is broken.
- Flocks of 300/400 spur winged plovers reported from Ardmore Airfield an aviation hazard

There are unconfirmed reports of a barn owl from the Onewhero area.

A large flock of sulphur crested cockatoos (40+) was reported from the Hunua district.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Gwen has asked that we all keep an eye out for tuturiwhatu/NZ dotterel in open paddocks, ploughed fields, construction sites, and the like. The manu will be on the lookout for nesting sites (nesting starts August/September).

Three of our members attended the Birds NZ AGM in Nelson over Kings B'day weekend. There was some consternation about the name-tags that were handed out to them. Two of our attendees were shown as being members of Auckland Branch, and the other attendee was shown as being from Waikato Branch – an unfortunate oversight on somebody's part!!

On a more positive note, Wendy & Nigel received a Meritorious Service Award for being among the top five contributors to the NZ Bird Atlas Project.

And well done to Sue Frostick for all her hard mahi motivating our members to participate in the Atlas Project and for putting in so much effort herself to ensure all squares in our rohe (and many in Waikato as well) had counts completed.

As a matter of interest, 309 species were recorded from across Aotearoa. The four most common species were: pahirini /chaffinch, manu pango/blackbird, tauhou, and riroriro.



RR REPORT FOR JUNE 2024

Winter is here and the Birds NZ Atlas project is finally at an end after five years of incredible effort. I would particularly like to thank our local members and others from around the country who have contributed checklists for our region over that time. And special congratulations to South Auckland members Wendy Hare and Nigel Milius, who were two of the five winners of this year's Meritorious Service Awards (MSA), in recognition for their huge contributions towards the NZ Bird Atlas project. Not only have they done an amazing amount of work in their 'home' district of Thames-Coromandel and the wider South Auckland region, but they have also covered a huge number of squares around the rest of the country.

Here are a few atlas statistics for South Auckland region:

100% of 'our' 100 squares have received at least some data over the 5 years, even if it was only five minutes in one season. Our top five squares by number of species recorded are:

AF72	Miranda	106 species
AC67	Ambury	100 species
AF74	Piako	86 species
AC69	Whitford/Howick	83 species
AE68	Karaka	76 species

165 bird species were recorded in our region. The top species (by number of squares they were recorded in) were:

Welcome Swallow	98 out of the 100 squares in our rohe
Australasian Harrier	97
Grey Warbler	96
Eurasian Blackbird	96
Sacred Kingfisher	96
New Zealand Fantail	95
Silvereye	95
Common Chaffinch	94
European Starling	94
House Sparrow	94
Spur-winged Plover	94

Even though the atlas has finished, I encourage you to keep contributing checklists to EBird on a regular basis. Please note the following:

- If you still have checklists in the EBird app on your phone which are dated prior to 01 Jun 2024, these should be uploaded to the atlas by 31 Jul 2024
- Once this is done, go into settings then portal in the app, and change from New Zealand Bird Atlas to

SKULL DISCOVERIES REVEAL GIANT AUSTRALIAN PREHISTORIC BIRD LOOKED A BIT LIKE A GOOSE

ABC Science - By environment reporter Peter de Kruijff Posted Mon 3 Jun 2024 at 7:30pm



A scientific illustration of what Genyornis newtoni might have looked like. (Supplied: Flinders University/Jacob Blokland)/

This is what one of Australia's long-dead species of Dromornithidae — a group of gigantic birds also known as mihirung (Aboriginal for giant bird) — looked like, according to a study published in the journal Historical Biology.

The prehistoric bird in question, *Genyornis newtoni*, was first described in 1896, but the only understanding of what its head looked like came from a few broken bits of fossilised skull, which could not be reconstructed. Early assumptions were that its head may have looked similar to one of the other seven Dromornithidae species, or like that of an emu.

Now, a cache of six partial skull specimens has strengthened the theory *G. newtoni* shares commonalties with modern geese and the South American southern screamer (details below).

A beak through time

The new skull material was gathered around 600km north of Adelaide. The fossil discovery means we now know a lot more about the biology of the prehistoric bird dubbed the "giga-goose," according to Flinders University palaeontologist and study lead author Phoebe McInerney.

The bird was a bulky bush chook that would have stood about 2 metres or more, and hit around 230kilograms on the bathroom scales. "The beak itself is very goose-like, so we have this wide, flat, rounded end," Dr McInerney said. But Dr McInerney said bones and muscles on *G. newtoni's* head shared many anatomical similarities with today's southern screamers.

"They also interestingly have features that allow them to open and close their jaw underwater ... without impacting their hearing or [water] going up into their palate or nose," she said.

Mihirung lived during the Oligocene (33.9 to 23mya) to about 45,000 years ago in the late Pleistocene when *G. newtoni* died out. Dr McInerney says mihirung may have diverged from the screamer lineage about 66mya when Australia, South America and Antarctica, which were part of the supercontinent Pangaea, started to break away from each other.

The new study shows that they share lots of skull details with the screamer from South America but the exact ecology of mihirung is hard to infer. They lack obvious aquatic adaptations such as duck bills or paddling feet, but it remains possible they were closely associated with water.

What happened to the 'giga-goose'?

As far as is known, *G.newtoni* was the last of the mihirung to go extinct. Because of crossover with people, who were in Australia about 65,000 years ago, there is a popular idea that egg consumption by First Nations people contributed to the big bird dying out.

Another theory has involved climate change and the drying of the central Australian landscape which is in an arid zone.

Dr McInerney said she thought a mixture of egg predation and disappearing wetland environments resulted in the end of the bird. "I think this species was highly adapted to wetland environments and the edges of creeks and other really flourishing healthy areas where there's lots of water," she said. "They probably would have gone extinct eventually if humans hadn't arrived."

The skulls haven't given up all their secrets yet. Dr McInerney said she planned to analyse *G*. newtoni's inner ear bones to figure out how the bird moved across the landscape. "The inner ear is more related to locomotion and balance rather than hearing," she said. "We can make inferences about how they moved and how that changed as they grew giant."

Source: ABC Science - By environment reporter Peter de Kruijff Posted Mon 3 Jun 2024. Edited for this publication



SOUTH AMERICAN SOUTHERN SCREAMER

Range from Colombia to northern Argentina.

Stand 75cm tall

Have large spurs on their wings that they use in territorial disputes.

Widespread and fairly common.

Have loud alarm calls – screams – which can carry for several km's

Preferred habitat is wetlands.

Chicks can run and swim very soon after hatching

Did you hear the one about the crow and the telephone pole? He wanted to make a long-distance caw

How do crows stick together in a flock? Velcrow



New Zealand Falcon Survey Newsletter #23 1 June 2024

Some items of interest from the newsletter,

The NZ Falcon Survey has just completed 18 years. The records of encounters received by the NZ Falcon Survey are submitted to the ebird database. As of 31 May 2023, 9,220 records had been submitted.

Two reports were received for January of falcons cooling off, first for 12 Jan 2024 in a backyard pool at Seatoun Heights in Wellington and the second, on Jan 20, in the sprinkler on a lawn at Flaxmere near Hastings.



(Hint: read the sign)

HEALTH AND SAFETY

A reminder that we need to have a safety briefing at the commencement of field trips. The Birds NZ website (<u>www.birdsNZ.org.nz</u>) has a **Hazard and Risk Assessment form**, an **On-Site Risk Assessment form**, and an **Incident Reporting form** that you can use.

These documents outline potential hazards and risks that could occur in any setting related to the type of activity and particular place that the event is likely to be operating in, together with possible control measure to eliminate or minimise risk. An on-site risk assessment will still need to be undertaken each time a team visits a site to review and identify any new hazards or change in risk no matter how familiar the participants are with the site.

Any incidents on field trips or meetings that result in harm, need to be notified to the RR (Sue) as soon as possible.

A copy of the Health and Safety Policy Statement is set out below.

Health and Safety Policy Statement

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 is the workplace health and safety law in NZ. This Act sets out the principles, duties and rights of people and organisations in relation to workplace health and safety. All organisations have a legal obligation for ensuring that activities they undertake meet their health and safety responsibilities.

Birds New Zealand is committed to ensuring that all observations, research and any other activities related to birding that are arranged and led by the society are safe, healthy and enjoyable. Members, non-member volunteers, employees and contractors of the society and others who carry out activities in any capacity for Birds New Zealand must stay healthy and be safe. Relevant information will be provided to achieve this.

Everyone has a role in maintaining a healthy and safe environment through:

* Valuing and prioritising health and safety.

Hope you enjoyed the read.

Don't forget to check out our Facebook page

