

# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

## OSNZ — Birds New Zealand

[birdsnsz.org.nz](https://birdsnsz.org.nz) and [birdsnsz.org.nz/society-publications/notornis/](https://birdsnsz.org.nz/society-publications/notornis/)

December 2023



### Greetings

2023 is fast drawing to a close as is the eBird Atlas scheme which finishes at the end of May 2023. While over 52,000 checklists have been submitted for the wider Wellington Region, there are still Atlas squares, especially in the Wairarapa that have very few checklists. Be sure while out birding to keep an eye out for banded/flagged birds and inform the DOC Banding Office if you see a marked bird as well as recording them in

eBird. Examples from our region of recently observed banded/flagged South Island pied oyster catchers, banded dotterel and little penguin highlight the value of observations of banded/flagged birds.

I very much appreciate contributions to the Wellington Newsletter – these can be varied in nature but should have an avian flavour and related to our region.

Best wishes and great birding for 2024

Geoff de Lisle

## Wellington Birds New Zealand Monthly Meetings

We are continuing our hybrid meeting setup, thus, you can join the meeting on the first Monday of the month.

1. In person at the Te Papa Collections Building, 169 Tory Street.
2. You can join the meeting from 7.30pm and will start at 7.45pm.

There will not be a meeting in January.

**The next meeting will be on February the 12th** (not the 5th as it clashes with Waitangi Day). "There will be no dedicated guest speaker for the February meeting, as this is our Annual Members Night! Instead I encourage all members to think of what they could present at our Annual Members Night! I'm counting on you, our great students, in particular! Anyone who has something to share for 5-10 min, please get in touch with me as I will be coordinating the agenda. Thank you! I am also considering holding the Members Night as an in person meeting only following the success that we had in December with an in person only meeting. If anyone objects for whatever reason, please do get in touch with me, so I can reconsider."

Johannes Fischer, Wellington Regional Representative.

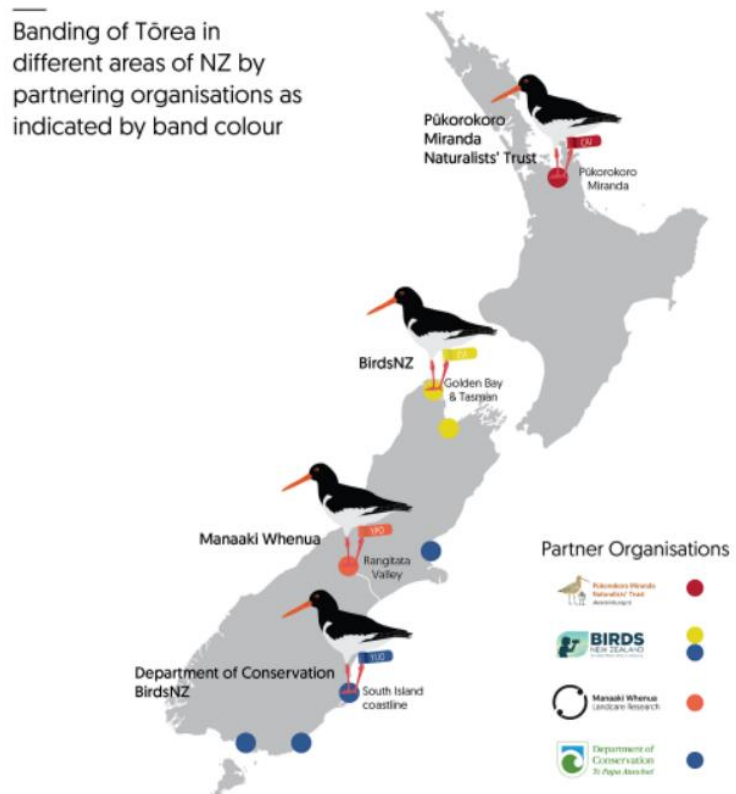
[birds.wellington@birdsnsz.org.nz](mailto:birds.wellington@birdsnsz.org.nz)

### Recent Meetings

October 2<sup>nd</sup>, **Pascale Lubbe, Otago University: *How New Zealand Got its Birds***. Pascale explored the origins of New Zealand birds and described when various species were first identified in New Zealand. Fossils are providing an increasing understanding of the sequence of the accumulation of birds in New Zealand. The "early birds" were wrens, followed later by moa, and later still kokako, huia, saddleback, mohua, tui and bellbird. More recently still saw the appearance of takahe, fernbird and laughing owl. The most recent additions to New Zealand's avi-fauna include immigrants from Australia. The accumulation of bird species will continue with self-introductions, many from Australia.

<https://www.pascalelubbe.com/>

November 6<sup>th</sup>, Anne Schlesselmann (Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research): **Research to better protect mobile species: Tōrea on the move.** Anne's talk summarised ongoing research focusing on South Island pied oystercatcher (SIPO) being carried out by a range of partners including Birds New Zealand, Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalist Trust, Department of Conservation as well as Landcare. The Landcare studies are based on the breeding grounds on the Rangitata valley. Nesting birds are being monitored on the Rangitata with both adults and fledglings being banded and flagged. The Rangitata birds are being marked with orange flags. SIPO marked at other locations have different coloured bands (see map). Adults have a unique 3 letter code while the juveniles have a two digit code. Some of the birds have been fitted with solar-powered GPS tags enabling them to be tracked to post breeding grounds. The adults follow a flyway that proceeds north on the western side of the North Island to Pukorokoro / Miranda and environs. The first migration of fledglings is more varied including to a range of locations including the Hawkes Bay and visits to Pauatahanui. The conservation of SIPO is complicated by the birds spending much of their time outside DOC protected areas, in flyways and stopover sites.



An important aspect of the Landcare research is the development of a model that covers inland breeding, the summer migration, coastal watching, and the spring migration. Such a model will help identify measures for the conservation of this species, including the time spent away from the breeding grounds.

Wellington members are reminded to keep an eye out for marked SIPO. Two SIPO tagged as juveniles have been sighted in our region. Orange 42 (pictured left) has been seen on a number of occasions on the Pauatahanui inlet. Orange 82 was seen in November in the Ohau estuary (pictured right).



December 4<sup>th</sup>, **Peter Vaughan (Monash University)**, presented findings of his studies on **Vanuatu Petrels**. The Vanuatu Petrel was first described in 2001 and the nesting area on Vanua Larva was not discovered until 2009. Vanua Larva is an active volcano with the last major eruption in 1965. The Vanuatu petrel nest high on the island where Peter has been studying them, incorporating the use of GPS and geolocator trackers. He observed the birds taking short range foraging trips as well as 3000 km flights.

An informative and entertaining podcast by Peter Vaughan can be found at the following link. Petrel Heads in Love, as part of the What the Duck series.

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/what-the-duck/what-the-duck!/102809546>

## Zealandia - Routine Pest Audit Finds Dead Weasel in Trap

On 19 October it was announced on the Zealandia Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Zealandia/>) that a weasel had been found dead in a trap. The weasel was caught in a DOC200 trap at the southern end of the sanctuary. The find occurred in the middle of a routine pest audit and there have not been any signs of predation or the presence of other mammalian predators. How the weasel gained entry to the sanctuary has not been determined. In response to the finding of the weasel additional checks have been made on the integrity of the fence and additional traps have been set. In August 2019 a weasel was detected but was not re-detected and it was assumed that it either left the sanctuary or had died. In October 2018 a weasel was detected and subsequently trapped.

<https://www.visitzealandia.com/Whats-On/ArtMID/1150/ArticleID/512/Routine-Pest-Audit-Finds-Dead-Weasel-in-Trap?fbclid=IwAR001c1I2J2X-GVC2d2718jmaKV4ONyShIBQW3LiOqIZ2nPnFOO1R0hxuD8>

## Rats, stoats and weasels have been eliminated from the Miramar Peninsula

November 2023. *Predator Free Wellington and the Miramar Peninsula community are celebrating the elimination of rats, stoats and weasels from the Miramar Peninsula. James Willcocks, Project Director for Predator Free Wellington, describes this as a massive milestone that has been hard won. "It takes a lot of persistence, resilience, and dedication to reach zero rats in an urban environment and we thank everyone who has stuck with us on this journey," said James. "The project has relied on the support of the 20,000 residents on the peninsula and involved almost every third household, business, school and kindergarten, hundreds of volunteers, technical experts, and our foundation partners Greater Wellington Regional Council, Wellington City Council, Predator Free 2050 Ltd, NEXT Foundation and Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika.*

<https://www.pfw.org.nz/resources/news/rats-stoats-and-weasels-have-been-eliminated-from-the-miramar-peninsula/>

Regional Representative: **Johannes Fischer** [birds.wellington@birdsng.org.nz](mailto:birds.wellington@birdsng.org.nz)

Regional Recorder: Peter Hodge [peter.hodge@gmail.com](mailto:peter.hodge@gmail.com)

Pauatahanui Survey: Ian Armitage [ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz)

Matiu / Somes Island survey, Shane Cotter, [heather.shane@xtra.co.nz](mailto:heather.shane@xtra.co.nz)

Newsletter, Geoff de Lisle, [osnzwell@gmail.com](mailto:osnzwell@gmail.com)

## Makaro / Ward Island – Shane Cotter

Makaro / Ward Island is on the eastern side of the harbour, about 1.7 km west of the town of [Eastbourne](#). It is about 250 metres long and 80 metres wide, with the long axis aligned north–south. The significantly larger [Matiu / Somes Island](#) lies about 5 km northwest. *The Port Nicholson Block (Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) Claims Settlement Act 2009 (Settlement Act) established a six-member Harbour Islands Kaitiaki Board comprising three members appointed by Trustees of the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust and three members appointed by the Minister of Conservation. The Kaitiaki Board is the administering body of the Harbour Islands Scientific and Historic Reserves with functions, obligations, and powers of an administering body under the Reserves Act 1977. Makaro / Ward island is Scientific Reserve and is pest-free.*



Shane Cotter has been birding on Makaro / Ward Island for many years with access to the island by DOC boat or kayaking from the Eastbourne beach. He has over 30 eBird checklists from Makaro / Ward Island which date back to 2003. These checklists include some with detailed summaries of nesting birds. Recently Shane has been banding little penguins on Makaro / Ward Island as part of the Wellington Harbour Islands project. This addition will provide information on the movement of birds between the various penguin nesting sites in Wellington Harbour.

The following is a summary of Shane's trip on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2023. He kayaked to the island from Muritai beach, Eastbourne under ideal boating conditions.

- Variable oystercatcher, approximately 10 birds, with one nest with 2 eggs on the southern end of the island.
- Spotted shags. Five nests on the northwest corner of the island.
- Black backed gulls. Around 150 birds and many nests with 1-3 eggs but no chicks yet. Nests are present all over the island including the top area under bush.
- Red billed gulls. Approximately 100 birds with many nests (50) with 1-2 eggs but no chicks yet. Nests located at the northern end of the island, on the northeast and north centre points with few on the south side of Northwest point.
- White-fronted terns. Approximately 100 birds with many nests (50) and a single egg. No chicks yet.
- Kakariki (red-crowned parakeet) 2 seen.
- Canada geese – 10 birds – breeding.
- White faced storm petrel 2 birds in burrow at southern end. C-34663 (caught and banded there previously) with unbanded bird in burrow. No egg. This bird was banded by me with Graeme Taylor and Kieran Cotter present on 20 November 2016.
- Little penguin / Korora. Four occupied nests, two nests with a single adult and 2 chicks, and two nests each with 2 chicks. Neither of the adults were flipper banded or web tagged.

Early December 2001 a white-faced storm petrel was found by Saskia Woodin burrow on egg (broken). <https://ebird.org/newzealand/checklist/S49141366> Shane commented, "Amazing that a single burrow has persisted over this length of time with different occupants present. How do they attract new partners when the previous one dies in such a remote location for storm petrels?"

Further observations from Shane, “No dead birds on beach but a little rubbish is starting to build up around the coast. The weeding team (or whoever they are) have done a fantastic job with mallow. Normally there are hundreds of plants but I saw very very few. There were about 3 flowering plants on the steep western cliffs and a few small plants scattered about and that was it. I removed about 15 small plants leaving just the 3 larger plants that were unreachable without ropes. Well done to the weeding team. Amazing!!! One seal on island southwest corner.”

## Queensgate Shopping Centre responsible for sticky gel on roof that killed birds

*“Queensgate Shopping Centre has confirmed it is responsible for putting down a sticky gel that killed a number of birds.*

*Seventeen swallows (Welcome swallows) were found coated in a glue-like substance near the city's Queensgate Shopping Centre in Lower Hutt.*

*All of the birds found with the substance last week and over the weekend have died.*

*In a statement Queensgate apologised for any distress and harm the situation had caused.*

*The shopping centre said the birds had come into contact with a non-poisonous, non-toxic, tacky bird repellent gel that aimed to discourage birds from landing and roosting in external areas of the centre where bird netting could not be installed.*

*Queensgate said it used a recommended gel in certain outside areas of the shopping centre and as soon as it was made aware of the situation its maintenance team arrived on site on Friday morning to remove the gel. It said it was now reassessing its bird deterrent options, including the application of the gel, to ensure it installed a solution that will not harm the local wildlife.*

*SPCA said it was aware of the situation and investigating, but was unable to comment further.” 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, RNZ.*

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/501823/queensgate-shopping-centre-responsible-for-sticky-gel-on-roof-that-killed-birds>

Note: There are multiple gel-based bird-repellent products commercially available for use in New Zealand. These products are used for so-called pest bird species such as feral pigeons and sparrows. While they are non-toxic there is a recommendation to “not apply on locations where desirable species of birds might become entangled in the repellent.”

## Mana Island – long-tailed cuckoo

Annemieke and Jaz Hamilton recorded a long-tailed cuckoo on Mana Island on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of November. What is assumed to be same bird was observed by Dallas Bishop & Geoff de Lisle from the 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of November in the area between the start of the South Tirohanga track and the takahe pens by the workshop. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December Graeme Taylor reported a long-tailed cuckoo in the same area. This is only the second long-tailed cuckoo reported in eBird on Mana Island with Colin Miskelly observing a bird from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 2008. Long-tailed cuckoo are parasitic, laying a single egg in the nests of whitehead, brown creeper and yellowhead. Whitehead have been successfully translocated to Tiritiri Matangi, Zealandia and Mana Island but long-tailed cuckoo have yet to colonise them as breeders (NZBirdsOnline). In contrast, shining cuckoo which parasitise grey warbler are regularly recorded each spring/summer on Mana Island. In recent years grey warbler only occur on Mana Island in very low numbers.



## Birds New Zealand Wellington branch pelagic trip report

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November Wellington Birds New Zealand held a pelagic seabird trip to Cook Strait on the Seafarer II skippered by Jono Delich. A plentiful supply of chum attracted a range of species close to the boat. The trip was organised by Michael Szabo and Johannes Fischer. Highlights of the trip to the Nicholson Canyon were Northern Royal Albatross, Salvin's Albatross, White-capped Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, Northern Giant Petrel and Westland Petrel. Pictures – Michael Szabo.

### Trip list

Northern Royal Albatross (4)  
Salvin's Albatross (17)  
White-capped Albatross (12)  
Little Penguin  
Northern Giant Petrel (1)  
Southern Giant Petrel (2)  
Westland Petrel (27)  
Cape Petrel (5)  
Fluttering Shearwater (10)  
Hutton's Shearwater (4)  
Buller's Shearwater (1)

Flesh-footed Shearwater (2)  
Short-tailed Shearwater (1)  
Sooty Shearwater (16)  
Spotted Shag  
Pied Shag  
Little Pied Shag  
Little Black Shag  
White-fronted Tern  
Red-billed Gull  
Southern Black-backed Gull  
Common Dolphin

For more numbers see the following eBird checklists.

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S153777154>

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S153777494>

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S153777170>

Link to post with more

photos: [https://www.facebook.com/groups/8577262 ... 076282277/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/8577262...076282277/)

<https://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=12455>

Michael reported that the Seafarer II stopped at Makaro / Ward Island on the way back to see the Tara White-fronted Tern and Tikitiki Kawau Spotted Shag colonies at the north end: Spotted Shag: 15 birds and 10 nests.

White-fronted Tern: 9 nests and 32 birds.

Red-billed Gull: 20 nests and 42 birds.

<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S153777494>



## Little penguins – Matiu / Somes Island

There is a long history of studies of little penguins on Matiu / Somes Island. Fred Kinsky (1960) from the Dominion Museum carried out an extensive study of penguins over two breeding seasons (1954-56 & 1956-1958). Leigh Bull (2000) carried out a further study on little penguin breeding on Matiu / Somes in 1995-97. In the early 2000s Rod Cossee from DOC, flipper banded little penguins on Matiu / Somes Island. The major change on Matiu / Somes in the 2000s was the instillation of over 250 nest boxes. These are now the nest of choice for little penguins and has greatly facilitated research on these birds. In 2008 Graeme Taylor and Reg Cotter started a new series of studies on different methods for marking birds as well as carrying out an annual census of breeding success. Mike Rumble took over management of these studies until the start of the 2023/24 breeding season. A new DOC application by Geoff de Lisle and Dallas Bishop will continue the monitoring of breeding success for the next five years.

The use of flipper bands has been a vital component for providing information on the movement of little penguins from their nesting sites on Matiu / Somes Island. Two recent examples of bird movements follow.

A flipper banded little penguin was found on a Kaikoura beach injured as a result of a dog attack in August 2023. The injured bird was sent to the South Island Wildlife Hospital in Christchurch. Unfortunately the injuries were severe and a damaged eye had to be removed. Given that little penguins use sight for feeding the injured bird could not be released back into the wild. Fortunately, the bird was able to be housed in the Antarctic Centre in Christchurch with other injured little penguins. This bird was reported in the national press and has been named Matiu. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/cutestuff/301007724/after-a-160km-swim-a-dog-attack-and-losing-an-eye-little-blue-penguin-finally-has-a-name-and-a-home>

“Matiu” P-52049 was banded on 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2022 as a chick and weighed 1160g at banding. Matiu was never seen again on Matiu / Somes. It was raised in nestbox NP34 located on the northern point (NP) of Matiu Somes Island. The nestbox is situated under low shrubs close to the rocky shore.

Parents:

P-51647 banded as an adult in NP34 on 15 August 2014

P-51723 banded as an adult in NP34 on 19 September 2020

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/2018915110/facebook-poll-used-to-name-rescued-penguin-at-antarctic-centre>

**Places for Penguins** Places for Penguins (PfP) is the Forest and Bird group that are providing predator control, nest boxes and plantings around the Wellington south coast to allow little penguins to safely breed. They are also monitoring nest boxes to record breeding success. In November they observed a metal banded penguin sitting on two eggs in an area they regularly monitor. Places for Penguins are marking little penguins with micro-chips and realised that the metal banded bird most likely came from Matiu / Somes Island. Kerry Shaw (Coordinator for PfP) notified the Matiu / Somes Island group of the exciting news.

An update from Kat Smith (PfP) included a photo of the banded bird (**P53838**) and 2 small chicks. The nestbox is in Māhanga Bay (MB06) which is not one of their microchipping bays.



**P53838** was flipper banded on Matiu / Somes as a chick on 11 Dec 2021 in an area known as "Caretakers Cottage" (Box CC05) - the box is close to the nursery area near the top of the island.

The chick weighed 620g, which is rather light, but only had 20% down remaining. The sibling chick (700g) banded the same day had 40% down. No adults were present in the box. Neither bird was recorded in the colony after their banding date and have not been back since.

The nesting in an area outside where the little penguin was raised appears to be a rare event. The Matiu / Somes penguin group greatly appreciated Places for Penguins reporting this finding. All little penguins that are banded as adult on Matiu / Somes are being checked for the presence of micro-chips. Currently no birds marked on the Wellington south coast have been identified on Matiu Somes. Photo: Kat Smith, **P53838** with two chicks.

Bull, L. (2000) Fidelity and breeding success of the blue penguin *Eudyptula minor* on Matiu-Somes Island, Wellington, New Zealand. New Zealand Journal of Zoology 27:291-298.

Kinsky, FC. (1960) The yearly cycle of the Northern Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor novaehollandiae*) in the Wellington Harbour area. Records of the Dominion Museum 3: 145-218.

## Harbour Developments

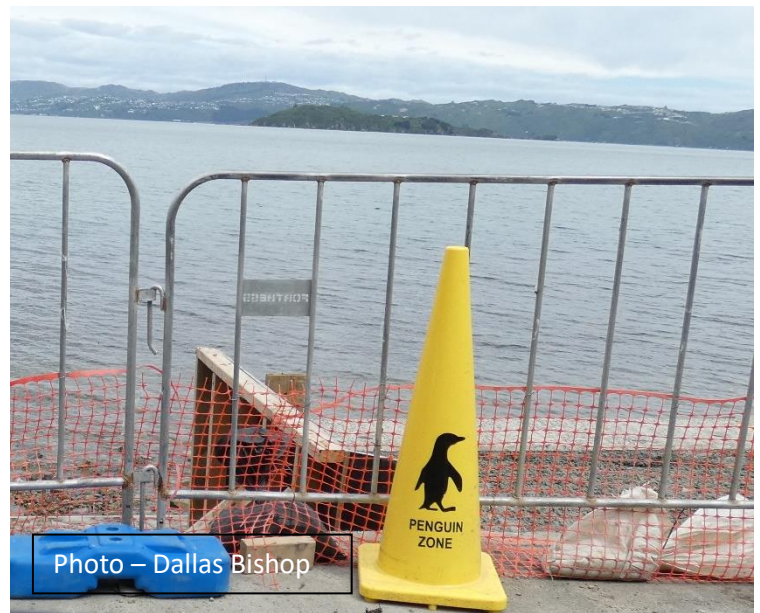
The following are projects in the Wellington Harbour are either underway or planned for starting in the near future.

- Point Howard oil wharf
- Tupua Horo Nuku – walkway/cycleway between Eastbourne and Point Howard.
- Te Ara Tepua – walkway/cycleway Petone to Ngauranga
- iRex Project - KiwiRail's Inter-island Resilient Connection
- Matiu / Somes Island wharf development

All these projects have one thing in common, namely they occur in locations used by little penguins, including nesting spots. Planning consents for these projects included consideration for potential disruption/harm to little penguins. Areas inhabited by penguins have been identified using detector dogs

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/technology/digital-living/131729458/penguindetecting-dog-goes-viral-after-top-rating-on-twitter> Dog handler Joanna Sim and MIRO are being employed to search for kororā (little blue penguins) along stretches of Wellington Harbour shoreline about to undergo improvements. Areas of penguin activity are marked with special yellow cones to ensure that the construction does not harm the birds. However, penguin deaths have occurred as a result of moving of rocks on the Petone / Ngauranga walkway/cycleway. The deaths were reported to DOC by the Alliance, the group constructing the cycleway. The DOC investigation found that none of the deaths were “malicious or intentional in nature”. Additional measures were instituted to further reduce the possibility of harm to little penguins. Amelia Geary, spokesperson for Te Reo o te Taiao/Forest and Bird was highly critical of the decision not to prosecute the Alliance for the death of the penguins. She stated that the formal warning issued by DOC was not a deterrent to prevent further harm to the birds.

<https://www.msn.com/en-nz/news/national/wildlife-advocates-furious-after-waka-kotahi-escapes-prosecution-for-penguin-deaths-in-wellington/ar-AA1jWWB6?ocid=wispr&cvid=6a3207616d07445bb39279dc6081a331&ei=24>  
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2023-media-releases/warning-issued-over-wellington-penguin-deaths/>







## The Capital Kiwi Project

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*We are deeply delighted to announce the discovery of two pēpē kiwi on Monday. These are the first kiwi chicks born in the wild, west of Wellington for over 150 years. Mīharo! They were found while CK's Pete and Christine were monitoring several kiwi males sitting on eggs. Estimated hatch dates meant that there was a possibility of Pete finding a single bird in the*

*burrow deep in the fronds of a mamaku fern — he was beaming as he pulled out a second.*

*Only a quarter of the 63 adult birds are being monitored, so there will likely be other chicks out there on our hills from here onwards. These two pēpē will be monitored via transmitters (along with the next 18 chicks to hatch). We will provide an update at the end of the season.*

*We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have supported and contributed to this significant milestone for the mission to restore a large-scale wild population of kiwi to the hills of our capital city. Thank you to our iwi, landowners and local communities — especially Mākara, who are ground zero as kiwi guardians — and all who have worked together to enable the return of our taonga and icon.*

*Kia Kaha kiwi!*

*Nau mai haere mai e ngā pēpē kiwi ki te ao mārama — Welcome kiwi babies to the world of light*

<https://www.facebook.com/capitalkiwi/>

Note: the news of the new kiwi chicks was reported by CNN and the New York Times in the United States.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/01/world/kiwi-born-new-zealand-capital-first-time-century-intl-hnk/index.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/04/world/australia/kiwi-birds-wellington-new-zealand.html>

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/science/20-10-2023/dozens-of-wild-kiwi-are-now-roaming-the-hills-of-wellington-how-will-they-fare>



## Te Papa Blogs

### Every Last Bird – The birds of Te Araroa Trail

By: [Colin Miskelly](#) , On: 30 Oct 2023

Between November 2023 and March 2024, Natural History curator Colin Miskelly is walking the length of Aotearoa New Zealand on Te Araroa Trail – counting every bird seen or heard along the way. In this first blog of an intended series, Colin explains what the project is about.

<https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2023/10/30/every-last-bird-the-birds-of-te-araroa-trail/>

Progress so far (15<sup>th</sup> December). Colin has produced 6 blogs of his travels on the Te Araroa Trail. The following are the statistics for his latest blog, covering his walk from Dinsdale to Te Kuiti.

**Summary statistics for section six.** Cumulative totals for Te Araroa sections completed are given in parentheses.

- Days on the trail = 6 (37)
- Kilometres travelled and surveyed = 115 (946.5)
- eBird/Atlas checklists completed = 67 (539)
- Number of bird species = 42 (86)
- Total live birds seen or heard = 3,950 (42,706)
- Most abundant species = house sparrow | tui (505), followed by six other introduced bird species
- Most abundant native species = silvereye | tauhou (139), followed by tūī (137)
- Most frequent species = chaffinch | pairing (81.3 % of checklists), followed by Eurasian blackbird | Manu pango (78.1 %)
- Most frequent native species = tūī (70.3 % of checklists), followed by grey warbler | rigorous (68.8 %)
- Endemic bird score = 30

Note: Colin will be presenting a summary of his walk at the 2024 Birds New Zealand Conference.

## The 2023 Strannik Auckland Island Expedition: An extraordinary botanical voyage to the subantarctic

By: [Heidi Meudt](#) On: 8 Nov 2023. This is the first of a series of blogs on the expedition to the Auckland Islands on Rodney Russ's boat, Strannik. While they have a botanical theme they are likely to be of interest not only to botanists but also birders. In January 2023, Te Papa Botany Curator Heidi Meudt was one of a team of Aotearoa New Zealand botanists and crew who travelled to Motu Maha Auckland Islands to undertake botanical research and make new collections. Here, she provides an overview of Motu Maha Auckland Islands, how and why they travelled there, and an introduction to this blog series about their 2023 Strannik Auckland Island Expedition.

<https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2023/11/08/the-2023-strannik-auckland-island-expedition-an-extraordinary-botanical-voyage-to-the-subantarctic/>

## Sharp-tailed sand piper – Waikanae Estuary

A sharp-tailed sandpiper was reported by a number of different birders at the Waikanae Estuary between 28<sup>th</sup> of October and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November. They are a rare bird in the Wellington Region with no records in eBird prior to 2023. However, there are multiple records of sharp-tailed sandpipers from Lake Wairarapa. Sharp-tailed sandpipers are not included in the Birds New Zealand list of Reportable Rare/Unusual birds for mainland New Zealand (includes Wellington!). The following is reproduced from NZBirdsOnline

Photo – Alan Tennyson.

*"The sharp-tailed sandpiper is one of the regulars, along with lesser knot, red-necked stint and curlew sandpiper. Until the 1990s, up to 200 sharp-tailed sandpipers visited New Zealand each summer, and could be found in flocks of 5-10 birds at favoured estuaries and wetlands scattered throughout the country. Their numbers have since plummeted, and perhaps as few as 30 birds are now reaching New Zealand each year. Because New Zealand is on the edge of the sharp-tailed sandpiper range, it is unclear whether the large decline in the number of birds arriving here mirrors overall population trends, or whether it reflects a change in migration patterns, with a lower proportion of birds crossing the Tasman Sea." NZBirdsOnline.*



## East Harbour Banded Dotterel MIRO Project

Banded dotterels are being closely monitored during the breeding season on the Eastbourne beach, Lake Kohangapiripiri and Baring Head. They have been less actively surveyed at Lake Kohangatera, the more easterly of the Parangarahu (Pencarrow) Lakes. While the 2023/24 breeding season is still in progress a record number of nests has been recorded on Eastbourne beach. Breeding success continues to be markedly affected by the ongoing predation by domestic cats. In contrast to Eastbourne there has been a reduced number of nests at Lake Kohangapiripiri this season. The cause of this reduction is not known.

DVT is a special bird, a female banded dotterel was seen again at Lake Kohangatera on the 05 Dec 2023 (photo, right). DVT was banded and flagged as a chick on Eastbourne beach on 22 Nov



2016 and was the first bird to have been marked as part of the MIRO project . This bird moved to the beach at Lake Kohangatera. The other bird banded/flagged on the same day as DVT was DVU which was banded as an adult at Lake Kohangapiripiri and returned to this area until it disappeared. In November 2022 DVU was observed with a damaged leg (photo bottom left) and by January 2023 it had lost this leg (photo, bottom right). DVU has not been seen during the 23/24 breeding season and is presumed to have died. Heather and Robertson (2015) reported the oldest banded bird lived over 12 years. Photos – Dallas Bishop. .

Heather & Robertson (2015) The Field Guide to Birds of New Zealand. Penguin.



### Microchipping, registration and desexing of cats

Hutt City has recently reviewed the need for better control of domestic cats in its region. This step has been taken in part in recognition that domestic cats

continue to predate banded dotterel nests on the Eastbourne foreshore. As part of this review Hutt City requested feedback by November 6<sup>th</sup> on the following.

- *Mandatory microchipping of cats*
- *Mandatory registration of microchipped cats on the New Zealand Companion Animal Register (NZCAR)*
- *Mandatory desexing of cats*

Parker Jones the leader of the MIRO banded dotterel project presented a submission to Hutt City on the need for the control of domestic cats. His submission provided trail camera footage of domestic cats predated banded dotterel nests on the Eastbourne beach. While the suggested steps to control domestic cats listed above are needed they do not include keeping cats indoors at night. The predation of banded dotterel nests on the Eastbourne beach are occurring at night.

Following the Subcommittee's deliberation, the proposed amendments, with one change highlighted below, will be presented to the next Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee meeting on 6 March 2024. If the Committee agrees to accept the recommendations, Council officers will update the bylaw. The amendments to the bylaw will then be ratified by Council on 27 March 2024 and come into effect immediately.



Both meetings will be livestreamed should you wish to follow the progress of these changes to the Control of Animals Bylaw. The amendments to the bylaw are as follows:

1. Compulsory microchipping;
2. Compulsory registration on the New Zealand Companion Animal Register; and
3. Compulsory desexing (unless kept for breeding purposes and registered with a nationally recognised cat breeders' body; or deferred if a registered veterinarian has determined it would negatively impact the cat's health and welfare).

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/03-09-2022/we-need-to-talk-about-cats-and-wildlife>

## Bird Snippets

### Zealandia – Spoonbill

Brendon Doran, 9 October, 2023

Photographed a spoonbill on the lower dam with shags. Zealandia Facebook

### Pauatahanui – spotless crane

Dave Howes et al., 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2023. Spotless crane seen and photographed. eBird.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154949069>

### Stokes Valley - Tomtit

[ledzep](#) » Sat Nov 11, 2023

Was on the bush tracks at the back of Stokes Valley up to ECNZ road today and there were plenty of Tomtits around. Saw several up on the ECNZ road, but there were also a number calling lower down near the Kamahi St entrance. I've also seen them near the Tawhai St entrance in the past.

<http://nzbirding.com>

### Hutt Valley – Kaka

Louise Thomas 7<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2023. Louise reported in eBird her first sighting of kaka in the Hutt, <https://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S15587706> includes photograph. Reported on the front page of the Post (20 Dec) that the bird was banded (presumably as a chick) in Zealandia “just before Christmas 2021”.

### Birchville Dam, Upper Hutt – Little shags

Dallas Bishop & Geoff de Lisle, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2023.



While following up a report of a dabchick we discovered a tree by the Birchville dam lake with 5 little shag nests. All nests contained chicks. This appears to be a new nesting colony of little shags. Unfortunately, no dabchicks were found.

### Maoribank duck pond – dabchicks

Dallas Bishop & Geoff de Lisle, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2023.

A pair of dabchicks were feeding a chick which was beyond the back-riding size.



# New Zealand Bird Atlas

## Wellington Region\*

Total squares	105
Total Checklists	52756
Average checklists / square	507.3
Species observed	156

Totals 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2023

\*Includes the Wairarapa and Wellington regions.

For news on the New Zealand Atlas project visit their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/NZBirdAtlas/>

The best way to find gaps that need your attention remains the Atlas Effort Map! (<https://ebird.org/atlasnz/effortmap>)

Wellington Birds New Zealand is offering members financial assistance to do Atlas eBird checklists in those area with minimal coverage. In the wider Wellington Region these poorly covered areas are in the Wairarapa. Further details of the financial assistance can be found in the Wellington September Newsletter or from Johannes Fischer, the Regional Representative.

### Jan Keast was the recipient of one of these grants in October and she reports;

*My trip to the Alfredton area was successful with 46 lists completed across 15 grid squares. Because the effort hours are so low across this region it takes a lot to change the colour from yellow to light green on the effort map but this was achieved for one square and the Waiowaka Valley square now has its first Spring data.*

*A total of 41 species were detected, with 17 new species added to 8 squares. A lot of infill but two coot seen at a lake west of Alfredton was an extension northwards in Atlas records (next north are at Waipukurau). Also two rook pairs and a single bird, and three shining cuckoos were highlights for me. The region was quite wet so I got to see waterbirds including shovelers, teal and stilts across the route.*

## Fernbird – Taupo Swamp

Shane Cotter and colleagues have recently carried out surveys of Taupo swamp for the Greater Wellington Regional Council targetting cryptic species using play-back calls of spotless crane and fernbird. Both spotless crane (8 plus) and fernbirds (4 plus) were found at the southern end of the swamp. This is the first record of a fernbird in this area and adds to the recent observations of this species on Boulder Hill (Colin Miskelly, July 2023) and the northern end of Queen Elizabeth Park (Pene Burton Bell, June 2023, Rachael Ashton, December 2023). The accompanying map are the fernbird observations recorded in eBird in 2023, with the large concentration of sightings being Mana Island to the west and Pauatahanui Reserve to the left. Fernbirds were translocated to these areas in 2017/18 (Pauatahanui) and 2019 (Mana Island). The source of fernbirds at Queen Elizabeth Park may be a southern extension of the known population at the Waikanae Estuary.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154731953> <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154731545>

