

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc.

Annual Report on Behalf of Council for 2024

It is my privilege to present this report on behalf of the Council of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (commonly known as Birds New Zealand). Over the past year we have been looking at new opportunities for activities and events to engage our members, and embedding our Constitution and internal policies and processes following significant change to the legal requirements for charities in New Zealand in 2023.

Deceased members

During the period of this report, I have received notice of the deaths of the following members:

Bruce Postill (former RR, Waikato)

Denise Poyner (Auckland)

Peter Schweigman (Otago)

Ken Bond (Auckland)

If member are aware of any others, I would appreciate having their names brought to my attention. I wish to take a moment to reflect on those who are no longer with us.

Council meetings

During 2024, Council met four times: three online via Zoom, and once at the NZ Bird Conference in sunny Nelson. Summaries of the business conducted have been included in my columns in *Birds New Zealand*.

After making significant changes to the Society Constitution at the last AGM as a result of changes to the legal requirements for charities, we opted not to make any changes to the Constitution this year, to let the changes become embedded and test that they are fit for purpose. Instead, we look forward to reviewing and revising the Constitution to ensure it is current and aligned with the needs of our membership as part of a body of work focussed on strategic planning for the Society in the coming year. One aspect of this work was the delivery of a survey of members, the results of which were discussed among Council at the end of the year. Several of the challenges and opportunities highlighted from these results will be implemented through proposed amendments to the Constitution in 2026.

Ongoing themes of Council business have included: management of the Society's finances; continuing the implementation of health and safety practices in the Society; a focus on membership and promotional opportunities, including fundraising; filling vacancies on Council and other Society leadership roles; and maintaining high standards in ornithological science. I am grateful to our Secretary Jo Chambon, Treasurer Paul Garner-Richards, Vice-President Ian Armitage, and Councillors Bruce

McKinlay, Colin Miskelly, Keith Woodley, Martine Darrou, Eleanor Gunby, and Mark Ayre who consistently provide thoughtful and nuanced input and advice to steer the Society into future.

Membership

Council was pleased to note that at the end of 2024, the Society has 1191 current financial members. This includes 192 new members in the year 1 January – 31 December 2024. Your membership fees have been used to publish our excellent magazine *Birds New Zealand* and our scientific journal *Notornis*, support research and Society projects, and ensure the smooth running of the Society. Members also benefit from reduced rates to attend the annual NZ Birds Conference. We are very grateful to all our members for their support, and especially to those members who make donations above and beyond their annual membership fees. In 2024, we received donations from 115 individuals to support the activities of the Society.

Having a well-maintained membership database ensures that Society communications are reaching our members. Membership Secretary Koshy Yohannan is adept in this role, having done significant work in 2024 to ensure the database is correct. Koshy provide a smooth welcoming experience for new members, and ongoing support for our existing ones.

Web Support Officer Roger Sharp has also played an important role behind the scenes, maintaining access to the database, supporting members with login issues, responding to Conference enquiries, and supporting the Regional Representatives.

Health and Safety

In 2024, Regions ran a wide range of safe and enjoyable field trips and activities. Based on reports from the Regional Representatives, in 2024 the Society ran at least 156 field trips (compared with 168 in 2023) and there were 4 reported incidents. I'd like to thank the field trip leaders for their diligence in highlighting the risks, and for reporting on incidents, so we can continue to ensure a safe experience for attendees.

Partnerships and supporters

Society activities and associated research were supported by our long-term relationship with T-Gear Charitable Trust. Additionally, we have long term commercial relationships with Pivotal Press, Swarovski Optik and Heritage Expeditions. I'd like to congratulate Heritage Expeditions on their recent 40th anniversary in March 2025. The website development company Xequals has continued to enthusiastically support the Society's activities through development work and webserver hosting of our website, including features facilitating direct submission of data to our various schemes and projects. I thank our partners for their support, and look forward to continuing these relationships, as well as seeking new opportunities.

We have continued to contribute as an active Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand – Te Apārangi, participating in the regular Biological & Environmental Sciences domain meetings. Through this membership, we have the

opportunity to develop closer relationships with other environment-focussed societies, and provide information directly to Te Apārangi, as a key player in the Aotearoa New Zealand research and policy space.

We have also developed a Memorandum of Understanding with Young Birders New Zealand, to support and encourage this group of future leaders in ornithology in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Funds and Scholarships

I wish to thank T-Gear Charitable Trust for their support of the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, which has come to an end in 2024. This important annual fund has been disbursed every year since 2013, supporting 124 projects that have improved the knowledge of Aotearoa New Zealand birds and their habitats. In 2024 alone, the BNZRF received 23 applications, of which the top 11 were selected for funding.

Recent themes have included bird movement ecology (understanding migration or dispersal of birds), translocation outcomes (tracking the results of managed movement of bird populations for conservation purposes), diet of native bird species, and their breeding biology. The information gained from funded research has improved the knowledge and understanding of the biology, ecology, breeding success, and vulnerabilities of 63 species of birds, including iconic Kiwi, Kākāpō, Takahē, and Kea, plus various species of penguins, albatrosses and many more. With about 50% of focal species classed as At Risk and a further 33% as Threatened under the Department of Conservation's New Zealand Threat Classification system, data from these research projects has been used to inform and improve conservation action and policy. It's also been important for supporting the new generation of ornithological researchers, with postgraduate students comprising 47% of recipients.

We are actively seeking a new sponsor for this important fund. I encourage you to contact me if you or an organisation you know may be well-positioned to form a partnership with Birds New Zealand.

The first disbursement of the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research Fund was made in 2024. Further disbursements may be considered from 2027, once the Fund has reached a sustainable state.

In other notable news is the receipt of a significant bequest from the estate of Kerry-Jayne Wilson, to establish a new scholarship for seabird research in the New Zealand region. Details of this are still being negotiated with the Trustees, but I look forward to supporting the next generation of seabird researchers through this fund in the future.

I acknowledge the passing of George Mason, whose generous contribution has provided the David Medway Scholarship for ornithological research. This fund is now being disbursed through the Taranaki Foundation, and we are grateful to the Foundation for the continued support and smooth transition to disbursement of the David Medway Scholarship through the George Mason Fund.

Publications

I acknowledge that 2024 was a tumultuous year for the publication of *Notornis*, and I wish to reassure members that disruption in the publication cycle has now been smoothed out. Colin Miskelly ably stepped up to take over the position of Editor from James Savage in November, with support from Craig Symes as Associate Editor. This was the first year in which *Notornis* was published entirely digitally, and further work is ongoing to ensure our publication processes are aligned with international practice. Volume 71 published in 2024 included 10 full articles, 12 short notes, a book review, and a corrigendum. *Notornis* remains the premiere ornithological publication for Aotearoa New Zealand and the South Pacific.

Michael Szabo had another successful year as Editor of *Birds New Zealand*, our quarterly members magazine. Michael is responsible for maintaining healthy relationships with our advertisers, including Heritage Expeditions, Swarovski Optik, Northern Territory Bird Specialists, and Te Papa Press. We also maintain a relationship with Solomons Tourism, who offered a sixth visit from a Birds New Zealand representative. Ilse Corkery, former Northland RR was able to take this opportunity to visit and observe the birds of the Solomon Islands. I wish to thank all the many contributors to *Birds New Zealand* who provide news on ornithological observations and activities from around the country, making this an enjoyable read. I encourage you to share your physical or digital copies with friends and family to showcase the activities of the Society.

Social Media

As part of our efforts to engage with the general public, Michael Szabo administers the Society Facebook page, which ~~is~~ now has over 12,000 followers. This is a useful platform for promoting the Society, sharing the latest news and activities, and importantly for recruiting new members. We also launched an account on Bluesky, which has taken over from Twitter as a hub for science communication. This account is primarily used to disseminate research presentations during our annual conference, and has over 1400 followers. We distribute a bi-monthly e-newsletter to provide timely updates and highlights. I encourage you to forward the newsletter to interested family and friends who may be persuaded to become members.

In 2024 Council revised the Society Code of Conduct to include social media, making clear our expectations for engagement and interaction online, both to uphold our reputation, and to support those members who volunteer in administering our official social media channels. The Code of Conduct is publicly available on our website, along with our other policy and procedure documents. I wish to thank all our members who are active on social media for their rapid and respectful engagement with the general public on ornithological questions.

Summary of activities of Schemes and Projects

New Zealand Bird Atlas and eBird

2024 marked the completion of the data collection phase of the 3rd New Zealand Bird Atlas, aiming to map the distribution and abundance of all birds across the country. I would once

again like to thank all of our members and others who contributed to this massive effort. Progress is now underway in preparing and analysing the data collected during the five-year New Zealand Bird Atlas for publication. Dan Burgin of Wildlife Management International has been leading this with support from other WMIL team members, and through the good relationship we have built with the Cornell University eBird team. eBird continues to be our platform of choice for ornithological data collection. One major upgrade in 2024 saw the platform provide the option to display common bird names in te reo Māori alongside English.

Beach Patrol Scheme

The purpose of the Beach Patrol Scheme is to systematically document the identity, location and numbers of birds found dead on New Zealand beaches. These data can be used to establish the occurrence and distribution of primarily seabirds, and identify instances of significant mortality. 2024 saw a total of 803 Beach Patrol records submitted from 16 Beach Patrol districts. 1,452 km of coastline was patrolled by 85 members, and 1,658 birds of 102 species were counted. Among these were 75 species of seabirds. This included the second beach-wrecked specimen of a Streaked Shearwater found in the Wellington South Beach Patrol district. Among the land and wetland birds reported were three species of interest: a North Island kākā, a New Zealand Falcon, and a Shining Cuckoo. A minor wreck of Sooty Shearwaters and Fairy Prions was observed in November. Thank you to those trip leaders and participants for your efforts to contribute to this scheme, and to Ian Armitage as scheme convenor.

Moult Recording Scheme

The aim of the Moult Recording Scheme is to collect information on the moult patterns of all New Zealand bird species. Moult is a critical time in the life of birds and determining when it occurs, how long it takes to complete and how many feathers are lost at one time are essential in understanding the vulnerability of a species during moult. Micah Scholer stepped down as Scheme Convenor in 2024, with Bruce McKinlay taking up the role with a view to increasing promotion of the importance of moult data collection. This work was initiated through a successful national Moult Workshop held as a one-day webinar in February 2025, to be reported on further in the 2025 reporting. Thank you to all those organisers and contributors both locally and overseas.

Nest Record Scheme

The purpose of the Nest Record Scheme is to provide data on length, and timing of breeding seasons, clutch size and number, incubation and fledgling periods, nest sites and materials used in nest building for birds in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2024 5 nest record cards were received. As convenor of the Scheme, Roger Sharp has been working with Council to investigate opportunities to digitise the scheme, including over 20,000 existing nest record cards, dating back to 1929 before the establishment of the Society. This is part of a wider body of work led by Council to ensure the availability and longevity of our significant datasets, so they can be used by researchers to fill in gaps in our knowledge.

National Wader Census

The National Wader Census provides information on the distribution and abundance of wading birds, including Arctic migrants, around our major estuaries and harbours. During the winter census in 2024, a total of 99,987 waders of 19 species were counted, an increase from 90,663 in 2023. Notably, Kuaka Bar-tailed Godwits numbered 12,163, the highest count since 2020. Five sites, Kaipara Harbour, Manukau Harbour, Firth of Thames, Tauranga Harbour and Farewell Spit hold around 70% of overwintering godwits each year. Similarly, the Banded Dotterel count of 6,131 was the highest count since 2011. Uncommon winter waders included, 19 Red-necked Stint, 12 Whimbrel, 2 Eastern Curlew, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, 1 Sanderling and 1 Semipalmated Plover.

A total of 138,936 waders of 25 species were counted during the summer census, an increase from 133,994 counted in 2023, and the highest count since 2013. Adrian Riegen, Census convenor notes that coverage of smaller areas of coastline contribute important information to the census – although counts in these areas may not be particularly high, they demonstrate the importance of these sites for a range of wader species. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up again this year with 86,523 counted, compared to 79,340 in 2023, and we also saw an increase in Red Knots counted at 26,032 individuals from the 24,935 in 2023. Strongholds for Red Knot continue to be Farewell Spit 8,930, Manukau Harbour 8,495, Kaipara Harbour 5,975, Firth of Thames 1,160 and Tasman Bay 658, which together account for 97% of all Red Knots counted. Ruddy Turnstone numbers were down to 913, the lowest ever counted. Arctic rarities included Eastern Curlew, Hudsonian Godwit, Grey-tailed Tattler, Sanderling, Greater Sand Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper.

Thank you to Adrian for coordinating the counts and compiling the data, and to all the many volunteers who work hard to collect this important data.

Banding Liaison Officer

In 2024, John Stewart completed his tenure as Banding Liaison Officer, and has handed the role on to Mike Bell. I'd like to thank John for his oversight during the seven years in this important role for the Society. We currently have 22 projects underway under the Birds New Zealand Wildlife Act Authorisation, including 2 new projects. These projects include studies of Fluttering shearwaters Banded Dotterels, Grey Warblers, Harriers, Fernbirds, Caspian Terns, Little Penguins, and Glossy Ibis, along with a range of passerines and waders. I'd like to thank the leaders of those projects for their prompt and thorough annual reporting.

Checklist Committee

The Checklist Committee are tasked with maintaining the Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, which provides information on the nomenclature, taxonomy, classification, distribution (current, historical, and fossil) and status of the birds of the New Zealand region. In 2024, the focus for the Committee was the preparation of the 6th edition of this important resource, which was published on the Society's website in December. Three new vagrant species (2 terns and a storm petrel) were accepted as occurring in New Zealand, and 11 species that became extinct more than c. 1 million years ago were added to Appendix 1. Recommendations were made based

on the latest research pertaining to the taxonomy, nomenclature, classification and arrangement of New Zealand birds, affecting 56 taxa. These included shifting several plover species from *Charadrius* to *Anarhynchus*, and banded rail from *Gallirallus* to *Hypotaenidia*. Tibetan sand plover *Anarhynchus atrifrons* was split from Siberian sand plover *A. mongolus*, and Pyramid prion *Pachyptila pyramidalis* from Fulmar prion *P. crassirostris*. The total number of bird species, including fossil species, now accepted from the New Zealand region is 502. I'd like to thank Colin Miskelly for his work as Convenor, and my fellow committee members Ricardo Palma, Nic Rawlence and Alan Tennyson for their efforts in maintaining the Checklist.

Records Appraisal Committee

The Records Appraisal Committee are responsible for assessing records of new and unusual species in the New Zealand region. Submissions of Unusual Bird Reports can be made via the Birds New Zealand website. In 2024, 113 UBRs were received and assessed, of which 85 were accepted. This resulted in the addition of two species to the New Zealand list: Horsfield's bronze-cuckoo and MacGillivray's prion. Publication of the results of RAC decisions in 2024 will be prepared in 2025. I'd like to thank Colin Miskelly as Convenor of the RAC, and Biz Bell as Secretary, along with committee members Andrew Crossland, Ian Saville, Ian Southey, Alan Tennyson, and co-opted member Paul Sagar for their efficient work.

Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee are responsible for assessing the scientific merit of applications to Birds New Zealand funds, grants and scholarships, maintaining the scientific integrity and high quality of research supported by the Society. In 2024 Graeme Taylor completed his tenure as Convenor, passing this role on to Terry Greene and new member Nic Rawlence as Co-convenors. Paul Sagar's significant period of service on the Committee has come to a close, and we thank Graeme and Paul for their leadership and expertise. The Committee received a diverse range of applications with the potential for excellent ornithological research. Many thanks to my fellow committee members Ilse Corkery, Kevin Parker, Matt Rayner, Rod Hay, Terry Greene, and Zoe Stone for their careful consideration of applications.

Regional Representatives

It's a pleasure to read all of the annual reports each year, but especially those from Regional Representatives. RRs play an essential role in the Society as the primary connection between our members and Council. They provide members with a voice, keeping us informed of local needs and opportunities. We have a really fantastic flock of RRs who maintain these regional connections, and lead activities, events and provide information for members and the general public at a local scale. In 2024, at least 40 Regional Projects were led by Regions, which is fantastic for both gathering information on our birds, and also for providing members with opportunities to be involved and build their skills and experience. A particular highlight that all regions have been participating in is The Peter Schweigman Memorial Royal Spoonbill Colony and Nest Count. Led by former Otago RR Mary Thompson, regions have put in effort to identify nesting sites and to count nests and birds. We look forward to learning about the distribution and trends for Kōtuku-ngutupapa Spoonbills based on this project.

I'd also like to acknowledge the important work of Regional Recorders and members of regional committees who also volunteer their time to ensure the smooth running of regions and collection of data.

Last but not least, our Executive Officer, Ingrid Hutzler, continues to provide exemplary service to the Society. Ingrid plays a vital role in providing effective management across all aspects of the Society, including updating news on the website, consolidating funding applications and recommendations, maintaining relationships with partners and other organisations, and providing support to RRs and the conference organising committee. We couldn't do it without her.

Thanks to you all, and I hope you've had an interesting and enjoyable weekend.
Natalie Forsdick
President