



THE WRYBILL

CANTERBURY REGIONAL NEWSLETTER

Te Ngutu Pare - May 2025



MAY 2025

RR'S REPORT

Our first trip to visit the sooty shearwater colony at Stony Bay at the start of April went well. We hired a van and drove the long, windy two-hour trip to the Banks Peninsula clifftop site. As dusk descended, giant petrels were seen on the sea below us, and penguins were heard calling from beneath the cliffs. Right on dark, a few adult tītī did a quick fly-past of the seated watchers before diving into the burrows, where they could be heard feeding their chicks. I'm contemplating running a trip earlier in the season next time. December or January would see higher numbers of adults visiting the colony, but with nightfall much later, the 11 p.m. finish time in Christchurch this time would be significantly later.

The February Te Waihora wader and waterfowl count has now run for 15 years. Denise Ford of Selwyn District Council has organised it for about 10 of those years, and this year was her last. I'd like to extend a big thank you to her for mustering us all together so capably. We are now looking for someone to take over the role for next February. There will be plenty of support for whoever puts their hand up. Please let me know if you are interested.

We've got a great lineup of speakers for meetings this year, and it's good to see people joining us online from all over our rohe. We have monthly field trips or surveys coming up, but if there's somewhere special you'd like to visit, please let me know and we can try to make it happen. I'm also very happy for other members to lead field trips, and I'm sure there would be plenty of interest if we were to hold more than one a month, especially now that our membership is well over 200.

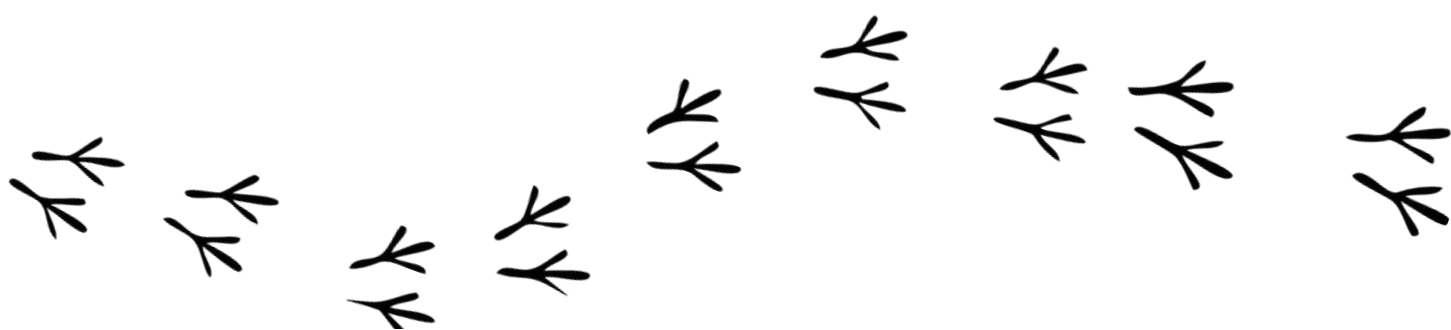
We've had a few local bird banding projects running, so please take the time to look extra carefully at harrier hawks and southern black-backed gulls, as they could be banded.

I've also attached the Canterbury wader survey results from February. I'm sure many of you have fantastic photos, but if you're looking for more, I know Josh Overend recently took some beautiful shots of a falcon out on Banks Peninsula—feel free to get in touch with him about sharing them.

Ngā mihi nui

Anita Spencer

Canterbury and West Coast Regional Representative





Swamp Harrier - Kaitorete Spit - Ben Ackerley

Indoor Meetings

Evening Meetings for members will take place at 7:30 pm on the last Monday of the month.



Where?

Mahaanui Area DOC Office, 31 Nga Mahi Road, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking available.

Upcoming Meetings:

May 26 - Vanessa Kennard, with a talk on '*Habitat Loss, Nutritional Stress, and Decline of the Matuku-hurepo/Australasian Bittern in Aotearoa New Zealand.*'

June 30 - Georgie Archibald, '*Rats to Riches: Birding at revived South Georgia Island*'

July 28 - Mark Fraser presenting unusual bird specimens held at the Canterbury Museum

August 25 - Nick Allen will be talking about the birds of Portugal from a recent visit there.

If you are willing or know someone who would be willing to present at a meeting please let Anita know at

birds.canterbury@birdsnz.org.nz

Field Trips

Contact Anita if you are interested in hosting a future trip.

May 24 - Brooklands Beach Patrol

Birding the wetlands of Brookland lagoon as we walk up the spit, and then beach patrolling back down the beach. The last one here turned up a dead White-capped albatross. The walk takes about 3 hours. If you would like to take part, please contact Anita Spencer (birds.canterbury@birdsanz.org.nz)

Photo: Emma Kelland



June 15 - Lake Ellesmere / Te Waihora Wader Survey

A great chance to see a variety of winter waders at Lake Ellesmere, highlights from previous counts include an Australian Tern, Black Stilt, high numbers of Black-fronted Dotterel and others.

If you would like to take part, please contact Anita Spencer (birds.canterbury@birdsanz.org.nz)

Photo: Samuel Amaris



July 20 - Ashburton Lakes Survey

This is a real highlight for some people with the high country area during its spectacular winter best. Contact Don Geddes for more details. (don.geddes@fireandemergency.nz)

Photo: Shellie Evans



Black-billed Gull - Ashley-Rakahuri Estuary - Ben Ackerley

2026 Chatham Island Birding Tour

28 October – 3 November 2025

Led by Ela Hunt, Ornithologist Specialising in Chatham Island Birdlife

Join an expert-led expedition to the Chatham Islands – a rare opportunity to explore one of Aotearoa's most unique birding destinations. With renowned ornithologist Ela Hunt as your guide, this flexible, small-group tour includes visits to key hotspots, predator-free sanctuaries, and special conservation projects.

Package includes:

Return flights to the Chathams, private accommodation, all meals, expert guiding, and all excursions.

Cost: Approx. \$2,550 (excluding NZ domestic connecting flights and meals prior to arrival)

Dates: 28 October – 3 November 2025

To register interest or learn more, contact:

Lloyd Esler – lloydesler@outlook.com | 021 176 6580

Join Birds New Zealand and Receive a Free Book

New Zealand Seabirds – A Natural History by Kerry-Jayne Wilson

New members of **Birds New Zealand** will now receive a complimentary copy of this stunning 136-page book, packed with over 100 full-colour photographs and maps. Valued at **\$50**, this 2021 publication offers a beautifully written insight into the lives of Aotearoa's remarkable seabirds.

Join now to claim your free copy:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/>

Keep an Eye Out for Banded Banded Dotterels

DOC is currently running a new **Banded Dotterel migration research project** and is seeking support from birders to help resight marked birds across Aotearoa.

How you can help:

If you spot a marked banded dotterel—whether you're birding locally or travelling—please report it to DOC by emailing: **b.dot.resighting@doc.govt.nz**
Include:

- Description of the marked bird (band/flag details)
- **Location**
- **Date and time** of observation

Obituaries

Bruce Postill (1945 - 2025)

In January, the Pūkoro Mirando community lost a long-standing and deeply valued member. Bruce Postill contributed over 25 years to the Pūkoro Mirando Naturalists' Trust (PMNT), initially as DOC Waikato representative (2001–2015), then as a full Council member until 2024. He also served as Waikato Regional Representative for Birds New Zealand.

Born in Sydney in 1945, Bruce grew up exploring the Blue Mountains, eventually becoming an active rock-climber and president of his local club. His commitment to safety saw him help write climbing safety manuals and form a rescue team. In 1973, Bruce moved to New Zealand, becoming a ranger at Fox Glacier and later Mt Cook, where he played a leading role in Search & Rescue operations. He later settled in the Waikato, continuing his work with DOC in fire crews and conservation.

Colleagues remember Bruce as detail-oriented, safety-focused, and generous with his knowledge and time. He had a deep love of the outdoors, a sharp wit, and a wealth of stories from a life of alpine adventures and fieldwork. Since 2000, Bruce has contributed to PMNT's international work along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, participating in multiple expeditions to China and North Korea, including the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project in 2008.

A man of many talents, Bruce also had a love of music, film, and practical problem-solving. He brought humour, resourcefulness, and cultural insight to every project. Even when moving to Christchurch in 2024, he donated carloads of tools and supplies to the Shorebird Centre — a final act of generosity from a lifetime of service.

Our thoughts are with his daughters, Mardi and Fleur, and their families.

— *Keith Woodley*

Bruce Postill with fans - Dagushan School, China - Keith Woodley



Andy Anderson (1945 - 2024)

Many in the Canterbury birding community – and beyond – were fond of Andy Anderson, a true character and bit of a lovable rogue who shunned eulogies but left a strong impression on those who knew him.

Andy was a fixture in birding circles on both sides of the Tasman. After 30 years in Queensland, where he founded the Cairns Birdwatchers Group and contributed daily bird reports from the Esplanade, he returned to New Zealand after the pandemic to be closer to family. In Christchurch, he was just as happy watching birds on a backyard feeder as he was chasing rarities in the bush.

A generation-spanning birder, Andy learned his craft the old-fashioned way – by spending countless hours in the field and talking with other birders. In Australia, many Canterbury birders travelled with him on unforgettable trips in search of rare birds, reptiles and mammals. Back home, he often stayed with old friends like Sheila and Tom Petch, where his sharp ear for birds and laid-back charm were always welcome.

Friends recall his deep knowledge, his generosity in sharing it, and his growing concern for the environmental crises facing the natural world. In later years, he became more outspoken on the links between conservation, politics, and social issues – writing about them with the same clarity and passion he brought to his birding.

In Cairns, his legacy lives on through “Andy’s Patch” and *The New Frogmouth* newsletter, both testaments to his enduring influence. Even in declining health, he remained mentally sharp, adventurous, and always game for the next birding trip – whether to the highlands of PNG, the streets of Mexico, or just a windswept patch of bush in Aotearoa.

He is greatly missed.

Our condolences to his family, and our thanks to Jan Walker, Denis Walls and BirdLife Northern Queensland for allowing excerpts of their tribute.

Andy, in 2023, with his trademark PNG ‘bilum’, long trousers, and a local Weka. Photo by Scott Ritchie.





Canterbury Karoro/Southern Black-backed Gull Chick Banding Project

The Canterbury branch recently started a project to monitor the distribution of Karoro/Southern Black-backed Gull (SBBG) chicks in North Canterbury. We intend to monitor colonies at three locations across North Canterbury (Waimakariri River, Ashley River, and the paddocks beside the Bromley oxidation ponds) for three years to learn more about chick distribution once they fledge.

We are banding chicks with an 'S'-sized stainless steel band on the right tarsus and an 'S'-sized colour-coded alphanumeric band (Darvic band) on the left tarsus. The coloured Darvic band will be specific to each site so we can identify the location birds have come from, and the alphanumeric code on the band can be used to identify and track individual birds (Waimakariri River = blue Darvic bands, Ashley River = red Darvic bands, and Bromley paddocks = yellow Darvic bands).

This project is also an excellent opportunity for members to learn skills in catching and handling seabirds, and in banding seabirds with stainless steel and Darvic bands. We therefore hope to increase the number of trained seabird banders in Canterbury.



Our first SBBG chick banding session took place on 14 December 2024 at the colony in the paddocks beside the Bromley oxidation ponds. The SBBGs here nest in the tall grass adjacent to the oxidation ponds. We had a good turnout of 15 people, mostly members keen to learn to band, and a few others keen to help with catching and holding chicks for banders. The weather was sunny and quite hot, so we erected a gazebo to work under and placed shade cloth over the top of the pen holding the chicks.

First, we had to catch the chicks. Gull chicks are mobile and leave the nest not long after hatching. At this stage, the chicks were about 5–6 weeks old and were large, starting to grow their wing and tail feathers, but still unable to fly. They are highly mobile and will scatter and hide if disturbed.

Everyone was shown how to pick up and hold seabird chicks safely. To catch them, we had to walk slowly through the colony in a line and find the chicks amongst the high grass. Some larger chicks took more effort and had to be chased down to be caught. Once caught, chicks were placed in a small pen with a shade cloth cover.



I am the Level 3 seabird bander for this project and responsible for training and overseeing all Level 1 and 2 seabird banders working on it. Both 'S'-sized stainless steel bands and Darvic bands are tricky to fit correctly and require quite a bit of practice to master.

I explained the process of how to fit an 'S'-sized stainless steel band to the right tarsus, along with a couple of demonstrations. This involved crossing and uncrossing the band join to take out the springiness, and then closing and flattening the join using the large-sized banding pliers.

I then explained the process of how to fit the coloured alphanumeric Darvic band to the left tarsus, again with a demonstration. This involved being able to pull the band apart with fingers and then fit it over the tarsus. The bands were then closed with glue.

Those learning to band then had an opportunity to practise fitting stainless steel bands and Darvic bands onto SBBG chicks' legs under my guidance. Everyone was also able to get experience handling seabird chicks and learnt how to hold them for a bander.

Overall, it was a successful day, and we managed to band 49 SBBG chicks with a stainless steel band, and 44 of those with a yellow alphanumeric band as well (numbers between 000–046). Everyone was happy with the chick handling and banding progress, though all had quite sore hands and fingers from squeezing banding pliers and opening Darvic bands.

These SBBGs have now fledged, so we would appreciate it if members could be on the lookout for SBBGs with yellow alphanumeric Darvic bands on their legs.

Mark Fraser

Photos by Deborah Fraser

Bird Sightings

BirdsNZ Report for Canterbury February 2025 - May 2024

The late summer and early autumn months brought a steady stream of rare sightings across the Canterbury region, with several species lingering from earlier in the season and a few unexpected visitors dropping in.

At Travis Wetland, a Marsh Crake made an unusually obliging appearance in late January, easily visible from the visitor centre. It remained for some time, delighting photographers and birders before disappearing later in the season.

The Terek Sandpiper continued its summer residency at the Ashley Estuary into autumn along with the pair of long-staying Little Egret as well.

The Marsh Sandpiper was joined by another at Lake Ellesmere at Wolfe's Bay. And there was a strong showing of other waders at Jarvis Road including 8 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and an impressive 6 Pectoral Sandpipers—a high count not seen in some time.

White-winged Terns once again made a notable appearance, with four birds recorded by Phil Crutchley at the Kaitorete Spit tip during the Lake Ellesmere all-species waterbird census on 16 February. Plumages ranged from non-breeding to individuals beginning to show breeding features. A lone non-breeding bird was also observed at the Ashburton River Mouth on 20 February, feeding mostly in the western arm lagoon.

A Reef Heron was spotted at Taylors Mistake on 20 March, and a probable Glossy Ibis was seen at Wainono Lagoon on 16 March. Later in the month, on 26 March, a group of three Cape Barren Geese at Washdyke/Waitarakao Lagoon set a new record for the site.

As always, these sightings are a testament to the value of careful observation, regular census work, and the dedication of the region's birders. We'll report more records as they come in and look forward to tracking the movements of both familiar and rare species as the year progresses.



Terek Sandpiper - Judah Gray



White-winged Tern - Ben Ackerley

Canterbury Wader Count February 2025

CANTERBURY WADER COUNT FEBRUARY 2025																											
	Waiapu Rd	Akaroa/Salmon Creek	Tasman Peninsula	Waikaremu Bay	Brooklands Lagoon	Tasman Wetland	Amor-Herberts Estuary	Lytelton Harbour	Pump Bay/Rapara I	Pottery Bay	Pigeon Bay	Okara Bay	La Bona Bay	Amor-Herberts	Lake Taupo	Tirohanga Wetland	Kaitake Spit	Building Flat A	Building Flat B	Kaitake Lagoon	Kaitake Flats B	Kaitake Flats A	Otago	Eastern Otago	Embankment Rd	Yarrow Flat	
Species	NA	NA	NA	AC	AC,GJ	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	KR,WA,GJ	GT,DG,NA	PL,TW,GA	DR,FS,BA,GJ	
Counters/NG	NA	NA	NA	AC	AC,GJ	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	CCC	KR,WA,GJ	GT,DG,NA	PL,TW,GA	DR,FS,BA,GJ	
Date counted	9-Feb	9-Feb	9-Feb	21-Feb	21-Feb	3-Mar	21-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	
Mule Swan																											
Australasian Crested Grebe																											
Little Black Shag																											
Australasian Bittern																							1				
Little Egret		1																									
Royal Spoonbill	24				35	16	77	2									6	35	2	90	22	154	146		9	1	
Pied Oystercatcher	81				325		2640	347	25	56	8	67	4	307			1			4						12	
Variable Oystercatcher	11				6		114	18	17	15	4	8	7	13	2											10	
Hybrid Oystercatcher	17																										
Pied Stilt	36			5	170			228	118		3		6	11	38	2	324	209	33	401	449	338	717	4	261	33	980
Black Stilt	1																										
Hybrid Stilt																											
Banded Dottel	4	2		1	36												538	1	34				3	64	6	94	687
Blackfronted Dottel	2																									450	
Wrybill																	2								2	196	
Pacific Golden Plover																	6	53									
Spurwinged Plover	19		1	91	45	16	48	33		7	5	5	8	81	4	41	31	4	36	8		31	2	58	5	32	
Turnstone																											
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper																										16	
Lesser Knot		3																								9	
Pectoral Sandpiper																											
Red-necked Stint																										1	
Bar-tailed Godwit		199			488		1557	357						2			2	1		45		123				106	
Marek Sandpiper																										1	
Arctic Skua																											
Black-billed Gull	29	207															293	78		114		16	8		1	25	
Black-fronted Tern	3	21		8	4												6	9	1		5	2	15	5	1	11	
White-winged Black Tern																											
Caspian Tern		22		3	7		32	2				2			3	3	4			6	1	10	4	20		3	
White-fronted Tern	15	46			34		12										1	15									
Site totals	53	690	1	108	1152	32	4708	877	42	81	17	88	30	451	11	1226	530	74	696	485	532	1108	13	450	728	1912	
Wader site totals	6	369	1	97	1070	16	4587	873	42	81	17	86	30	441	8	916	297	71	486	457	350	935	12	415	726	1860	
% of total count	0.0395387141	2.431630972	0.00658078583	0.0392092257	7.05107084	0.105436573	30.22734761	5.752883031	0.2767710041	0.533772652	0.112026359	0.5667215811	0.197693575	2.906095552	0.0527182861	0.036243822	1.957166392	0.467874794	3.202635914	3.011532125	2.306425041	6.161449753	0.0790774291	2.73476112	4.784184514	12.25700165	
# wader species at site	2	9	1	3	6	1	5	5	2	4	3	4	4	5	3	8	6	3	4	2	3	4	3	3	4	10	
	LI,MI,LA,Salmon Mts	Reinis Bay	Doydan	Hank Creek	Levelling	Turnmu	Banded Lake Ellesmere	Coumra Lagoon	Rams Rd	Akaroa Rd	Styler Lagoon	Okara Rd	Wangape Lagoon	Smallfield Reservoir	Salmon Creek	Opua Wetland	McKinnons	TOTAL									
Species	NM,JJ	AP,DS	AS,KD,DM,AL	NG,GL	GB,NF,BC	SH,DE,SL		NA	DG	AC	n/c	n/c	PS,JS	PS,JS	PS,JS	PS,JS	n/c										
Counters/NG	NM,JJ	AP,DS	AS,KD,DM,AL	NG,GL	GB,NF,BC	SH,DE,SL		NA	DG	AC	n/c	n/c	PS,JS	PS,JS	PS,JS	PS,JS	n/c										
Date counted	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb	16-Feb		25-Jan	16-Feb	20-Feb			17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb	17-Feb											
Mule Swan			1		2	2		5	16																		21
Australasian Crested Grebe					1			1																			1
Little Black Shag								0							1												1
Australasian Bittern								1																			1
Little Egret								0																			1
Royal Spoonbill	67	86	27	60	24	19	760	40		8					2	5											936
Pied Oystercatcher	2		14				40	22	6				1	7													3936
Variable Oystercatcher							0			2			44	45													306
Hybrid Oystercatcher							0																				17
Pied Stilt	87	61	11	32	6	23	3969	26		54			197		3	8											4874
Black Stilt							0																				1
Hybrid Stilt			4				20																				20
Banded Dottel							1877	5	1	89																	2015
Blackfronted Dottel							0			4				6		1											13
Wrybill							200			1																	201
Pacific Golden Plover							59																				59
Spurwinged Plover	77	8	1	2		5	341	2	4	52			4		3	1											770
Turnstone							0			4																	4
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper							18																				18
Lesser Knot							9																				12
Pectoral Sandpiper							0				1																1
Red-necked Stint							48																				48
Bar-tailed Godwit							277																				2880
Marek Sandpiper							1																				1
Arctic Skua							0			5																	5
Black-billed Gull		2	24				561		7	219				1													1024
Black-fronted Tern						2	87			15	79			10													197
White-winged Black Tern							4				1																7
Caspian Tern	1	1	1			4	147						14														252
White-fronted Tern						99	115	2	80	78																	362
Site totals	234	159	82	97	32	152	8910	58	330	412	0	0	277	52	10	14	0										18004
Wader site totals	166	69	30	34	6	28	6856	33	11	229	0	0	252	52	7	9	0										15175
% of total count	1.03904448	0.454695222	0.197693575	0.224052718	0.0395387141	0.184514003	45.19275124	0.2174629321	0.072487644	1.509060956	0	0	1.66062603	0.342668863	0.0461285001	0.059308072	0										100
# wader species at site	3	2	4	2	1	2	12	3	3	9	0	0	5	2	3	2	0			<							

Wrybill - Lake Ellesmere - William Harland



Health and Safety

For everyone to have an enjoyable time on field trips and other activities we need to make sure everyone stays safe. Here's how you can do your bit.

1. Wear clothing appropriate for the activity such as plenty of warm layers, hat and gloves in winter; a sunhat and sunglasses in summer. Bringing a raincoat is always a sensible option. Footwear needs to be suitable as well - think sturdy soles and good ankle support for many walks, especially on hills, something that can get wet and muddy especially at Lake Ellesmere in winter. Walking poles could be helpful to some on steep and/or uneven ground.
2. Be honest and open about your physical abilities. Not all trips will be suitable for everyone. If you have a pre-existing medical condition that could impact the trip (such as - but not limited to - asthma, allergy to bee stings, diabetes) please notify the trip leader of the condition, any problems that could arise and what the trip leader and others may be required to do to assist you. This information will be kept confidential unless a medical event requires it being shared. Make sure you bring whatever medications you may need.
3. Bring enough food and drink for the event plus a little extra in case the trip takes longer than planned. Fresh water is not always available and dehydration can be a concern in summer so bring your own drinking water.
4. Listen to the health and safety briefing given at the beginning of each trip, keep your eye out for any unexpected hazards and talk to the trip leader and others if you have any concerns along the way. Let the trip leader know of any accidents or near misses.
5. Stay with the group at all times unless you have the trip leader's okay.
6. The trip leader reserves the right to decline participation in any trip if they have concerns about anyone being unable to participate safely or not being suitably equipped.
7. Health and safety incidents or concerns must be reported to the trip leader/RR immediately.

Scopes for Loan:

If you are in Canterbury and wish to borrow a scope contact Sandra (sandraw67@gmail.com). If you are on the West Coast and wish to borrow a scope, contact Liz Meek (ronmeek555@gmail.com).

Submissions:

The editor invites members to submit articles and/or photos for the next issue of *The Wrybill*. Many thanks to everybody who contributed to this edition of *The Wrybill*.

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