

# BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

*Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa*

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## COVER IMAGE

Pukunui Southern New Zealand Dotterel, Rakiura.

Photo by Oscar Thomas.

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# From the President's Desk

## New Zealand Birds Conference

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at our annual New Zealand Birds Conference here in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland over King's Birthday. It has become Aotearoa New Zealand's largest annual conference about birds and bird research. With a full programme including 44 scientific presentations, from birdsong and sanctuaries to scat and even crusty bum (!), it promises to be an informative weekend. I warmly thank the local organising committee, especially Chris Thompson, for all their hard work to ensure another great annual conference.

## Sponsors and advertisers

Birds New Zealand would like to thank all of our conference sponsors and advertising partners. I would like to encourage you to consider the products and services offered in the tailored advertising that regularly appears in Birds New Zealand magazine for Heritage Expeditions, Swarovski Optik and NT Bird Specialists. In particular, I'd like to congratulate Heritage Expeditions on their recent 40th anniversary. A scholarship to join a 'Birding Down Under' voyage with them in 2016 was a catalyst for me. It led me to join Birds New Zealand and to attend my first NZ Birds Conference the following year in Te Anau, Southland.

Another scholarship recipient and member of Birds New Zealand, Oscar Thomas, has an illustrated feature article in this edition about Heritage Expeditions' recent 2025 'Western Pacific Odyssey' voyage which he participated in as a guide (see page 14).

We are currently seeking a new sponsor to support the annual Birds New Zealand Research Fund. The Fund allows us to support a wide range of local research projects that expand our knowledge of birds and their habitats, including many threatened species. I would like to invite any prospective funder to contact me at [president@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:president@birdsNZ.org.nz) to discuss this important opportunity to support New Zealand bird research.

## Notornis updates

You will be pleased to note that under the proactive management of *Notornis* Editor Colin Miskelly, our acclaimed scientific journal is back on track this year. In fact, it's running ahead of schedule! Recent changes to *Notornis* processes led by Colin mean that research articles are now made available online as soon as typesetting is completed, before being collated into each quarterly issue. We expect this to benefit authors and readers alike.

Other recent changes mean that research published in *Notornis* is more widely findable and accessible than ever before, and we hope authors will see the positive impacts of this in their citation rates. Birds New Zealand is proud of its publications, and we strongly value the independence of our editors in selecting and promoting research, activities and news that will be of interest to you as a member.

## February Council meeting

In February, Council met via Zoom to discuss the financial health of the Society, the activities of our regions, and our various nationwide projects and schemes. Regional Representatives (RRs) also gathered online in April, and I was delighted to hear from these friendly and enthusiastic regional leaders, who are busy delivering a whole host of activities across the country. The RRs are the key connectors between members and the Society's Council, ensuring a two-way flow of information between Council and our members. We would love to have a full cohort of RRs across the country, so if you are interested in helping to

make that connection for members in the Far North region or Whanganui region, please contact me via email ([president@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:president@birdsNZ.org.nz)).

## Vacancies

We are currently also seeking capable and knowledgeable members to take on a couple of other important roles in the Society. At the 2026 AGM, our long-serving Treasurer, Paul Garner-Richards, will be stepping down from this Council role. To ensure a smooth transition, we are now seeking expressions of interest from members with knowledge and expertise in accounting software, budgets, and spreadsheets.

We are also seeking an Auckland-based member to take on the role of Librarian for the Society, taking responsibility for our catalogue of ornithological books and periodicals held at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. If either of these roles are of interest to you (or someone you know), please contact me for further details ([president@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:president@birdsNZ.org.nz)).

In personal news, the shocking death of PhD student Kyle Whorrall over the Easter weekend has left me and my Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research colleagues shaken. Kyle was a member of both the Invertebrates research team and the genetics lab group that I work in. Kyle was just like so many of us – curious about the natural world, and happiest when spending time observing the interactions of the critters around us.

As I write this from the deck of my flat on a sunny Sunday morning, I'm heartened that despite this tragic event, the natural world continues to bring me joy and lift my spirits. The birds remain busy despite recent turbulent weather. Tūi are chasing each other above the bush, while Piwakawaka are stealing morsels from spiderwebs glistening with morning dew. Life goes on.

NATALIE FORSDICK, PRESIDENT



📷 Natalie Forsdick photo by Michael Szabo.



## Fledglings magazine

The latest edition produced by Young Birders NZ is now online with articles on penguins, godwits, Pukorokoro Miranda Bird Camp, birding hot spots, fun activities and quizzes. Birds New Zealand helps support the Young Birders NZ website and regular Bird Camps. See the magazine here: <https://static1.squarespace.com/>

## 2025 New Zealand Garden Bird Survey

Birds New Zealand members and the general public are once again being asked to contribute to the annual NZ Garden Bird Survey. Just choose any day between 28 June and 6 July and spend an hour watching the birds in your garden. For each species, record the highest number you see or hear at any one time. The survey is led by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research and the instructions are contained in this website along with handy garden bird identification resources:

<https://gardenbirds survey.nz/>

## Make a difference with a donation

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

\* Deposit a donation into our bank account: 02-0290-0164715-00

\* Make a donation by online credit card payment: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/donate/make-a-donation/#form/Donation>

## Hoiho microchipping review

Hoiho microchipping is under review after X-ray reports that inserted microchips (PIT) have migrated from the insertion site, in some cases into the clavicular airsac and thoracic inlet ending up near vital organs. A temporary suspension is in place until we have more fully assessed the risks, alternatives and improvements. The precautionary decision was based on welfare concerns. We are discussing alternative implantation sites with penguin experts and will initiate testing of inguinal/leg implantation to ensure Hoiho monitoring can continue.

MICHELLE BRADSHAW, DOC BANDING OFFICER

## New Members

We warmly welcome the following 84 new members: Owen Mikosza, Shona Oliver, Finlay Shackleton, Merlin Francis, Kurt MacIntosh, Leila Lees, Rebecca MacQueen, Margaret Oakley, Isabella Brown, Tram Vi, Frazer Dale, Jeanette Budgett, Ryan de Regnier, Lyall Reynolds, Chloe Mc Menamin, Cara Thomson, Paul Seddon, James YH Lee, Luke McClean, Esteban Fuentes, Joey McGrath, Stefan Pearce, Andrew Strother, Jamie Darby, Jessica Van Damme, Ian Higgins, Cassandra Mark-Chan, Cathy Catto, Alysha Jurgeleit, Nigel Adams (Auckland); Nathan Appleton, Andrew Rousell, Takayasu Amano, Jeremy Rossaak (Bay of Plenty); Sarah Gabites, Debby Kerr, Judah Gray, Fleur Van Eyndhoven, Ananya Agnihotri, Glenn McKinlay, Ien Hellemans, Erin Mornin, Rachael Wood, Cassidy Solomon, Lucy Nixon, Shari Martelletti, Gemma Green, Richard Doebling, Hannah Whittall (Canterbury); Jane de Hamel (Gisborne/Wairoa); Marta Maturana, Graeme Ninness (Manawatu); Irati Abascal Zúñiga, John Price, Inés Coca Tagarro, Olivia Benson, Audrey Fulford (Nelson); Bev Reynolds (Northland); Angelina Martelli, Zachary Dickson, Linda Kent-Lindsay, Alex Bell, Melanie Young (Otago); Bevan Walker (South Auckland); Emily Roberts (Taranaki); Jos Kater [Hamilton Zoo], Keely Muir, Nicki van Zyl, Trudy Ashworth, Jonny Mackenzie, Antoinette Ratcliffe, Megan Clemance (Waikato); Harry Donald, Ian Gwynne-Robson, Megan Adamson, Paul Thompson, Erin Patterson, Ella McCallum, Jacob Littlejohn, Tim Broadbent (Wellington); Jarrod Smith (West Coast); Sheryl Murray, Elliot Wilks (Whanganui); Peder Svingen (USA).

## Donations received with thanks

We thank the following 25 people for their generosity: Helen Morgan, Susan Cook, Diane Hyde, Keely Muir, Stuart Nicholson, John A. Stewart, Oliver Aughton, Marshall Clark, Stuart Laurenson, Richard Gardner, Luke Southorn, Israel Cooper, Trudy Ashworth, Audrey Rendle, Ien Hellemans, Denis Robinson, Elizabeth Taylor, Tony Whitehead, Michael Lee, Shelley Heiss-Dunlop, Phil Simms, Eddie Bright, Darion Rowan, Jacob Littlejohn, Bianca Stinson.

## Special Offer – free book for new members

Thanks to the generosity of Potton & Burton, new members currently receive a free copy of *New Zealand Seabirds - a natural history* by Kerry-Jayne Wilson. Published in 2021 and valued at \$50, it includes over 100 colour photos and maps (while stock last, excluding overseas and family subscriptions).

Birds New Zealand membership includes our quarterly *Birds New Zealand* magazine and acclaimed scientific journal *Notornis*, occasional special editions of *Notornis* and discounts on bird books, opportunities to take part in field trips and bird surveys, hear speakers at branch meetings and improve ornithological and birding skills, a free branded sticker and lens cloth, and early bird discount for our annual conference (31 May-2 June 2025 in Auckland).

New members can join now via this link:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/>

## Leaving a gift in your will

If you would like to leave a gift in your will to Birds New Zealand, whatever it may be, please contact our Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: [eo@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@birdsnz.org.nz)

## Kākāriki Karaka released on Pukenui Anchor Island

A new population of Kākāriki Karaka Orange-fronted Parakeets is being established on Pukenui Anchor Island in Fiordland with the release of 34 birds there in February. The Department of Conservation reports the birds have adjusted well and have been seen flocking together with local Mohua Yellowheads.

## New Nelson Regional Representative: Kathryn Richards

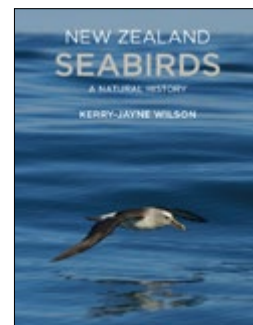
From an early age growing up on a farm in Northland I have been interested in animals and the outdoors. My specific interest in birds has developed later in life and has been inspired by experienced birders I have met through running the Kiwi Conservation Club in Marlborough, and later when I shifted to Nelson and joined Birds New Zealand.

A trip to the Chatham Islands as a volunteer really opened my eyes to seabirds and motivated me to learn more about them.

More trips inspired me to continue learning to gain as much knowledge as possible from experienced birders, and in Nelson we are lucky to have some of the best to learn from.

I am also very involved in trapping and helping to administer a local pest trapping group. My day job is working as a kindergarten teacher but in my spare time I love mountain bike riding and racing, but I have to try hard not to stop and eBird while I'm out riding my bike. I'm looking forward to supporting our region and continuing to build my own knowledge and experience.

KATHRYN RICHARDS



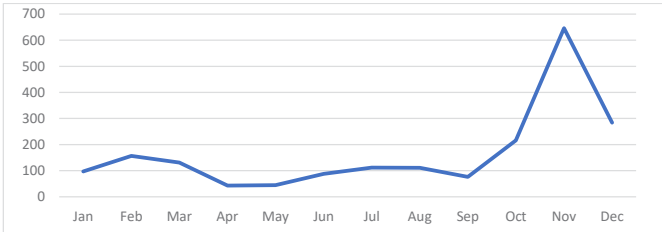


# Beach Patrol Scheme 2024 Annual Report

Table 1: Summary of effort by Beach Patrol districts (km): 2023 and 2024

Beach Patrol districts	Distance patrolled (km)	
	2023	2024
Northland East	558	159
Northland West	334	173
Auckland East	63	18
Auckland West	92	76
Bay of Plenty	111	0
East Coast North Island	48	21
Taranaki	10	7
Wairarapa	8	31
Wellington South	83	124
Wellington West	439	692
North Coast South Island	9	31
Canterbury North	58	25
Canterbury South	57	54
Otago	27	10
Westland	6	1
Southland	101	29
Chatham Islands	5	0
Subantarctic Islands	0	0.5
Total distance patrolled (km)	2,009	1,452

Figure 1. Beach Patrol records by month, 2024; all species, all BP districts.



A total of 803 records were submitted to the Society’s long-running Beach Patrol Scheme in 2024 (2023, 760) from 16 Beach Patrol (BP) districts. A total of 1,452 kilometres of coastlines (2023, 2,009 kms) were patrolled by 85 members, their relatives and friends (2023, 54) (see Table 1).

A total of 1,658 birds of 102 species were counted, including land and wetland species, comprising 311 adults (2023, 638), 78 juveniles (2023, 1,701) and 1,269 birds of unknown age (2023, 890). Of them, 75 species were seabirds. No birds (nil entries) were reported on 82 km (7.6%) of the total distance patrolled, mostly in Wellington West and Northland East BP districts.

Members appear to be comfortable using the new website-based reporting procedure. Several technical improvements were made during the year, including adding and updating common names based on Amendments to the 5th edition of the Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, Notornis, 2024, Vol. 71: 93-114. Data reported last year for the years 2015 to 2023 have been updated with the benefit of a considerable number of additional BP records for this period, mostly from 2019, that were submitted by several members during the year.

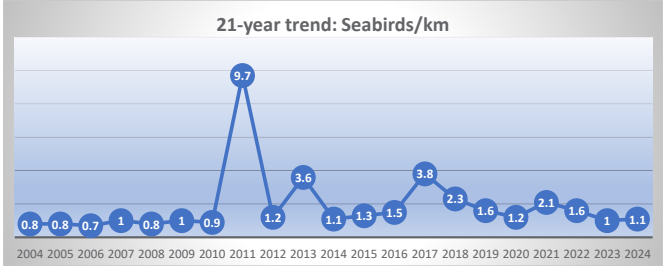
A minor beach wreck appears to have occurred late in 2024 (See figure 1). Inspection of data indicates that the minor wreck is mostly attributed to two species, Sooty Shearwater and Fairy Prion. Maximum numbers were recorded in November, mostly in Northland East, Northland West, Wellington West and Southland BP districts.

The first New Zealand record of a Streaked Shearwater (*Calonectris leucomelas*) was found during a beach patrol in October 2024 in the Wellington South BP district (at Moa Point, near Wellington Airport).

Table 2: 21-year comparison of patrol distances, seabirds counted & birds per kilometre

Year	No. Seabirds	Distance Patrolled (Kms)	Seabirds/Km
2004	2,086	2,545	0.8
2005	1,791	2,328	0.8
2006	1,738	2,406	0.7
2007	2,222	2,224	1.0
2008	2,371	2,808	0.8
2009	3,867	4,051	1.0
2010	2,571	2,930	0.9
2011	15,426	1,592	9.7
2012	1,668	1,444	1.2
2013	4,275	1,195	3.6
2014	1,154	1,034	1.1
2015	1,363	1,047	1.3
2016	1,658	1,139	1.5
2017	3,487	924	3.8
2018	2,057	891	2.3
2019	921	585	1.6
2020	1,243	1,051	1.2
2021	2,673	1,250	2.1
2022	2,206	1,361	1.6
2023	1,871	1,863	1.0
2024	1,662	1,452	1.1

Figure 2



Four Cook’s Petrels (northern) were affected by marine oiling in 2024; all were found in the North East BP district (Uretiti Beach). Three seabirds (two species) were entangled in fishing lines, a Southern Black-backed Gull in Northland East, and two Red-billed Gulls, one each in Northland East and Canterbury South. Disappointingly, one Red-Billed Gull was found to have been shot (East Coast North Island; Tukituki River estuary).

A total of 27 species of land and wetland birds (56 birds; 2023, 44 birds) were reported in 2024, 2.2% of all dead birds counted. Three notable species were a North Island Kaka (Northland East), a NZ Falcon (Southland) and a Shining Cuckoo (Auckland West).

The number of birds counted per kilometre of patrols in 2024 (1.1 birds/km) is comparable to 2023 but lower than in 2021 and 2022 (See Table 2 and Figure 2). A comparison from 2004 of the number of seabirds counted per kilometre (seabirds includes waders) illustrates a major ‘wreck’ in 2011, with smaller ‘wrecks’ in 2013, 2017 and 2021.

Lastly, Council expresses its thanks and appreciation to the many members who contributed BP records through 2024.

IAN ARMITAGE, CONVENER



Sooty Shearwater: Les Feasey/NZ Birds Online.

## Records Appraisal Committee 2024 Annual Report

RAC Secretary Elizabeth (Biz) Bell continues to provide timely and efficient administrative support to the committee and submitters, and Paul Sagar continues to provide independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. The online UBR reporting system continues to be the main source of UBRs received. A total of 113 UBRs was received in 2024, and assessed between March 2024 and February 2025. This is substantially fewer than the record 135 UBRs received in 2023. Of these 113 UBRs, 85 (75%) were accepted by the committee. Two species were added to the New Zealand list during 2024: Horfield's Bronze-cuckoo and MacGillivray's Prion.

The online database of UBRs was also moved to the Society's new website in 2022 (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/rare-birds/>). The database and the systems supporting it have worked well since this transition. The database provides almost immediate feedback on UBR submissions and decisions, as well as a searchable database of all submissions and decisions dating back to the 1960s. It includes hyperlinks to publications referring to individual UBRs, and to New Zealand Birds Online species pages. A paper reporting on the 248 RAC decisions from 2023–24 will be prepared for publication in *Notornis* during 2025. I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members (Andrew Crossland, Ian Saville, Ian Southey, Alan Tennyson) for their efficient support during 2024.

COLIN MISKELLY, RAC CONVENER

## Moult Scheme Annual Report 2024

I have contacted Micah Scholer, the previous Moult Scheme Convener, and introduced myself. Micah still has all the hard copies of historic data and the electronic database which he wishes to transfer to me at some point. The highlight of the year was attending the online Moult Workshop held in February 2025. Ably convened by Paul Fisher and team based in Nelson this workshop was a significant achievement for the scheme and for raising the profile of the scheme and the priority for completing and submitting moult records for Birds in New Zealand. My priorities for the next year are to complete the handover of the electronic data and the hard copy cards from Micah, undertake an assessment of the required actions to set up a full electronic database of the scheme, and promote the scheme with articles and presentations to field workers to generate interest.

BRUCE MCKINLAY, CONVENER

## Nest Recording Scheme Annual Report 2025

Currently we are in the process of setting up an online database for these records. This will make it easier for members to enter data and to retrieve bulk information rather than having to request cards or complete the form downloaded from the website. It will also make it possible to extract data for requests for information. (See the "Management-of-Information-Guidelines" link). When funds are available the database will be planned and setup in a similar manner to the current Beach Patrol database.

In preparation for scanning the existing cards, all 20,000+ of them, I viewed each card briefly and sorted them into 3 groupings. As the format of card changed in 1980, I separated them into pre-1980 (old style), post-1980 (new style) and colony. Ian Armitage then collected them and took them back to Wellington so that they were ready for scanning at a local company that was used for the Beach Patrol scanning. While going through the cards I noticed that there were a number that pre-dated the establishment of the Society. Some of these cards were from as early as 1929. These were written predominantly by a R.H.D. Stidolph whose obituary was featured in the 1980 *Notornis* (see: [www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Notornis\\_27\\_2-1980-pp60-64.pdf](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Notornis_27_2-1980-pp60-64.pdf)).

Most cards were for the more common birds such as Blackbird, Song Thrush and Pukeko and some were for rarer birds from offshore islands. Please use this link to see how to apply for data: [www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Management-of-Information-Guidelines.pdf](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Management-of-Information-Guidelines.pdf)

ROGER SHARP, NEST RECORDS RECORDER

## National Wader Census 2024

**Winter Census 2024:** A total of 99,987 waders of 19 species were counted during the June-July 2024 wader census, up from the 90,663 in 2023 but very similar to the 2022 winter count of 99,553. Nationwide coverage was good with only the Far North, North Kaipara and Porangahau not counted mainly due to a lack of people. South Island Pied Oystercatchers (SIPO) have been declining steadily over recent years but the winter 2024 count of 48,792 was an improvement on the 45,200 counted in 2023. The Variable Oystercatcher (VOC) population continues to increase with a record 4,627 counted in 2024. The VOC count is not a true reflection of the total population as many remain on the breeding grounds during winter and are not counted. The Bar-tailed Godwit number at 12,163 was the highest since 2020. Five sites, Kaipara Harbour, Manukau Harbour, Firth of Thames, Tauranga Harbour and Farewell Spit hold around 70% of overwintering godwits each year.

The Banded Dotterel count of 6,131 was up from 5,779 in 2023 and the highest count since 2011. The winter strongholds were Farewell Spit 915, Kaipara Harbour 724, Southland 659, Kawhia Harbour 523, Manukau Harbour 367 and Lake Ellesmere 352. Only the Southern NZ Dotterels that move to the South Island from Stewart Island in the winter were counted with just 30 seen in 2024. 1,177 Northern NZ Dotterels were counted including 350 on the Coromandel and 224 at Mangawhai. A count is also undertaken at selected post-breeding flocking sites in March each year, which also gives a good indication of the status of the population. The 1,327 Red Knot counted in 2024 was a considerable improvement over the past three years and the 681 counted in the Manukau Harbour accounts for 50% of the total. The Ruddy Turnstone count of 77 was lowest since 66 were counted in 2007. Wrybill numbers are reasonably steady with 4,529 counted in 2024, with 2,324 on the Firth of Thames and 1,747 on the Manukau Harbour and combined accounting for 90% of the total count. Uncommon winter waders included 19 Red-necked Stint, 12 Whimbrel, 2 Eastern Curlew, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, 1 Sanderling and 1 Semipalmated Plover.

**Summer Census 2024:** A total of 138,936 waders of 25 species were counted during the November-December 2024 wader census, compared to 133,994 counted in 2023. This is an increase on the previous two summer counts and the highest count since 2013. National coverage was quite good but the key Far North sites were once again not counted, nor Gisborne/Wairoa and Manawatu. Coverage of some smaller areas particularly along Auckland's east coast are increasingly well covered. The Coromandel is now being counted regularly with 2,602 waders counted at ten locations this year: Bar-tailed Godwit 1,924, NZ Dotterel 124 and VOC 368. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up again this year with 86,523 counted, compared to 79,340 in 2023 and 81,769 in 2022. Counts of over 5,000 were recorded at: Manukau Harbour 14,505, Kaipara Harbour 13,016, Farewell Spit 11,178, Tauranga Harbour 6,280 and Southland 5,338. The 26,032 Red Knot counted was another improvement on the 24,935 in 2023 and 21,658 in 2022. 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 compared to 1,777 in 2023 and 1,404 in 2022. This is the lowest ever even, lower than the 2012 count of 914. The strongholds for Ruddy Turnstone were: Farewell Spit 279, Kaipara Harbour 235 and Manukau Harbour 177. All other Arctic waders were in very low numbers with only 154 Pacific Golden Plover, 23 Red-necked Stint, 20 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and 19 Whimbrel counted. Rarities were 4 Eastern Curlews, 2 Hudsonian Godwits, 2 Grey-tailed Tattlers, 2 Sanderlings, 2 Greater Sand Plovers, 1 Lesser Sand Plover, 1 Curlew Sandpiper and 1 Marsh Sandpiper.

ADRIAN RIEGEN, NATIONAL WADER CENSUS COORDINATOR





Salvin's Prion: Paul Walbridge/NZ Birds Online.



Oscar Thomas, at right, 9-years-old.

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND				Total Number of Specimens recorded on this card		(For Office use only.)	
SPECIMEN RECORD CARD				B.P. Card Number		B.P. Card Number	
Species <i>Oceanites oceanicus exasperatus</i>				1		3464	
Observer and Address M.J. Imber, Massey University of Manawatu, Palmerston North.				B.P. Card Number 1609			
Where Found Waitarere Beach, LEVIN.				Date Found 17/11/63			
Sex	Freshness of Specimen		Molt		Age		
?	About 1 week dead		Full plumage		?		
Bill Length	Bill Depth at base	Bill Width at base	Mid Toe & Claw	Tarsus	Wing Length		
18.6 mm	-	6.3	29.0	34.4	159.0		
Tail	Total Length	Wing Span	Weight	Size of Gonads			
74.2	-	-	-	-			

Front view of a completed card.

## Specimen Records Project

A Specimen Records Project was established by the Ornithological Society of New Zealand in 1949 to provide a structured basis for recording some anatomical measurements of birds found dead on beaches, or found/captured inland. The project tended to be companion to the Beach Patrol Scheme (established 1951), because it enabled members to record measurements when examining beach-wrecked seabirds. Although this historical project was well known and used 35-75 years ago it has not been used since 1991. Older members will remember this project and might have contributed to it.

Specimen Record cards were used to record measurements of the bill (length, depth, width), mid-toe and claw length, wing length, wing span, tail length and the total length of a bird. When practicable, notes were made on bird weight, sex and moult. Most records were submitted between 1950 and 1985; the most recent record was in 1991. The collection includes records for several land bird species. The collection comprises 2,237 cards covering 99 species. That is less than 8% of the Beach Patrol Scheme (over 30,000 records).

811 records (36%) are for five species each having more than 100 records: Fairy Prion, Sooty Shearwater, Little Penguin, Fluttering Shearwater and Salvin's Prion. These are regularly reported in Beach Patrols and would explain why most specimen records of these species have been submitted. A further 638 records are for nine species (all seabirds) each with 50-99 records. Records were submitted by more than 50 members including notable professional ornithologists (Sir Charles Fleming, Sir Robert Falla, Dr Peter Bull) and enthusiastic amateurs, including students. The collection is a valuable resource which has been gathered over a 42-year period by Society members and is now held in the Society library at Auckland Museum. It may be studied on application to the Executive Officer ([eo@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:eo@birdsnz.org.nz)). Cards may be copied or photographed there but will not be loaned out.

IAN ARMITAGE, VICE PRESIDENT

## Where in Aotearoa New Zealand are our birds by region?

A project to collate a list of all bird taxa in Aotearoa New Zealand by region was successful in obtaining funding through Envirolink, a regional council driven funding scheme administered by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. The bird lists were part of a larger project to provide regional councils with comprehensive species lists for four taxonomic groups. This project was led by Dr Scott Jarvie (Otago Regional Council) and Dr Jo Monks (University of Otago), on behalf of the Biodiversity Working Group, Te Uru Kahika (Regional and Unitary Councils Aotearoa). The University of Otago contracted ornithologist Oscar Thomas to undertake the project for the birds.

Oscar Thomas collated an initial spreadsheet of avian taxa exported from the New Zealand Threat Classification System (NZTCS), supplemented with additional information from the 2022 Birds New Zealand checklist. A range of sources were used to help determine the status of each taxa in each region of Aotearoa New Zealand, including New Zealand Birds Online, eBird, the Birds New Zealand Unusual Bird Report database, *Notornis*, and the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds, supplemented with the personal knowledge of compilers and Birds New Zealand members.

The Birds New Zealand Beach Patrol Database was kindly adapted and provided for use by Beach Patrol Scheme Convener Ian Armitage, with support from the Council. With close to 500,000 records of beach-wrecked birds dating back to 1951, some of the only detections of a species in a given region (or indeed Aotearoa New Zealand) is through beach patrols, such as Newell's and Cory's shearwaters. It is fantastic to have such a comprehensive dataset available for projects such as this. Oscar Thomas has also been an active participant in beach patrols since the age of nine, starting with Muriwai Beach walks run monthly by the Auckland Branch and the late Mel Galbraith. Fascinating finds include six or seven prion species, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, and Kerguelen Petrel.

This project required assumptions to be made where evidence could not be found, particularly for taxa that are cryptic, mobile, or sparsely distributed. For example, given the complexity of observing seabirds; species ecology, beach-wrecks, and records from offshore or in adjacent regions were used to inform their status in a given region as best as possible. Small regions such as Nelson and regions with low observer coverage such as Gisborne and West Coast were harder to make inferences for and thus have lower certainty. This list relied on local knowledge to become the most useful and accurate resource it can be. Updates will be vital to maintain the integrity of this list when relevant new information on the status and distributions of birds across Aotearoa New Zealand is made available. The project can be accessed online here: <https://www.envirolink.govt.nz/envirolink-reports/>

OSCAR THOMAS



## Notornis changes

Council made the difficult decision to cease printing *Notornis* after Volume 70 in December 2023. Our recent survey of members revealed that many greatly miss being able to browse hard copy of the journal. Unfortunately, it is not sustainable to return to printing it. However, for those who must have their reading matter as ink on paper, we have made it easier for you to print individual articles or whole issues wherever you can access a printer. As of March 2025, the journal has been reformatted to A4 size, and all full papers start on odd-numbered pages to facilitate double-sided printing.

## DOIs and ORCIDs

Also in March, we registered *Notornis* with Crossref and starting assigning DOI (Digital Object Identifier) numbers to each article and issue. Joining the Crossref group of scientific journals should greatly increase the reach and impact of *Notornis*. Many journal impact measuring systems ignore journals that don't assign DOIs. I have started the slow process of registering DOI numbers for back articles (and back issues) of *Notornis*, including loading the 'Literature cited' lists for each article into Crossref. As of early May, more than 1200 articles had been registered, extending back to 1996. This process will soon merge with a separate project being undertaken by Ian Armitage, to create separate PDFs for every article published before 1990 (while these were individually searchable in the Publications Archive, the search results for pre-1990 articles returned a PDF of the entire *Notornis* issue that contained the article). These processes require every *Notornis* article landing page and PDF to be opened, and so we are correcting any errors and omissions encountered as we proceed, along with standardising the style used for article titles and bird names.

Contributing authors should note that membership of Crossref requires that we display DOI numbers (where they exist) for all literature cited. This has been added to 'Notornis Author Instructions'. An internet search of each article title and journal name will soon reveal if it has a DOI. Authors are also invited to provide their ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) number if they have one. These will show alongside their name on the article title page, and will be loaded into Crossref when the article is registered. ORCID numbers are very useful for authors who share their name or initials with other authors of scientific articles, as it ensures that articles are matched to the correct author in citation metrics. Even in a country as small as New Zealand we have two Dr Hugh A. Robertsons working as scientists for the Department of Conservation. And if the system had existed in the time of former OSNZ President and Fellow Brian D. Bell (1930–2016) it may have reduced confusion over whether it was he or the very much extant Ben D. Bell who had written a particular article.

## Pre-publication

Another new feature for *Notornis* is that full papers are being pre-published as soon as they have been typeset and the authors and editor have agreed that they are ready to publish. The lead article for the June 2025 issue was pre-published on 24 March 2025, and ten further articles had been pre-published by early May. These all had the tag '[PRE-PUBLISHED]' showing after their titles on their Publications Archive landing page. These tags were removed when the full issue was published in early June. The official publication date for pre-published articles will be when the entire issue is published. Please note that members won't be alerted to new articles until each entire issue is published and the Contents page is shared with you via email. Authors are welcome to promote their own pre-published articles, or you can check for them on the Birds New Zealand website, where they will display at the top of the Publication Archive.

COLIN MISKELLY, NOTORNIS EDITOR



▲ New Zealand Falcon Kārearea with prey: Michael Szabo.

## Identifying Swamp Harriers and New Zealand Falcons

These two raptors overlap widely throughout New Zealand, except where the NZ Falcon or Kārearea is largely absent from Auckland northwards. In some ways they look fairly similar so can be confusing to identify, but with practice you should be able to tell them apart.

Adults Swamp Harriers or Kāhu have a tawny-brown back, pale cream streaked breast, yellow eyes and facial skin, and a creamy white rump that's visible in flight. Juvenile and immature birds are dark chocolate brown. Adult Kārearea have a brown back, streaked cream breast and rufous undertail and thighs, long yellow legs and toes, yellow eye-rings and facial skin, dark eyes, and a distinct dark moustachial stripe from the base of the bill that runs down the face. Juveniles are dark brown without cream streaking and have blue-grey legs, eye-rings and facial skin.

The Kāhu is about 15% larger and 10% heavier than the Kārearea, and about the same size and weight as the Little Black Shag. The Kāhu has a more languid, gliding flight than the Kārearea, which is faster and more animated with about 120 wingbeats per minute compared with the Kāhu's 60 wingbeats per minute. The Kāhu also has broader, larger wings compared to the Kārearea's wings, which are narrower and more pointed. When gliding, Kāhu often hold their long wings in a shallow V-shape with the tips upturned. Kārearea have a more direct flight.

Sometimes both species spiral up on thermal updraughts. When they do, remember that the Kārearea has a relatively longer narrow tail compared to the Kāhu's banded tail which is often fanned. Watch also for the Kāhu's dramatic undulating 'sky-dancing' courtship displays which involve them making impressive repeated dives and sharp upward swoops. When perched, Kārearea are smaller and quite slender compared to the larger and bulkier Kāhu, which has a relatively larger head with a large 'owl-like' facial disk around each eye.

Both species engage in spectacular aerial prey swapping which involves one bird passing a prey item to its mate. When they dive at prey with their wings folded, Kārearea can reach a speed of up to 200kph. Kārearea are more often seen in forest habitats (both native and introduced pine), on top of a tall tree, or open tussock habitat and hill country. Kāhu are often seen in open farmland, standing on posts or telegraph poles, and they sometimes land on roads to scavenge road kill. The Kārearea has a loud high-pitched repetitive *kek-kek-kek* call that is very different to the short, sharp *kee-o kee-o* call of the Kāhu. It is often helpful to take a photo and look at it on your computer screen.

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR



▲ Swamp Harrier Kāhu: Imogen Warren/NZ Birds Online.



Photos by Nikki McArthur.

## Manawatū braided rivers shorebird breeding census

The braided rivers of the Manawatū region support nationally-significant breeding populations of several Nationally Threatened or At Risk shorebird species, including Pohowera Banded Dotterels, Black-fronted Dotterels and Tarāpuka Black-billed Gulls. With financial support from the 2024 Birds New Zealand Research Fund and co-funding from Horizons Regional Council, we will carry out the first complete census of shorebirds breeding on the rivers of the Manawatū in October and November 2024, to create a detailed baseline measure of the population size, local densities and distribution of these shorebird species.

The census will involve a team of experienced observers systematically traversing over 400km of riverbed habitats in the Manawatū and Rangitikei river catchments, on foot, by kayak and by raft, recording cumulative counts of all birds encountered within each 1km section of river surveyed. All areas of unvegetated gravel, silt and mud will be intensively searched on an approximately 50m x 50m grid search pattern to ensure that no shorebirds are missed, and care will be taken to avoid double-counting individual shorebirds, for example by using handheld radios to coordinate counting efforts between team members. In addition, field workers will also quantify weed cover and substrate 'coarseness' within each 1km survey section, allowing us to examine the relationship between these habitat variables and local shorebird densities.

This survey forms part of a larger-scale programme of work aimed at creating population size and trend estimates for riverbed-nesting shorebirds on all of the braided rivers of the lower North Island. Since 2019 we have carried out similar census surveys along 292km of braided river habitat in Hawke's Bay, and a further 211km of riverbed habitat in the Wairarapa and Wellington regions. The completion of this Manawatū riverbed-nesting shorebird census will therefore fill the last large remaining gap in our knowledge of the number and distribution of shorebirds breeding on the braided rivers of the lower North Island.

The results of these surveys will make useful contributions towards a number of conservation management initiatives, including helping to inform future re-assessments of the National Threat Classification System rankings of several shorebird species. These results will also help Horizons Regional Council to monitor the effects of flood management activities on the shorebird populations of these Manawatū rivers, and to target habitat management initiatives such as predator and weed control to those river reaches that support the highest shorebird densities.

NIKKI McARTHUR, PROJECT COORDINATOR

## Male kākāpō booming again on the North Island mainland

Kākāpō at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari have completed their first season of booming, something that has not been heard on the North Island mainland for more than a century. Eleven-year-old Taeatanga, one of three male Kākāpō



Taeatanga booming: Aotearoa Science Agency.

currently within the sanctuary as part of a fenced habitat trial started booming in December 2024, and six-year-old Tautahi followed suit. Booming is one aspect of the elaborate breeding behaviour of male Kākāpō, designed to attract the attention of potential mates. DOC Kākāpō Recovery Programme Operations Manager Deidre Vercoe said the news was an encouraging early indication that the habitat there may be suitable for the males, however it was too early to know whether the site could one day support a breeding population.

## North Island Mātātā Fernbird Moulting Study

The objective of this study funded by the 2024 Birds New Zealand Research Fund (BNZRF) was to describe the moulting characteristics of North Island Mātātā Fernbird, which has also required developing new techniques for ageing juvenile and older birds to distinguish post-juvenile and post-breeding moulting patterns. Two field trips were planned, in November 2024 to band early fledglings and in late March 2025 to assess the progress of post breeding moulting prior to completion and post juvenile moulting. A total of 46 Mātātā were banded over two field visits in November 2023 and April 2024, potentially available for recapture in 2024/2025. The planned Whangarei trip in November 2024 was cancelled due to bad weather. Field work was undertaken from 29 March to 7 April 2025, with studies focusing at Ngunguru and Tahi wetlands, both sites visited previously in 2023/2024.

Nine new birds were banded and nine were recaptured. Morphometric measurements and photographs of feather moulting extent were taken of all birds for analysis. For post breeding moulting, most birds exhibited growing outer primaries with feather sheaths, indicating that primary moulting was almost complete. This observation can also be used to estimate the timing of moulting and compared to South Island fernbirds. The two juvenile birds captured exhibited two extremes of post juvenile moulting, with one almost completing moulting with suspended secondaries (abridged moulting) and the other birds still with all juvenile feathers, providing more information on the extent of post juvenile moulting. This field season contributes to a project total of 55 fernbirds banded and 18 recaptures since 26 November 2023.

The study will contribute to a publication describing the moulting extent of NZ endemic passerines, which has been submitted to *Notornis* and accepted for review. An article describing Mātātā moulting and morphometrics, intended for use in conservation management of fernbirds is planned for publication in *Notornis* later this year. A revision of Mātātā moulting has been submitted to the Bander's Guide to Sexing and Ageing Birds (Bell in prep) and information from this study was also presented at the Birds New Zealand Online Moulting Workshop supported by the 2024 BNZRF.

The Whangarei team consisted of Sui Sinclair and Dr Tony Beauchamp (Northland Co-Regional Representatives), Katrina Hansen (Northland Regional Council), Carl Dowd (Tahi Operations Manager). Ilse Corkery (Department of Conservation) and Matu Booth (The Forest Bridge Trust) were unable to attend the banding sessions. Paul Fisher provided training on selecting mist-netting sites and capturing Mātātā with playback, and revision on how to record moulting and criteria for ageing and sexing Mātātā to support ongoing study by the Northland team. About 40% of the 2024 BNZRF grant was not used in lieu of one field trip cancelled. The final expense claim will be submitted once validating the sex of Mātātā feathers has been completed by Infogene Ltd.

PAUL FISHER



# BIRDS | SCIENCE | PEOPLE



Beach patrol at Pakiri: Ian McLean

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▣ Steffi Hebbard with Kiwi Pukupuku, Kapiti Island: Brook Waimārama Sanctuary.

## Little Spotted Kiwi released at Brook Waimārama Sanctuary

Forty Little Spotted Kiwi or Kiwi Pukupuku were taken from Kapiti Island in the Wellington region and released at the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary near Nelson in May, returning the species to the South Island mainland for the first time in nearly 100 years.



▣ Pukunui: Craig McKenzie/NZ Birds Online.

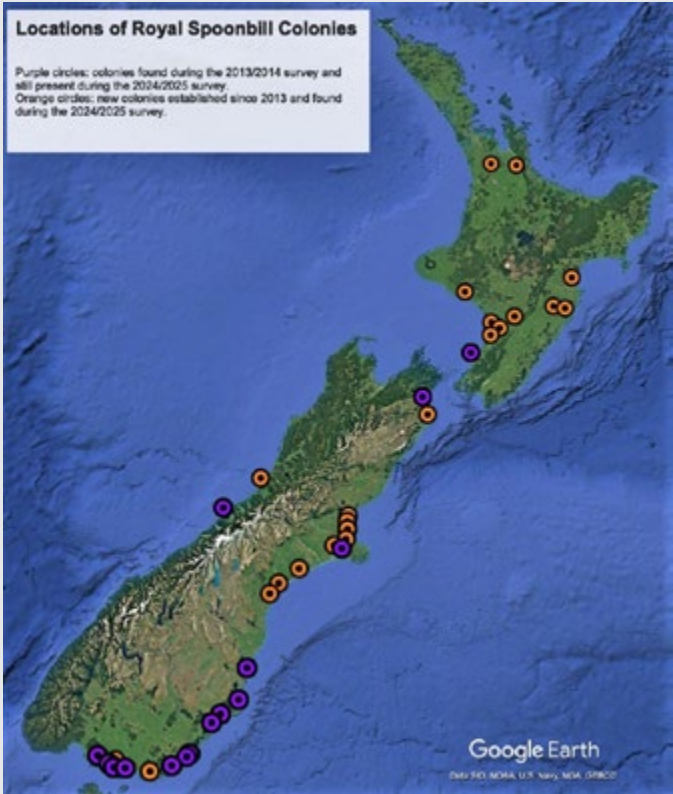
## Good news for Southern New Zealand Dotterels

The latest annual April flock counts of Southern New Zealand Dotterels or Pukunui have found a population increase of four birds, up from 101 last year to 105 this year. Ranked as the world's rarest wading bird, the New Zealand Nature Fund launched a fundraising campaign in partnership with the Department of Conservation (DOC) in 2023 to raise funds from public donations to support DOC's Pukunui Recovery Team. They say they have raised over \$400,000 from over 600 people to date, including \$200,000 from an anonymous party and \$20,000 from the Southland Forest & Bird branch. DOC has used some of the funds to employ more trappers to target feral cats, put surveillance cameras around key breeding sites to monitor feral cat numbers, buy extra feral cat kill traps, and support more helicopter flights to monitor remote nesting sites.



█ Maukiekie Island Royal Spoonbill colony: Nick Beckwith.

Royal Spoonbill Nest Counts				
Birds NZ region	Location	2024	2013 *	
Waikato	Lake Kimihia	46		
Waikato	Te Aroha wetland	2		
Hawke's Bay	Lake Whatuma	8		
Hawke's Bay	Omakere	3		
Hawke's Bay	Anderson Park, Taradale	4		
Whanganui/ South Taranaki	Lake Waikato	5		
Manawatu	Raumai Lagoon	6		
Manawatu	Omanuka Lagoon	1		
Manawatu	Rototane/Voss lagoon	7		
Manawatu	Moutoa/Blind Island	14		
Wellington	Kapiti Island (Northern end)	29	20	
Marlborough	Blenheim Wastewater Treatment	35	64	
Marlborough	Lake Elterwater	10		
West Coast	Waitangiroti, Okarito	30	23	
West Coast	Ruatapu	20		
Canterbury	Pegasus Wetlands	16		
Canterbury	Kaiapoi Wastewater Treatment	14		
Canterbury	Travis Wetland	18		
Canterbury	King Billy Island-Lyttelton	6		
Canterbury	Lower Ashburton River	4		
Canterbury	Mouth of the LII River	(14)		
Canterbury	Halswell River, Lake Ellesmere	47	134	
Canterbury	Rhodes Lagoon/Orari Lagoon	8		
Canterbury	Smithfield Pond, Timaru	6		
Otago	Maukiekie Island	10	30	
Otago	Taiaroa Head	(15)	28	
Otago	Green Island	10	37	
Otago	Taieri Island	6	(15)	
Otago	Nugget Point	1	22	
Otago	Rainbow Isles	1	5	
Southland	Haldane Estuary	4		
Southland	Shell Banks New River Estuary	27		
Southland	Awarua Wetland	20	60	
Southland	Bluff Harbour Rabbit Island	2	17	
Southland	Omaui Island	7	18	
Southland	Tihaka/Pig Island, Riverton	14	45	
Total number of nests		470	632	
* from Thompson M and Schweigman P (2014) Birds New Zealand 3:12-13.				
Bold indicates new colonies since last survey in 2013. \/: best estimate				



# Results of the nationwide Royal Spoonbill Colony and Nest Count 2024/2025

The first Kōtuku Ngutupapa Royal Spoonbill nests away from Okarito were found among driftwood at the Wairau lagoons in 1979 and in Otago on Maukiekie Island in 1984. The further expansion of breeding colonies down the eastern South Island was documented by Peter Schweigman, who also helped coordinate the 2013/2014 national colony survey, which identified 17 colonies in the South Island and just two in the North Island. Peter would have been intrigued by the results of this past season's nationwide survey, which found a marked expansion of colonies, with 25 in the South Island and 11 now in the North Island.

The number of known colonies reported was 36 (see table). There were 10 new colonies in the North Island and 12 new colonies in the South Island, 8 of which were in Canterbury; their range now extends from Bluff to Huntly, with 30% of colonies now in the North Island compared with only 10% a decade ago (see map). Fourteen colonies from the 19 documented in 2013/2014 count were still active.

The total number of confirmed nests was 470, which is fewer than a decade ago (see table). This is a minimum number as observers sometimes found it difficult to see nests if hidden below the tree canopy or on sides away from view. Most of the

counts were made from the ground, and some from aerial images taken from light aircraft in Otago and Southland or by drone at Kapiti Island. It was commented that it was difficult to identify nests from aerial images; at one location on the shell banks of New River estuary, 27 nests were discovered by a ground search but only 14 from aerial images. In contrast, the drone imaging of nests at Kapiti Island was very successful as observers on the ground near the colony could not see any nests as they were hidden in the shrubs.

Although the number of colonies has doubled, the size of individual colonies has decreased. Whereas in 2013, 13 (68%) colonies had greater than 20 nests, in 2024 only 6 (16%) of this size were identified; 4 of these were well-established colonies and two were new colonies (Lake Kimihia and New River). Sixty percent of colonies had less than 10 nests.

In 2013 Canterbury, Otago and Southland were the strongholds for breeding colonies and nests. Now the number of nests in Otago and in Southland has markedly decreased (see table). Four of the 2013/2014 sites in Otago and Southland are no longer used. The findings suggest a shift northwards of breeding sites, although nest numbers have been maintained in Canterbury with the establishment of more smaller colonies.





▲ Royal Spoonbill colony, Travis wetland: *John Dunlop.*



▲ Aerial drone photo of Royal Spoonbill colony on Kapiti Island: *Miles Davitt.*



▲ Royal Spoonbill colony, Pegasus Wetland: *Grant Davey.*



▲ Royal Spoonbill nests with eggs, Ashburton River colony: *Don Geddes.*



▲ Royal Spoonbill with juveniles, Lake Waikato: *Peter Frost.*

Nests were found in all manner of places but always near water. Islands were the most favoured location. The nests of stick platforms were mostly built in available trees at various heights above water. A commonly used tree was willow, which reflects the type of tree invading shallow lagoons, where many of the new colonies were found. In contrast, some colonies were on the ground with nests among sedges or on driftwood. Spoonbills are usually thought to be cryptic breeders, but interestingly, several of the new colonies were not in out-of-the-way sites. At the Travis wetland the colony was 100m from a roundabout of two busy Christchurch roads, at Pegasus only 150m from residential housing and Anderson Park was in the heart of Taradale. Birds were happy to colonise built structures such as water treatment ponds or maimai. The most unusual and precarious colony consisted of 4 nests built in sprouting willow driftwood on a braided river bed amongst a large Southern Black-backed Gull colony on the Ashburton River.

Birds New Zealand's nationwide Royal Spoonbill population census (2024) found an almost two-fold increase in the number of birds over the last decade (7% per year); the number of colonies has increased similarly but the total number of recorded nests has not. It would be interesting to find out whether breeding in

New Zealand could add sufficient new birds to the population to account for the growth or whether new arrivals from Australia are still contributing.

This survey did not set out to study breeding biology. Nevertheless, some interesting observations were made. Active nests were seen from the end of October to mid-March. There were several reports of nests at various stages in the one colony at the same time: nest building, eggs, chicks and fledged juveniles. At the Travis colony, John Dunlop reported that usually 4 eggs were laid and on average two fledglings were raised per nest. A future detailed study of suitable colonies would make a valuable contribution to knowledge about Royal Spoonbill breeding biology as very little is currently known.

Thanks to all Birds New Zealand members who took part in the survey, members of the public who alerted us to possible colonies, the pilots of light aircraft and drones, Chris Lalas who supplied aerial images of the Otago coastal colonies, and support from the Birds New Zealand Project Assistance Fund for the aerial survey of Southland.

MARY THOMPSON, SURVEY COORDINATOR





▲ Short-tailed Albatross off Tori-shima, Japan.

# Western Pacific Odyssey: From Long-tailed Mynas to Short-tailed Albatrosses

Article and photographs by Oscar Thomas

Heritage Expeditions ran its first Western Pacific Odyssey (WPO) voyage in 2007. The 2025 voyage spanned 25 days from Auckland, New Zealand to Osaka, Japan onboard the *Heritage Adventurer* (13 March – 6 April) with almost 100 passengers on board. This epic journey has developed a reputation over the years as one of the world's 'ultimate pelagic trips', putting mythical seabirds on the map such as New Caledonian Storm Petrel and Lava Petrel.

A fantastic array of seabirds was spotted from the decks as we headed north from the Hauraki Gulf, including Cook's, Pycroft's and Black petrels, Common Diving Petrels, and Antipodean and White-capped albatrosses – all species familiar to kiwi seabird enthusiasts. The once-thought extinct New Zealand Storm Petrel is always a highlight in this area, seen by us alongside White-faced Storm Petrels. The calm conditions helped with spotting other marine wildlife, including Spine-tailed Devil Rays, Bottlenose Dolphins and Bryde's Whales. More warm water species appeared the next day in the form of White Noddies, Red-tailed Tropicbirds, and White-naped and Gould's petrels.

Our first stop was Australia's Norfolk Island where we were greeted by local birding legend Margaret Christian of Green Eyes Bird Tours. It was fantastic to learn about the birds that call this island home and see hundreds of Tasman Masked Boobies and

thousands of White, Grey, Brown and Black noddies departing at dawn. Ashore, we headed up to Palm Glen in the National Park to search out four island endemics: Norfolk Robin, Norfolk Parakeet, Norfolk Gerygone, and Slender-billed White-eye. Three came easy, but only a few heard or glimpsed the parakeet (very similar to our Red-crowned Kakariki). The local subspecies of Golden Whistler put on a good show too, as did Nankeen Kestrel, Pacific Emerald Dove and Crimson Rosella.

## Volcanic Vanuatu to the Bismarck Archipelago

Vanuatu was next. Landing on the active volcano of Ambrym we first visited Lake Lonwolwol and encountered the spritely Vanuatu Streaked Fantail, vibrant Tanna and Red-bellied fruit doves, and the wary Metallic Pigeon. That afternoon produced more fruit doves, noisy Coconut Lorikeets and large flocks of fast-flying Uniform and Satin swiftlets.

The next day we started at 3am on the island of Espiritu Santo. Buff-bellied Monarch and Southern Shrikebill kept birders on their toes at Loru Conservation Area, while a pair of vividly coloured Vanuatu Kingfishers sat still long enough for all to enjoy. Other highlights included Pacific Kingfishers and Imperial Pigeons, South Melanesian Cuckooshrikes, and Yellow-fronted





▲ Great Frigatebird male.



▲ Cocos Booby female.



▲ Kermadec Petrel dark morph.



▲ White-tailed Tropicbird.

White-eyes, Vanuatu Whistlers, although always singing, proved difficult to glimpse, and some participants may have encountered the elusive Vanuatu Megapode, but brief sightings kept things mysterious!

At sea we enjoyed watching Brown and Red-footed boobies taking shots at flying fish and flying squid flushed by the ship. Interesting and enigmatic seabirds included the aptly named Magnificent and Vanuatu petrels and the rarely seen Polynesian Storm Petrel. I managed to miss an unusual sighting of a Juan Fernandez Petrel while trying to de-fog my camera gear! But I finished just in time to see a beautiful Spot-breasted Cuckoo Dove that landed on the ship 30km offshore!

In the Solomon Islands, we landed on Guadalcanal. Our adventure was off to an exciting start at 3 am, heading ashore for Honiara. We drove in the dark up Mount Austen and searched for birds from sunrise. Enjoying the clearing conditions as the forest lightened up, we had excellent sightings of specialties such as the majestic Blyth's Hornbill whooshing overhead, gangs of Solomons Corellas, and the stunning Ultramarine Kingfisher. The colourful Claret-breasted Fruit Dove and bizarre Buff-headed Coucal required diligent scanning of distant canopy, but we were rewarded with good views. A lucky few also spotted a Finsch's Pygmy Parrot (think Rock Wren in size and colour), a raucous Melanesian Megapode, and the elusive yet surprisingly noisy Woodford's Rail. A Pacific Baza soaring overhead was a welcome addition while heading back down.

Our next stop was Kolombangara which involved another early commute, this time up to the Imbu Rano Mountain Lodge, set among stunning native forest. From the veranda overlooking the 1770m peak of the dormant volcano, Mt Rana, we enjoyed

'scope views' of Red-knobbed Imperial and Pale Mountain pigeons. The birders dispersed into the forest, and had great observations of White-capped Monarchs and Crimson-rumped Myzomelas as Moustached Treeswifts soared overhead and noisy groups of small parrots flashed over the canopy, with Duchess and Meek's lorikeets both seen. An array of Columbids serenaded us but remained hidden, including Crested Cuckoo Dove, Superb Fruit Dove, and Stephan's Emerald Dove.

Back on board some of us scanned the coastline for additional birds, including Pacific Reef Herons, Ospreys and the enormous Solomon's Sea Eagle. White-tailed Tropicbirds, Lesser and Great frigatebirds, Black Noddies and Sooty Terns made up the bulk of the coastal seabirds. A handful of Streaked Shearwaters here would be the only ones we encountered outside of Japan.

Next stop Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. This was the first time the WPO has visited this destination, which has a tumultuous history. We were ashore at dawn and drove up the windy road to the abandoned Panguna Copper Mine, birding back down amidst cloud forest at 1000m. We encountered numerous Scarlet-naped Myzomelas, Bougainville Monarchs and White-eyes, Steel-blue Flycatchers, and heard the mournful call of the rarely-seen Odedi (Bougainville Bush Warbler). Further down the road we observed Claret-breasted and Yellow-bibbed fruit doves, and an obliging pair of Bougainville Crows.

As we cruised north, the sea was alive with feeding groups of tunas, attended by wheeling frigatebirds and terns. In the afternoon, the first Heinroth's Shearwaters were seen in one of the feeding groups, causing many birders to flock to the decks. Over the next few hours, we saw at least 30 of them. Other highlights included Beck's Petrel and a large pod of False Killer



▲ Vanuatu Kingfisher



▲ Long-tailed Myna



▲ White-capped Monarch



▲ Blyth's Hornbill

and Melon-headed whales. At Kavieng we had great sightings from the wharf of Bismarck Crows, gaudy Red-flanked Lorikeets and Papuan Eclectus, and the 'Common' trio of Kingfishers, Sandpipers and Terns. Birders in the forest reported Golden Monarchs, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Green-fronted Hanging Parrots and White-breasted Fruit Doves.

## Chuuk Lagoon to Japan's Inland Sea

After more sea time we crossed into the Northern Hemisphere to arrive at Chuuk, one of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia. A stream of Leach's Storm Petrels and Bulwer's Petrels kept us entertained, often threatening to be a closely related almost identical species until photos were examined. A Christmas Shearwater was unexpected, whereas Tropical Shearwaters not so much. Ashore on Weno Island, birders set off for the Japanese WW2 Lighthouse at the eastern tip. Along the way, we enjoyed excellent views of the endemic Chuuk Flycatcher, Caroline Islands Ground Dove and Reed Warbler. Even the beautiful red Micronesian Myzomelas were uncharacteristically showy.

On a remote atoll with relatively low bird diversity, it seems species that would normally be quite hard to see are much more confiding. Those who climbed to the top of the historic lighthouse were rewarded with close flybys of courting White-tailed Tropicbirds, and had great views of a pair of endangered Chuuk Monarchs in the undergrowth, with possibly the first photographs taken of birds in the rufous plumage morph that females can show. Everyone was thrilled to see all the bird species we could hope for on Weno.

Seabirds kept us busy for our final week at sea as we tried to separate the almost identical Matsudaira's and Tristram's Storm Petrels (the latter lacks white upper primary shaft flashes), and the recently split Brown and Cocos boobies. Bonin Petrels whizzed by in ones and twos, and Red-footed Boobies put on a good show going for the last of the flying fish prior to our approach to the Ogasawara Islands. At Chichi-jima we spotted our first land birds since Micronesia: the beautiful Blue Rock Thrush and bulky Eastern Buzzard! Large flocks of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters increased the difficulty of trying to pick out the smaller Bannerman's Shearwater, but the smallest and most





▲ Bismarck Crow



▲ Black-footed Albatross



▲ Caroline Islands Ground Dove



▲ Chuuk Monarch female

endangered (Bryan's) Shearwater eluded us entirely that day (luckily the seabird researchers on the boat nearby spotted one!).

Another sea day led us ever closer to Tori-shima, a spectacular active volcano and protected sanctuary that is the main breeding site of the endangered Short-tailed Albatross, a species thought to be extinct in the 1940s due to over-harvesting for their feathers. Any day you get to see an albatross is a good day, but these are particularly exquisite seabirds. Black-footed Albatross are more widespread but also occur here – and as luck would have it, a Laysan Albatross from Hawai'i also made a brief pass. I was also thrilled to spot several Japanese Murrelets, a first for Tori-shima on the WPO voyage, my first-ever alcid (Auk), and one of the most localised.

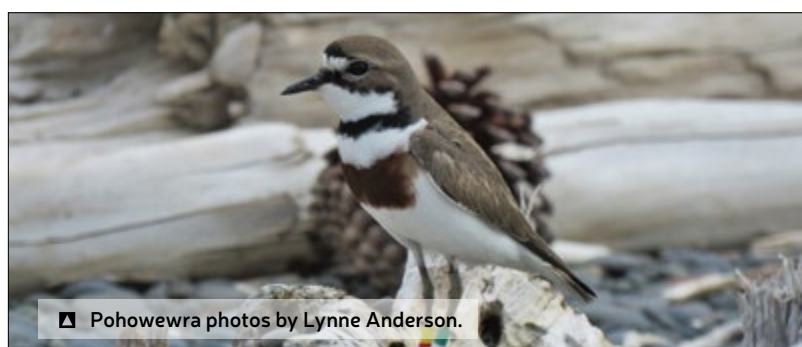
On the final sea day, things were eerily still and grey. It was hard to tell where the sky ended and sea began. More and more ships and debris came past us, some of the debris manifested into flocks of phalaropes (Grey Phalarope or Red Phalarope depending on which plumage they're in), impressive little shorebirds that have taken to the open seas. Several smart Long-tailed and

Pomarine skuas soared past occasionally, en route to their breeding grounds further north. Coming into Ōsaka Bay at the eastern end of Japan's Inland Sea there was an hour of daylight before we came alongside, so birders made the most of it spotting various gull species, Greater Scaup, Oriental Greenfinches and a Black Kite.

Heritage Expeditions has offered the WPO since 2007; however, they have not scheduled in any future WPO voyages, so it is possible that the 2025 WPO will be the last of its kind. If that is the case, it went out on a high note with an incredible 40 species of tube-nosed seabirds seen, one of the few close approaches to Tori-shima to view colonies of the iconic Short-tailed Albatrosses, and the first time the enigmatic Chuuk Monarch was seen. It was certainly a trip of a lifetime.

*Oscar Thomas is a Heritage Expeditions Guide and a member of Birds New Zealand. He is currently an MSc student at the University of Otago studying the Pukunui Southern New Zealand Dotterel, and is the author of A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of New Zealand (John Beaufoy Publishing: 2023).*





■ Pohowewra photos by Lynne Anderson.

## 10<sup>th</sup> annual Auckland dotterel minders forum

The 10th annual Auckland dotterel minders forum was held at Māngere Bridge on 12 April, celebrating a decade of community-driven conservation efforts to protect the Tūturiwhatu Northern New Zealand Dotterel. Organised by Auckland Council's Environmental Services team, with longstanding support from Auckland Birds New Zealand members – particularly Gwenda Pulham and Shaun Lee – the forum provides an opportunity for those involved in dotterel conservation to connect, and to share their knowledge and experiences. Held annually since 2014, the only hiatus occurred in 2020 due to COVID-19.

This year's guest speaker Emily Roberts from Taranaki gave an inspiring presentation about the work she has been doing with 'Dotterel Defenders' on the recovery of Tūturiwhatu in the Taranaki region and the importance of raising awareness, education and inclusion for protecting our native species. She also shared how "JAM", a Tūturiwhatu flagged on the west coast of Auckland, turned up in Taranaki (over 300km), where it then successfully fledged chicks – highlighting the importance of conservation efforts between regions and the value of bird banding/flagging in being able to share the incredible stories of these birds.

The Auckland dotterel minders network came about over 14 years ago in recognition of a growing interest in dotterel protection from volunteers at an increasing number of sites across the region, building on the dotterel conservation work of John Dowding. Gwenda Pulham and Auckland Council Environmental Services staff helped to facilitate connection between these volunteers and provide support for the work being done. This has evolved into the current network with Tūturiwhatu monitored at over 40 sites, with around 130 breeding pairs usually monitored in recent years (a record 175 pairs were monitored in the 2022/23 breeding season).

One of Birds New Zealand's Auckland region projects is the annual dotterel post-breeding flock counts, coordinated by Gwenda Pulham. The data from these counts, alongside the breeding monitoring reports from the dotterel minders, indicate an increasing Auckland Tūturiwhatu population. Thanks to the dotterel minders, the Auckland Tūturiwhatu population is recovering, and this has contributed to the improvement in the conservation status of the species nationally (see: [https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Dowding\\_67\\_717-728.pdf](https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Dowding_67_717-728.pdf)). Tūturiwhatu are now listed as Conservation Dependent, so while efforts to protect them must continue, their fate could have been a very different story.

JACINDA WOOLLY, BEN PARIS & MADDIE WHITE  
(AUCKLAND COUNCIL)

## Save the Dotterels Hawke's Bay – Napier Zones

'Save the Dotterels Hawke's Bay' is a group of more than 20 dedicated local volunteers concerned for the survival and breeding success of the Pohowera Banded Dotterel on beaches in Hawke's Bay. The group advocates for the protection of shingle beach habitat and for all indigenous species both fauna and flora naturally found on our shores.

The group has been monitoring the birds for three seasons but last season the monitoring area was greatly expanded (from the Bayview/Westshore site) to include from Marine Parade right down the full length of Awatoto Beach – about 5.5 km. This is an area that was plagued with beach fires, vehicles driving on the beach, a rat infestation, and cats roaming the area at night.

This last season also saw 40 of Hawke's Bay's Pohowera banded through a new 5–10 year study led by Dr Luke Eberhart-Hertel and conducted by the Max Planck Institute in Germany and the Department of Conservation.

### Key results: Bay View to Surf Club – about 2.5 km

Dotterel first sighted	12/07/24
First nest identified	21/08/24
Total nests	45
No. of nests hatched	26
Chicks fledged	18 estimated

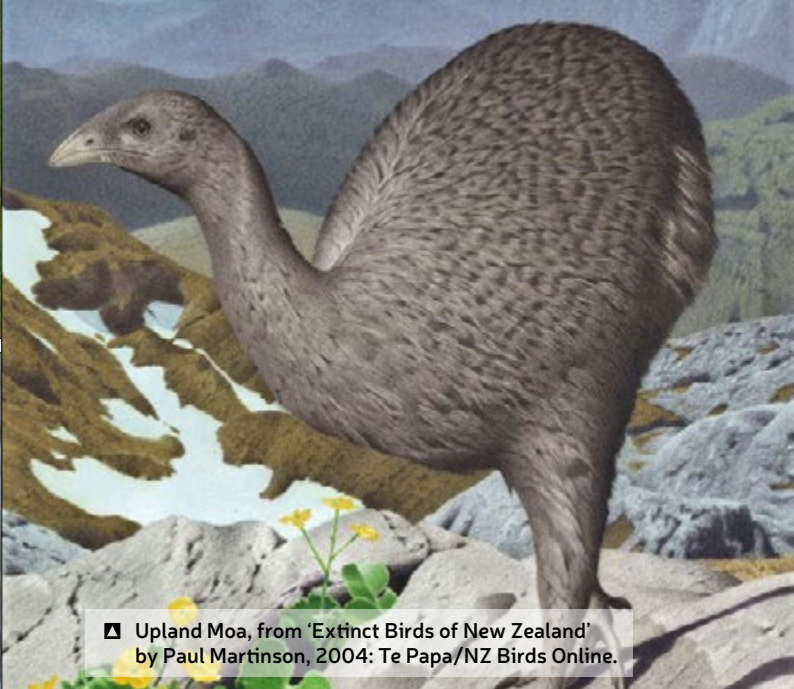
### Marine Parade to Awatoto – about 5.5 km

Dotterel first sighted	16//08/24
First nest identified	23/8/24
Total nests (many re-nests)	86
No. of nests hatched	22
Chicks fledged	9 estimated

While 131 nests were identified (many 2nd or 3rd nesting attempts), only 27 fledglings were observed over a six-month period on about eight kilometres of beach. In the Awatoto zone, it appears that not enough chicks are fledging to ensure that the species will survive on Napier's southern beaches. Predator control has now been introduced to this area but many nest failures were due to human disturbance. Pleasingly, on the northern beaches results were improved from the previous season (which may be largely due to the demise of a persistent cat). For the full report please contact Lynne Anderson at: [autumntrees8@gmail.com](mailto:autumntrees8@gmail.com)

LYNNE ANDERSON





▲ Upland Moa, from 'Extinct Birds of New Zealand' by Paul Martinson, 2004: Te Papa/NZ Birds Online.

## Upland Moa ate colourful fungi

A new study reveals the extinct Upland Moa ate colourful truffle-like endemic fungi. The study says animals that consume fungi (mycophages) are important for fungal spore dispersal, including ecto-mycorrhizal fungi that is symbiotic with forest-forming trees. New Zealand's truffle-like fungi are hypothesised to be adapted for bird dispersal. However, there is little direct evidence for this hypothesis, as 41% of New Zealand's native land bird species have become extinct since human settlement in the 13th century. The study reports that ancient DNA and spores from inside two coprolites (fossil scat) from the Upland Moa reveal consumption and likely dispersal of fungi spores. Contemporary data shows that NZ birds rarely consume fungi and that fungal communities are undergoing a gradual species turnover following the establishment of introduced mammalian mycophages, potentially affecting native forest resilience and facilitating invasion by exotic trees (Alexander P. Boast et al. 2025. *Biology Letters* 21 (1): 20240440; doi: 10.1098/rsbl.2024.0440).



▲ Australian Magpie with skink in its bill: Paul Alcorn.

## Australian Magpie eating a skink at Petone Beach

An Australian Magpie has been seen eating a Northern Grass Skink at Petone Beach on 25 April. The observer, Paul Alcorn, says that while the skink did not show any signs of life it looked physically complete and shiny. The magpie appeared out of a Marram Grass patch near a footpath and with the skink in its bill. A second magpie then appeared from the same patch, suggesting they were a pair foraging in the same area. Les Doran of DOC says it has long been suspected that Australian Magpies in NZ could be lizard predators, but this report with a photo is the first known pictorial evidence. He says another possibility is the bird found a dead skink to scavenge.



▲ Tieke North Island Saddleback and decomposing fly agaric toadstool: Michael Szabo.



▲ Mature fly agaric toadstool (*Amanita muscaria*): Michael Szabo.

## Tieke and Hihi foraging on fly agaric

While visiting Zealandia on 15 April I saw a juvenile Tieke North Island Saddleback foraging on a decomposing fly agaric toadstool (*Amanita muscaria*). It held the cap and started to peck at it, inserting its bill inside and opening it outwards, seemingly searching for grubs with its tongue. Then it did the same to the stem and the ground underneath. After two minutes, it bounded to a nearby spot and did the same with a mature *boletus* mushroom. It used the same foraging techniques for two minutes before hopping out of view. Tieke have not been photographed foraging on fly agaric before. This is significant because this introduced toadstool contains bufotenine, a poison and a weak hallucinogenic agent. Although I did not see the bird ingesting the toadstool, photos show it was flicking its tongue inside it.

Former ranger Neil Anderson has reported that six or seven Hihi were seen "convulsing" on the ground at Zealandia in March/April 2015 after some were seen feeding on fungi. He saw one eating a fly agaric toadstool and another eating a *Boletus* (*pers comm*, 14/5/25): "In late March [2015] a juvenile male was found on the ground near a feeder convulsing with wings outstretched and head arched back. The bird was weak and unresponsive with eyes closed and was taken to Wellington Zoo hospital where it was given fluids and kept for observation. By the next morning it seemed fully recovered ... The next day another bird exhibited the same symptoms and was once again taken to the zoo where it recovered fully and was released back into the Sanctuary. Subsequently three more birds, all juvenile males, were found with these symptoms and were kept on-site in a box overnight in a warm place with access to food and by the morning all were recovered and were released seemingly none the worse for wear." He also reports one Hihi died, seemingly of hypothermia: "Fri 24th April 09:15. Found juv male hihi on the ground in the same vicinity as disturbed mushrooms and close to where sick bird had been seen in canopy the previous evening. It was the same bird (BM-KR) as had been seen the night before and was hunkered down head tucked into breast, weak and very cold and may have been on the ground all night. Bagged the bird up and carried it inside my bushshirt back to Ops shed but by the time I arrived it had died."

MICHAEL SZABO, EDITOR





### FAR NORTH

We visited 90 Mile Beach on 28/3 where we saw a total of 1,249 birds along 30km of beach, including 300 South Island Pied Oystercatchers (SIPO), 10 Variable Oystercatchers, 572 Southern Black-backed Gulls, 190 Red-billed Gulls, 3 Caspian Terns and 155 White-fronted Terns. Nearby at Walker Island in Rangaunu Harbour, Mathieu Poot reported 11 Whimbrels and 1 Eastern Little Tern in early February. We also saw 250 Royal Spoonbills, 97 Red-billed Gulls and 78 White-faced Herons at Unahi on 10/4.

Kevin Matthews reported a Reef Heron at Shipwreck Bay near Ahipara on 15/4, and an Australasian Bittern and an Eastern Barn Owl plus several more owls heard calling in the vicinity of Awanui on 2/4. He also saw 22 NZ Dotterels and 150 SIPOs on East Beach on 17/4, a Wrybill on Tokerau Beach on 16/4, and a Pectoral Sandpiper with 6 Banded Dotterels north of Te Paki Stream on 5/5. A possible Glossy Ibis was reported with a flock of at least 100 Royal Spoonbills at Unahi on 5/5. Kevin Matthews visited there on 10/5 in search of the putative ibis and, although he drew a blank, he was rewarded with a sighting of a grebe that he says was "almost certainly" a Hoary-headed Grebe just east of Unahi wharf, and 20 Eastern Cattle Egrets with the large spoonbill flock.

Following the recent rainy weather there have been big flocks of gulls on paddocks around Kaitaia, and Weka are reportedly becoming more numerous in Opuia with birds also seen between Kerikeri and Okaihau.

– ISABELLA GODBERT & KEVIN MATTHEWS

### NORTHLAND

In February, branch members visited Vinegar Lake in Tikipunga to look at the birds there, including 3 nesting Australasian Little Grebes. Tony Beauchamp explained how the balancing pond was developed and how the surrounding landscape had changed over the 5 years the pond had existed in its current state. The pond had become weedier, supporting the use of Australasian Little Grebes and the presence of NZ Dabchicks. Seven pairs of grebes have undertaken 27 breeding attempts and fledged 16 young in the season that has just ended.

In April, Paul Fisher returned to Northland from Nelson to catch and assess the moult on Fernbirds. Paul's trip coincided with the change from drought to wet weather, which was rather unfortunate. Paul worked with 4 Northland members and caught 11 new Fernbirds and 7 recaptures, at Hilton and Melva Ward's wetland on Old Mill Lane in Ngunguru and Tahī at Poutawa North.

Gary Wilson gave us a very informative talk for us about a trip he and Robin had just taken to Nepal. Their photos included an ant-eating bear that Robin wanted to see. It was interesting to see how the tour company they used and how the park staff managed tourists so they got the best possible experience and the feeling they were not part of the masses.

Lastly, notable sightings on a pelagic trip from Tutukaka out to 'The Petrel Station' on 10/2 included 2 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, 1 Gibson's Albatross, 1 Salvin's Albatross, 4 Pycroft's Petrels, 3 Black-winged Petrels, 1 Wilson's Storm Petrel and 42 Grey Ternlets.

– TONY BEAUCHAMP

### AUCKLAND

Important late summer and autumn surveys included the Northern NZ Dotterel count at Big Sand Island/Manukapua on Kaipara Harbour on 29/3 which recorded 57 Nth NZ Dotterels, 400 Banded Dotterels, 20 Pacific Golden Plovers, 1 Semipalmated Plover, 327 Ruddy Turnstones, 3 Curlew Sandpipers, 5 Red-necked Stints, 11 Eastern Little Terns and 18 NZ Fairy Terns. The annual South Kaipara Lakes Dabchick Survey on 25/4 produced more grebes than in previous years. In 2024, only 10 NZ Dabchicks and 1 Australasian Little Grebe were counted. The 2025 result included 18 NZ Dabchicks and an incredible 29 Australasian Little Grebes (21 adults, 8 juveniles) - the first time they have outnumbered dabchicks. This massive increase may be due to more extensive predator control and immigration of birds from others parts of Auckland/Northland, or perhaps even new birds arriving from Australia? Other species seen included 1 Australasian Bittern, 39 Grey Ducks, 45 Australasian Shovelers, 93 Grey Teal and 11 NZ Scaup. Our Puweto/Spotless Crane monitoring at Orangihina in Te Atatu on 22/3 recorded 6 Spotless Cranes and 40 Fernbirds.

Public guided walks included one at Ambury Park on 16/3 guided by Stuart Laurenson with birds seen including 200 Kuaka/Bar-tailed Godwits, 330 Red Knots, 1600 Wrybills, 1 Whimbrel, 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper, 57 Caspian Terns and 140 Royal Spoonbills. A Guided Bird Walk for Kids at Cornwall Park on 14/4 was also well attended with 30 enthusiastic participants. Bird numbers were low, but included Common Pheasants, Tui and views of Kereru in flight display.

Our branch had a display at the Auckland Dotterel Minders Forum in Mangere on 12/4 and Trina Smith represented us at a RiverCare Group Te Wai o Parera Guided Walk in Te Atatu on 29/3. Our display at the excellent Oceania Seabirds 2025 Symposium at Auckland University 14-16/4 was a great opportunity to highlight the Society's beach patrol scheme and support for seabird research.

Our Muriwai South beach patrol on 5/4 found 1 Australasian Gannet, 2 Southern Black-backed Gulls, 1 White-fronted Tern, 1 Flesh-footed Shearwater and 1 Sooty Shearwater. Elsewhere, a Greater Sand Plover was seen by Guy Portas near Puketutu Island on 5/3 and a deceased Pallid Cuckoo was found by the road near Helensville by Jasmine McCracken in January.

– IAN McLEAN

### SOUTH AUCKLAND

Our March speaker was Taranaki RR Peter Fryer, who has been working as the summer guide at Pukorokoro Miranda. He gave an entertaining talk about his Heritage Expeditions cruise to the Subantarctic Islands in December 2023. In April members of the Conservation Engineering Society Aotearoa spoke about their work and mission, which is to leverage cutting-edge technology to conserve our unique but fragile ecosystems. In March, members and dotterel minders conducted counts of post-breeding flocks of NZ and Banded dotterels around South Auckland and the Coromandel. Matarangi proved once again to be Coromandel's most important site for post-breeding dotterel flocks, with numbers over 100 for both species. Whangamata and Pauanui also had over 100 NZ Dotterels. Kidd's Shellbanks had over 100 Banded Dotterels, and there were

almost 100 at the Pukorokoro stilt ponds.

The Black-Billed Gull colony at Mataitai was successful this summer, with 71 chicks seen on 27/1. March sightings at Piaki included 2 Glossy Ibis on 8/3, an Australian (formerly Gull-billed) Tern on 9/3, 6 Whimbrels and 3 Curlew Sandpipers on 12/3. A Marsh Sandpiper was spotted at Kidd's Shellbanks on 2/3, and 1 at the Pukorokoro stilt ponds on 22/4. A satellite-tagged juvenile NZ Fairy Tern spotted at Miranda on 15/3 was tracked at Kawakawa Bay and Pahurehure the following day. An Eastern Common Tern was seen at Taramaire on 3/3, 3 Australian Terns were present at the Sandspit in Waiuku in early March, and an Eastern Curlew was at Tararua north of Thames on 28/3. A New Zealand Falcon was seen at Ponga Road, Hunua on 10/3. A flock of about 100 Little Black Shags was reported flying into Bottle Top Bay on 1/3, and 52 were seen roosting at Wattle Downs ponds on 19/4. Three Arctic Skuas were present at Matingarahi on 8/4 and 7 were seen at Orere Point several weeks earlier.

A banded SIPO was spotted at Grahams Beach. With an orange flag, this individual was banded on the Rangitata River in October 2024. A Bar-tailed Godwit with an orange flag over green was banded in Newcastle, Australia. In mid-March, Tony Habraken and others searched the Firth of Thames for White-fronted Terns that he had banded in the past. They found a total of 9 with bands, and the highlights included 4 that were banded in 1997/98 and are now 27 years old and 2 banded in 2002/03 that are now 22 years old.

– SUE FROSTICK

### WAIKATO

A Kōtuku White Heron is once again present in the Huntly area, a Little Egret was a surprise along the Taupō lakeshore near Acacia Bay in early April, a Reef Heron was a nice find near Kaiaua (locally uncommon to rare), and exposed mud at Lake Ngaroto attracted a juvenile Black-fronted Dotterel. Branch members enjoyed a bird ID course at Pukorokoro Shorebird Centre. The re-worked wader roost area by the Piako River put on a good show of diversity in March/April with highlights including Australian (formerly Gull-billed) Terns, Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egrets, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit and 3 Curlew Sandpipers. Best of all was a White-tailed Tropicbird captured on camera by a visiting tour group on 21/2! Just north of Thames, an Eastern Curlew continues to be seen along the foreshore and Peter Fryer reported Red-crowned Kakariki up near Port Charles (NE Coromandel). Some of our semi-urban winter Kaka have returned with autumn sightings reported from several spots around Hamilton and Gordonton.

Introduced doves continue to strengthen their grip in the region, with Spotted Doves now present in virtually all towns and cities across the Waikato and many more being seen in rural areas. This rapid expansion of their range has come in the past 10 years as previously they were largely limited to a few neighbourhoods in Hamilton and elsewhere were rare or highly localised. Barbary Doves are also spreading, but more slowly. There are small pockets around our northern boundaries, Hamilton, Cambridge, and Matamata. Moving in the opposition direction, introduced Rooks are almost gone but small groups or individuals are still spotted sporadically on the Hauraki Plains and in the Taupō District.

– RUSSELL CANNINGS





## REGIONAL ROUNDUP



▣ Children's Guided Bird Walk, Cornwall Park, Auckland, 14/5:  
Kevin Barker.



▣ Adult Nankeen Night Heron, Upokongaro: Paul Gibson.

### BAY OF PLENTY/VOLCANIC PLATEAU

In March there was a report of an Australasian Little Grebe at Lake Rotomahana, a private access lake in the Volcanic Plateau – a rare species for the region. Close on the heels of that there came a report of a Black-tailed Godwit at Maketu so Maketu ended up with 3 different godwit species this summer, with a Hudsonian having joined the Bar-tails a few weeks earlier. Yellow-crowned Kakariki were seen in the Whirinaki Forest the same month. This forest is to the north of Te Urewera and is well worth a visit. To top off March an Australian (formerly Gull-billed) Tern was spied back at Maketu, along with 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. The Titiipounami/Rifleman population still ekes out a spot in the Aongatete Forest, near Katikati. Good numbers were seen in April. Cooney's Reserve at Omokoroa, north of Tauranga, is usually the domain of shorebirds, being one of the largest of our surveyed Tauranga Harbour godwit sites. However, a Pateke/Brown Teal was seen there in January. An Eastern Little Tern was further down the coast at Ohiwa in April. Lastly, an Eastern Barn Owl has been reported from Waihi.

– PAUL CUMING

### GISBORNE/WAIROA

It has been quiet on the East Coast this autumn. Geoff Foreman reports 15 Common Redpolls in the sand dunes near town. This introduced species is only very rarely seen in our region. Another notable report has been the success of local long-term trapping projects with Eastern Whio Link continuing to see increases in Whio numbers in the areas they are trapping. They were featured on TVNZ's Country Calendar on 4/5. Another local trapping project that has recently reported great success is the Whinray Ecological Trust. Their most recent report was of more than 100 Kiwi Nui North Island Bown Kiwi in the Whinray Scenic Reserve, an increase from just 6 when they started there in the 1990s. It's great to have these successes in our region.

– MALCOLM RUTHERFORD

### TARANAKI

As the Pukorokoro shorebirds migrated north I headed south to my winter territory in Taranaki, relieving the very capable Rob Wheeler who has been acting RR in my absence. Thanks Rob.

A few weeks after we/Adrian Riegen banded and flagged 6 NZ Dotterel chicks, Dr Emily Roberts visited a beach in South Taranaki where we know NZ Dotterels, Pied Stilts and VOCs attempt to breed, but which has big problems with dogs off the lead and motor bikes. To her surprise she found 2 pairs of NZ Dotterels with chicks. One of the adults was flagged JAM. Adrian told us the bird was flagged as a chick

at Bethell's Beach (west Auckland) on 23/11/22 and last seen on there on 21/01/23. Of the 6 chicks we flagged, the first (JPA) moved a short distance up the coast from Waiwakaiho and is now at Waiongana with 7-8 others. JPA's sibling JPB is currently at Port Waikato, which highlights the value and knowledge to be gained from flagging shorebirds.

Our April indoor meeting included our AGM, with the re-election of all to respective positions. The field trip to Pukeiti under the shadow of Te Papa-Kura-o-Taranaki (Mt Taranaki) was reasonably quiet with both Whitehead and NZ Falcon recorded. We finally have a record of Royal Spoonbill breeding in Taranaki after birds were found nesting at Lake Waikato, close to the southern Taranaki boundary. We've had records of nests there before but this time birds were seen on nests and 1 nest had 3 well-grown chicks, which hopefully fledged. As yet we have no records of breeding in northern Taranaki, although spoonbills have been seen at Mokau and Awakino river estuaries for many years.

A Kaka duo was seen at Barrett Domain in early January and a Southern Giant Petrel paid a brief visit close in at Port Taranaki. It was a good breeding season for Whio on Mt Taranaki. DOC monitoring counted 106 blue ducklings. A settled spring saw river levels low. That and extensive predator control and an aerial 1080 drop all contributed to protecting nesting females. Whio are now seen on most suitable river habitat around the maunga, a testament to the hard work done by many, including volunteers. Lastly, our regular Taranaki trio will take part in the eBird Global Big Day on 11/5, when hope to see more than 70 species.

– PETER FRYER

### HAWKE'S BAY

For the first field trip of the year in 9th February, 9 of us headed to the Scrapes at the Ahuriri Estuary to look at waders. For a change, we approached from the northern side, which leads past the kiwi enclosure. There were good numbers of Kuaka/Bar-tailed Godwits (265), some of which were starting to colour up, 14 Kuriri/Pacific Golden Plovers, Tūturiwhatu/NZ Dotterels, Red-necked Stilts (2) and Ruddy Turnstone (1). The next stop was the Upper Ahuriri Estuary. Beyond the stop bank were a good number of Poaka/Pied Stilts and ducks. The star of the show was a Kotoreke/Marsh Crane, which a few in the group had not seen before. A stop at a local cafe afterwards made for a very enjoyable morning. Also in late February was the now regular "Farewell the Godwits" event, which is well-organised by our friends at the Ahuriri Estuary Protection

Society and supported by our branch members. As usual, there was a good turnout.

Our field trip in March was to the Clive wetlands on a beautiful sunny and calm Sunday morning. Plenty of birdlife abounded, although both crane species, which have been reported from there, eluded us on this occasion. Our RR, Bernie Kelly, completed a solo overnight trip to the Porangahau Estuary, camping in the upper estuary where he was able to checklist a good number of waders. He counted 3 Whimbrel together, as well as good numbers of Kuaka and a rather big flock of Tara/White-fronted Terns. At the far end of the estuary there were healthy numbers of Tūturiwhatu/NZ Dotterel and Pohowera/Banded Dotterel.

Pūweto/Spotless Crakes were making themselves uncharacteristically visible in late February in Clive, with 3 seen by Sav Saville one afternoon. Common Redpolls were seen along the Tukituki River in March by Ron Jackson, possibly a new location for Hawke's Bay, although they are quite often seen in Havelock North. Adam Clarke had an unusual sighting of a Kākā flying across Hastings township and calling sporadically in late March. The 'seasonal' Kōtuku/White Herons reappeared in late March, spotted first in Grange Creek in Haumoana. They are typically also reported from Park Island and Anderson Park, although no sightings have been reported from these locations yet this year.

– THALIA SACHTLEBEN

### WHANGANUI

There have been no godwits on the Whanganui Estuary for several weeks now, so most have migrated and the remainder, mostly young birds, have moved elsewhere. There are still plenty of Pied Stilts, with many young birds among them, the odd Caspian Tern, as well as the usual gulls and shags.

During April several large groups of Royal Spoonbills passed through, stopping for just a few hours on the estuary. Lynne Douglas alerted me to a group of them on 23/4 that were resting in the basin by the boat ramp on Wharf Street. These birds were on their northward migration after nesting further south. Also on 23/4, a White Heron Kotuku was photographed from the backyard of a property on Bedford Ave. I went straight around but by the time of my arrival the bird had flown downstream. No one has reported it since. Sacred Kingfishers are now visiting the estuary to feed on crabs, something they do every winter. I am planning this year to spend more time photographing them, as they are a lovely bird, one of my favourites.

At Upokongaro at the 'Door Behind 4' café,



## REGIONAL ROUNDUP

sightings of the Nankeen Night Herons have been few, but as the days get colder, and the leaves fall, we can expect more views of the birds as they warm up in the afternoon sun. On 19/4 we photographed a chick there, soon to fledge, from the Macrocarpa. This past breeding season has continued for 6 months, which is quite amazing.

On 24/4 I found an adult bird sitting just below the carport, at the back of the café, on a bare branch. You can see its thick neck in the photo on page 23. Night herons are also known as 'thick-necked' herons. Then on 29/4, Jim Norris and I met with some visiting Wellington members, and we were fortunate to find several juvenile night herons in trees by the Goose's Roost, including 2 that posed nicely for us in a tall London Plane tree.

PAUL GIBSON

### MANAWATU

In March, members joined the Manawatu Estuary Trust for their Farewell to the Godwits event at the Manawatu Estuary. A perfect morning tide brought the birds in nice and close for viewing, and c.100 people attending got great views of Bar-tailed godwits, Red Knots, Pacific Golden Plovers and a couple of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. Later in March, 5 members attended the first field trip of the year to Lake Ouananui and Manawatu River estuary. At the lake we heard a Spotless Crane Pūweto very close but we did not get a sighting. There were plenty of waterfowl, among others: NZ Dabchick Wewia, NZ Scaup Pāpango, Grey Teal Tētē-moro and Australasian Shoveler Kuruwhehi. There were Royal Spoonbills Kōtuku ngutupapa, Black-fronted Dotterel, Pied Stilt Poaka and several shag species.

At the Manawatu River estuary we still had a good group of Bar-tailed godwit Kuaka, Wrybills Ngutu pare, Pied Stilt Poaka and SIPOs Tōrea. There was also a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper Kohutapu and a couple of Pacific Golden Plovers Kuriri. Most exciting was an Arctic Skua that chased the terns and gulls. An eBird trip report can be accessed via this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/345605>

In general, there have been been some nice birds at the Manawatu River estuary this late summer and autumn. Some of the more exciting birds have been Arctic Skua, Eastern Little Tern, Eastern Common Tern, Black-fronted Tern, Little Egret and up to 70 Royal Spoonbills. Fernbird has been observed at Pukepuke Lagoon and Waikawa Stream and Spotless Crane has been observed at Pukepuke lagoon, Lake Ouananui and Te Hakari wetland. Attendance at our monthly meetings has been above 20 and there has been lively discussion. The meetings are on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:15pm in Val Kenward Room at the Palmerston North Community Leisure Centre, 569 Ferguson Street.

- KIRSTEN BENDIX OLSEN

### WAIRARAPA

Our first trip of the year was to the wild east coast: White Rock, the Opouawe River mouth and Te Kaukau Point. The weather was magnificently fine. We were treated to some close encounters with ocean bird including Australasian Gannets, Northern Giant Petrels, White-fronted and Caspian terns. Onshore we saw Variable Oystercatchers, NZ Pipits, a few dotterels and a variety of shags.

In March we ventured to the small Wairongomai Delta on the western side of Wairarapa Moana. After contacting the farmer landowner, we accessed the beach and small spit that provide an attractive habitat for all sorts of birds. On the lake itself were NZ Dabchick, NZ Scaup, Grey Teal, Australasian Shoveler and a few Royal Spoonbills. Pied, Black and Little shags were also present. Altogether 30 species.

Another beautiful day (it can't last) saw us visiting the lowland bush remnant of Carters Reserve where so much work has been done to repel the advancing weeds. Birdlife was especially active in the still morning. Paradise Shelducks were sunbathing high in dead trees. Tui, Kereru, NZ Fantail, Grey Warbler and Silvereyes were ubiquitous. All the finches were present bar the Redpoll. Altogether 19 species. We then retired to Marie's place for morning tea. The February wader survey of Wairarapa Moana, organised by Nikki McArthur, was successfully completed. Of note was a February sighting of an Australian (formerly Gull-billed) Tern by the lake by Joel Gilbertson.

We are interested in tracking the spread (or otherwise) of Common Mynas around Masterton. They have long been established around the dump and nearby electrical substation (for warmth?). They have recently been seen further afield. If anyone has a confident sighting, please upload it to eBird or email me: [birds.wairarapa@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:birds.wairarapa@birdsNZ.org.nz)

- OLIVER DRUCE

### WELLINGTON

We have had an excellent range of monthly speakers, including Peter Moore on Campbell Island albatrosses, Susan Ellis on Remutaka Kiwi, and Neil Fitzgerald on species movements. Thanks again to all our speakers who help to ensure an interesting and engaging monthly hui.

Our Cook Strait pelagic trip for members on 29/3 was one of the best yet with 20 members enjoying close views of 5 albatross species (Nth & Sth Royal, Black-browed, Salvin's, White-capped). Other notable sightings included 2 Little Penguins, 2 Northern Giant Petrels, c.200 Buller's Shearwaters, 6 White-chinned Petrels, 9 Westland Petrels, 5 Common Diving Petrels, 1 Cape Petrel, 10 Spotted Shags, 3 Black-fronted Terns, a murmuration of c.1,000 Common Starlings (over Makaro Ward Island), c.100 Common Dolphins, 4 NZ Fur Seals and a Sperm Whale (seen surfacing and diving).

Other notable reports included the discovery of Fernbirds at the northern end of Kapiti Island - an exciting and unexpected self-introduction of this species there! Further details will be reported in *Notornis*. A Plumbed Whistling Duck has been seen regularly on private land in Ōtaki, an Erect Crested Penguin found at Tongue Point on the south coast which was rehabilitated at Wellington Zoo was successfully released back into the wild in April, and an Eastern Common Tern was photographed in breeding plumage at Waikanae Sandspit on 29/4. The long-staying White Heron first seen at Waimanu Lagoon in Waikanae late last year was still present in April.

Wellington has welcomed a new batch of North Island Brown Kiwi via translocation to the Makara hills by the Capital Kiwi Project, and in May Little Spotted Kiwi were

translocated from Zealandia and Kapiti Island to Cape Sanctuary in Hawke's Bay and the Brook Sanctuary near Nelson. It is an exciting time for conservation groups in the Wellington region, particularly as programmes have matured to the level that offspring can now be translocated elsewhere. It is great also to be continuing to forge conservation connections between regions. With some stormy weather no doubt on the radar during the coming quarter, it is worth considering doing some beach patrolling. You never know what you will find!

Lastly, I wish you all the very best in your birding endeavours.

- ANNEMIEKE HAMILTON

### NELSON

Mellow autumn days afforded months of great birding with many members out observing and increasingly sharing their photographs pictures and sightings through our Facebook page, Birds Nelson: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/441307714899123>

Seven members took a boat trip in Queen Charlotte Sound with Mike Bell as guide and boat skipper where they visited a roost site for Kawau Pāteketake (King Shag) at the south end of Blumine Island, before going ashore to see Kākāriki Karaka (Orange-fronted Parakeets) which are now thriving on the island. The trip also included Motuara Island, where they saw Yellow-crowned Kakariki.

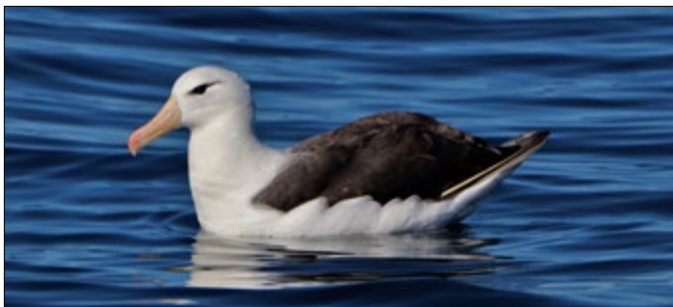
Notable sightings in the region included White-winged Black Tern, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a pair of breeding Australian (formerly Gull-billed) Terns. While most of the Bar-tailed Godwits have now departed Motueka Spit, there were still several hundred at the end of March, many in breeding plumage, along with 326+ Red Knots, good numbers of Banded Dotterels (4 with trackers) and 260+ Ruddy Turnstones.

We have continued to hold well-attended monthly meetings at the Headingly Centre. The March meeting was our AGM with the appointment of the committee and our new RR, Kathryn Richards. David Melville gave an excellent illustrated talk on the differences between the Australian Tern and the Common Gull-billed Tern (see photo on page 23), which was topical following the breeding success at Waimea Inlet of a pair of Australian Terns this season (which resulted in 2 chicks fledging). As usual there was a stunning array of photos from talented members and at our April meeting, Peter Gaze gave a talk on bird breeding strategies and the huge diversity and range of evolutionary adaptations shown.

The Australian Wood Duck population based in the Mapua area had limited success this season. Only 5 birds were seen at Westdale Road and 1 pair at Berkette's Dam in Appleby. Rob Schuckard has continued to lead a project monitoring gannets with black irises at the Farewell Spit colony, a condition reported to result from high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Northern Gannets. A total of gannets with 3 black irises have now been banded at the colony. Although plans are in place to continue monitoring next season, it seems likely the cause of this in NZ is something else. Last year, 30+ Swamp Harriers used a roost site at Pearl Creek so members are being asked to check this area for signs of renewed activity as winter approaches.

Kia hari te matakitaki manu - happy birding!  
- KATHRYN RICHARDS & PAUL BENNETT





■ Black-browed Albatross, Wellington branch pelagic trip, 29/3:  
*Michael Szabo.*



■ Australian Tern (centre) in breeding plumage with 2 Common Gull-billed Terns in non-breeding plumage, St. Vincent Gulf, South Australia: *Paul Taylor.*

### MARLBOROUGH

In April, Marlborough members were invited by Jessica and Alastair Midgley of Altmarloch in the Awatere Valley to go birding at Lake Altmarloch. Six of us enjoyed a walk around the lake observing all the birds there led by Alastair who told us the history of the lake and the homestead and about the feral cat and other pest trapping he has been conducting for a number of years. Alastair has observed a couple of pairs of dabchicks breed successfully on the lake over the past few years. He was pleasantly surprised to learn that one of his "dabchicks" was actually an Australasian Little Grebe! This is the second location in Marlborough that we have found this species in the last couple of years, the other location being Bankhouse Estate in the Waihopai Valley.

While visiting the Marlborough region, Otago RR Dawn Palmer spotted a Black Stilt in Okiwa Bay at the head of Grove Arm, Queen Charlotte Sound. It has proved to be an easy 'twit' with several birders visiting the same location since then and finding the bird was quite easy to see. Local members are now looking forward to getting out on 10th May for eBird's Global Big Day to see how many species we can collectively see in the Marlborough Region!

- PATRICK CROWE

### CANTERBURY

Late summer and early autumn brought a steady stream of rare sightings across our region, with several species lingering and a few unexpected visitors dropping in. At Travis Wetlands, 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.

A Terek Sandpiper continued its summer residency at the Ashley Estuary along with a pair of long-staying Little Egrets. A 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 here in some time.

White-winged Black Terns once again made notable appearances, with 4 birds recorded by Phil Crutchley at the Kaitorete Spit tip during the Lake Ellesmere all-species waterbird census on 16/2. 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 20/2, feeding mostly in the western arm lagoon. A Reef Heron was spotted at Taylor's Mistake

on 20/3, and a probable Glossy Ibis was seen at Wainono Lagoon on 16/3. Later in the month, on 26/3, a group of 3 Cape Barren Geese at Washdyke/Waitarakao Lagoon was a record number 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 familiar and rare species alike.

- SAMUEL AMARIS

### OTAGO

The mysterious Weka in Dunedin continue to appear at various sites including 1 on my own doorstep! At least 2 have been killed in predator traps. In late summer a Shining Cuckoo fledgling was seen near Dunedin being fed by its Grey Warbler parents. SIPO were seen in Queenstown and the Remarkables, and a Common Diving Petrel over Lake Wānaka. A Laughing Kookaburra was recorded near Milton, Kākā at Lake Hayes and Red-crowned Kākāriki near Balclutha. Eastern Rosellas were recorded at new sites along with NZ Tomtit in the Catlins from areas with no previous records. Australasian Little Grebe and Little Black Shag have been seen at Diamond Lake, Wānaka. More Tākahe were released into the Rees Valley although a Stoat has since predated some. There was a Black-fronted Dotterel at Smaills Beach (Dunedin), Long-tailed Skua and Mottled Petrel at Otago Harbour entrance, and a Pomarine Skua chasing Black-fronted Terns near Katiki Point. Black-fronted Terns were regular dusk visitors over Balclutha along with Black-billed Gulls, and Titi/Sooty Shearwater chicks fledged successfully from an Otago Peninsula colony.

Our branch has 8 Otago projects planned this year with the Wild Dunedin Tomahawk Lagoon event already completed. On 13/4 local members acted as helpers providing spotting scopes and bird ID support to visitors with 44 people taking part and 27 species recorded. The Wild Dunedin Festival's closing event was Graeme Loh's Fairy Prion talk which was an open Birds New Zealand branch meeting – even the stepped aisles were full. Our joint bittern and crane monitoring project with Otago Regional Council (ORC) continues with acoustic files from 75 sites that were monitored this past season ready for analysis. RR Dawn Palmer continues to collaborate with the Wakatipu Wildlife Trust leading bird trips, which have proved popular. On 10/3 our collaboration with DOC, ORC, Manaaki Whenua, and representation from Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki

Puketeraki saw a team arrive at Warrington Beach to cannon net SIPO, with 73 SIPO and 5 Variable Oystercatchers being caught. The SIPO were flagged blue and VOCs white so please keep an eye out for flagged birds and report them. Following a request, several members have searched for any juvenile Royal Spoonbills and their records were submitted to eBird.

Our Winter Wader Count is on 22/6 (backup 20/7, contact Maree: [mareej@kinect.co.nz](mailto:mareej@kinect.co.nz)). Our Pigeon Island weekend trip (Lake Whakatipu) is 4-6/7.

Check out our Birds Otago Facebook page or join us: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/>

- FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

### SOUTHLAND

Local members undertook an aerial survey of the known Royal Spoonbill nesting sites around Southland on 14/12 and got 61 nests at 7 sites, although this is very much a minimum as a ground truthing at one site found nearly twice the number of nests seen from the air.

One of the highlights of this period was a Latham's Snipe at the new wetland near Waituna Lagoon seen on 22/1 by Sean Jacques. Sean also reported 144 Pacific Golden Plovers in a paddock near Jocks Roost at The New River/Invercargill Estuary during the February wader count. This site appears to be where the birds congregate before heading north on migration. Pete McClelland found a Common Sandpiper in the lower reaches of the Oreti River on 4/1.

DOC picked up a dead juvenile Spotless Crake in the middle of town on 25/2 – apparently a victim of building strike at night. They also picked up a live juvenile Crested Grebe in Queens Park in the middle of Invercargill on 19/4. The annual Southern NZ Dotterel flock count across the known wintering sites on Rakiura and Awarua Bay produced a total population estimate of 105 birds, a slight increase on last year but still perilously low.

Sean Jacques found a Chestnut-breasted Shelduck at the Roger Sutton Lagoon on 30/3 while Anja Kohler had 1 at Te Anau on 25/4. Anja has also had a Royal Spoonbill and Cattle Egrets at her favorite spot near the mouth of the Upukerora River that flows into Lake Te Anau. Lastly, Bradley Shields reports seeing 3 Long-tailed Skuas off Rakiura Stewart Island: 2 during a Wrybill Tours pelagic trip on 25/2 and 1 in Foveaux Strait from the ferry on 20/3.

- PETER McCLELLAND

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



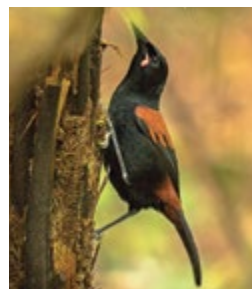
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