



TŌREA PANGO

NELSON BRANCH BIRDS NZ

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 18

May/June 2025

Newsletter dedication

To the memory of Marina Bennett, wife of newsletter editor Paul Bennett. Our thoughts are with Paul and his family and friends. Kia kaha from your birding friends.



Kia ora Nelson birders. Winter doesn't mean birding comes to a halt. In this newsletter, check out some activities you can get involved in, and remind yourself of what was on offer at the meetings in May and June.

The next meeting will be on Monday 7 July at the Headingly Centre in Richmond. Come at 7.00PM for a cuppa, with the meeting kicking off at 7.15PM. Remember, bring any news or photos to share.

Quote of the month from Regional Rep Kathryn Richards, heard at the June meeting: "We all hang out at the poo ponds."

Cheers, acting newsletter editor Alison Ballance



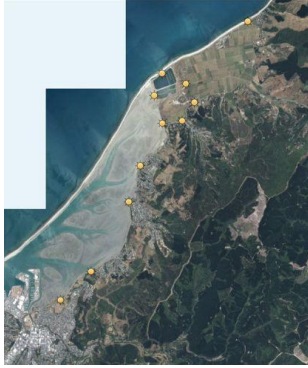
Get Involved

Pelagic trip, Kaikōura

Sharen Graham is organising a trip to Kaikōura to see pelagic seabirds. The trip will be with Albatross Encounters, and will cost \$220.00, on Saturday 19 July. The boat trip will leave at 09.30AM and last 4 hours. Alternative bad weather option: 20 July. Contact Sharen (grahamsharen@gmail.com) and she will give you information on how to book direct with Albatross Encounters.

Swallow Watch

Birds NZ Nelson has initiated a project to learn more about the moult and ecology of the Welcome Swallow. One of the project aims is to investigate if Welcome Swallows have communal roosts in the Nelson region. The team would like to hear from anyone who has observed swallows forming communal roosts, which could be in raupō wetland, stands of vegetation, infrastructure such as power cables, buildings or other habitat where birds can perch.

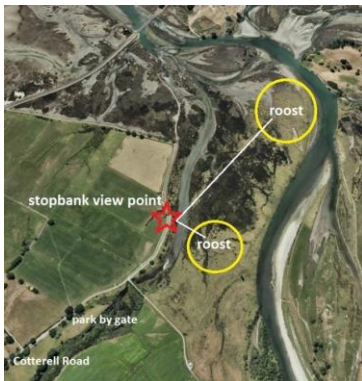


This study will include a coordinated watch of swallows at various vantage points around the Nelson Haven to Glenduan, North Nelson area, focusing on the feeding swallows in the North Nelson Wastewater Treatment wetlands and their dispersal to roost sites at dusk. The first watch is planned for **Saturday 5 July, from 4.30PM to 6.15PM** (dusk till dark).

Observation points will be from the roadside and safe parking locations (the map shows possible survey spots, depending on the number of watchers). All instructions and recording forms will be provided on the day. Car sharing may be an option, depending on the numbers of volunteers. Please contact

Paul Fisher (wildlands.nelson@gmail.com) if interested in participating in this or future coordinated watches.

Winter harrier roost



David Melville informed us at the May meeting that the harrier roost at Pearl Creek is all go again, with 26 birds seen coming in to roost in the long grass. To reach the roost, drive down Cotterell Rd. in Appleby, park by the barrier (don't block the road) and take a short 500m walk towards the Great Taste Trail and up onto the stop bank to just past the large ngaio tree with a maimai at the foot of the stopbank (red star on photo). In early May, David viewed the roost between 1710-1805. If anyone is keen to go and watch this one evening let Kathryn Richards know. She says she can email the membership and we could meet up, to save going out alone in the dark!

Backyard Bird Survey

The annual Landcare Research [Backyard Bird Survey](#) runs from Saturday 28 June to Sunday 6 July.

Invitation to Wakapuaka planting day

The Catchment Team at the Nelson City Council is organising a planting event at the newly constructed Todd Valley wetlands (see May meeting article for more details).

You're invited to join the Todds Community Planting Day: Saturday 19 July 9.00AM—2.00PM

Tap on the link or paste it in a browser to join.

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_YikyMjUyZjQzMjlkMC00MWNlThYitOTEyNTM1NTMzZTA2%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22b0e30c6b-08df-46e6-89be-60c108f12fa8%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22c98d9664-2bc0-4c73-9690-4952ee6505df%22%7d

Birds NZ Nelson Branch in the news

Rob Schuckard and David Melville, along with a few noisy Australasian Gannets at Farewell Spit, feature in Alison Ballance's story on H5N1 bird flu, playing on RNZ'S Our Changing World programme this week. You can listen to the audio story "[Getting ready for H5N1 bird flu](#)" any time on the RNZ website.

Wakapuaka Wetland Restoration & May meeting report *by Kathryn Richards*

Paul Fisher gave us an informative talk at our May meeting about the Todd Valley Stream and Wakapuaka wetland, from its early history to the modern-day environment we see now.

Over the years this wetland, that borders the Nelson sewage settling ponds, Boulder Bank Road and SH6, has been heavily modified. It used to be intertidal flats until the road was built in 1970, and bunds and flood gates were installed to drain the area. There have also been changes caused by sediment build-up after flood events.



The last major flood event of 2022 led to the recent Nelson City Council project to reestablish water flow through the Todd Valley Stream, and develop two constructed wetlands which have been designed to encourage birds and fish. The soil removed for the stream's reconstruction was used to form ponding areas with islands and raised areas to provide habitat for birds, especially when flooding takes place.



Fun fact: Nelson is home to 23 different fish species spawning in our region's waterways, so it's important we protect and maintain these habitats. Todd Valley stream was an example of a waterway that no longer had inanga spawning, because it was not accessible to fish to lay their eggs during a king tide. The recent project has rectified this.



This area is now accessible to the public to view and enjoy, and we hope in the near future to organize a club trip to see what has been done.

Also at the May meeting, thanks to Lorraine for organizing a quiz and testing our knowledge. There weren't too many wrong answers or heated discussions, and I think we all learnt something.

David presented a short PowerPoint on the movements of South Island Pied Oystercatchers up and down the country. Questions were raised about why we are not getting sightings in other areas of the country - is it due to lack of birds, or a lack of birders reporting flagged SIPO?



Oops!

A University of Oxford building was closed for almost a week after a seagull broke a glass roof by repeatedly dropping a stone on it. In a [video](#), the bird could be seen bouncing a large stone off the glass roof of the Blavatnik School of Government.

Craig Martin and Marsh Crakes – June meeting report *by Alison Ballance*

Keen birder and photographer Craig Martin shared 10 years of observations and insights into the behaviour and character of the elusive Kotoreke Marsh Crake at the Branch's June meeting.

His decade-long Marsh Crake obsession started when he was watching a small tidal wetland on Staples St. at the base of the Motueka Sandspit, near where he lives. He was looking for birds such as Kōtuku and Shoveller when a small feather floated past. Craig realised that it could only have come from a Marsh Crake, which is a tiny (sparrow-sized) reclusive rail, and he was hooked.



He initially got just the occasional picture of a head or a tail, but over time, as he learnt more about the behaviour of the resident pair of crakes, and as they became accustomed to his regular quiet presence, the birds revealed more of themselves. Marsh Crakes are very beautiful little birds, with long legs, oversized feet, an unusual green bill, and lovely grey and chestnut feathers.

Crakes like preening in the sun, and Craig provided a well-placed log that became a favourite preening spot and features in many of his photos.

Photo: Marsh Crake posing in sun on Craig's log (image: Craig Martin).

Craig learnt that the Marsh Crakes would come out of the raupō stands to forage along the muddy margins for small snails and worms, and that the best time was on extremely low tides, just as the water began to come in. Craig has also seen a family group of 5 Marsh Crakes, in the Otuwhero wetland near Mārahau, feeding on whitebait.



Craig describes the crakes as methodical feeders that remain for a while in one place then suddenly rush to the next spot. They like to run everywhere, he says, but will occasionally take off in a burst of explosive flight that is very hard to anticipate and photograph. They are almost always on the ground, but he has spotted a bird 4 metres up in some raupō, taking advantage of a small basking platform made by a pukeko.

Photo: resident pair enjoying Craig's carefully placed log (image: Craig Martin).

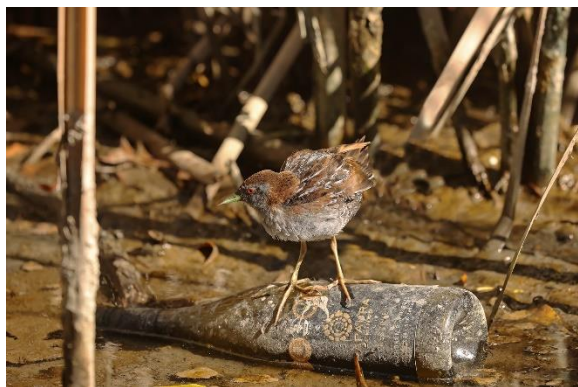
He has never found an active nest, but his resident pair disappear for about 3 months from August before reappearing with chicks. He reports that he has heard the birds make a soft purring noise as well as quiet 'cree' calls.



Over the ten years of observation, Craig has seen a significant change in the vegetation and hydrology of the wetland. Raupō has spread across most of the wetland, blocking the regular tidal flushing. The crakes now have a smaller area to forage in and they spend more time searching through the slime left on raupō stems after the tide recedes. Craig also says he no longer sees Kōtuku, Spoonbills and ducks in the wetland.

Photo: Wetland as it was 10 years ago. Today the raupō has spread across most of the area (image: Craig Martin).

Craig has seen rats in the wetland and even a stoat swimming across it, so he and his friend Bruce have set up a network of 20-or-so traps to protect the birds.



The pair also remove significant amounts of rubbish from the wetland, dumped there by people using the next-door carpark. Craig is very concerned about a proposal by the Tasman District Council to allow freedom camping in the reserve, as this will certainly worsen the rubbish situation.

Photo: Not ideal! Marsh Crake perching on wine bottle (image: Craig Martin)

Honours

Congratulations to Daryl Eason, who was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for [services to wildlife conservation](#) in the 2025 King's Birthday Honours.

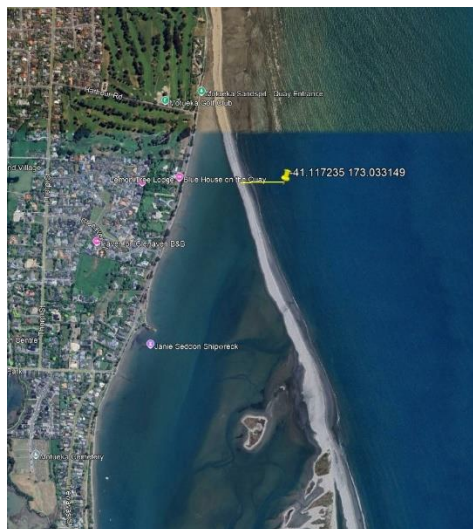
He joins other Birds NZ Nelson members who have been previously recognised:

Graeme Elliot, Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for [services to wildlife conservation](#).

Kath Walker, Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for [services to wildlife conservation](#).

Alison Ballance, Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for [services to natural history, filmmaking and broadcasting](#).

Moving sands of Motueka Spit *by David Melville*



I am tidying up my Variable Oystercatcher banding data and thought this was a good example to show how much Motueka Sandspit has moved. The yellow marker on the map (left) is where my daughter Julia and I caught an adult VOC (flagged as CA6) on 24 October 2011. It was holding territory on dry land. This site is now some 180m offshore from where the sandspit now sits!

We only have 3 re-sightings of CA6: paired with an unmarked bird on 27 December 2011 (exact location unsure), and seen paired with CM3 on 4 and 10 December 2012 some 1.8km to the north, at the end of Staples Street. Whether CA6 died or moved elsewhere we have no idea, but CM3 was still alive on 9 August 2020.



On the Birds NZ Nelson [Facebook page](#) on 13 June, Rebecca Bowater shared this photo of 'Pigeon eating the fruit of a Puriri tree [Vitex lucens] in my garden'

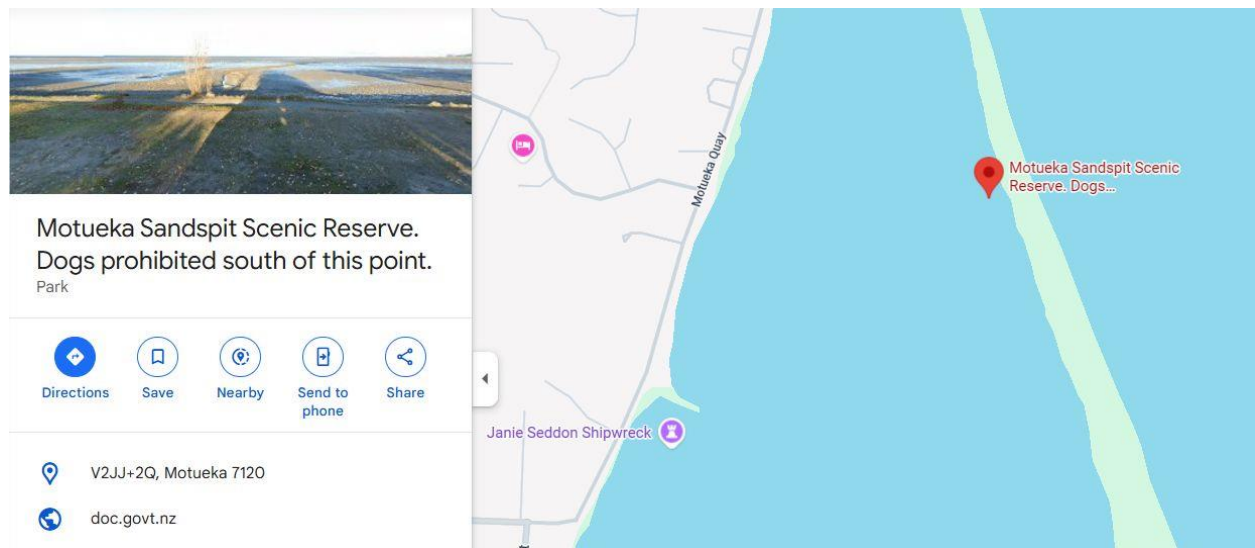
Dog-free zone on Motueka Sandspit *by David Melville*



There is now an app that allows you (and dog walkers!) to know where the boundary of the "dog prohibited" area is on Motueka Sandspit.

The QR code shows you where the boundary is.

And/or if you go to Google Maps there is a marker, which if you click on it takes you to:



Which is all a lot easier than trying to determine the boundary from the official description:

Motueka Sandspit (Southern End)– south of latitude marker 41.1200

when there is no marker, and the *'no dogs past this point'* signs that DOC put out are frequently washed out as the Spit moves - although Christine does a valiant effort to drag the signs back from whence they came!

Note that the Google maps marker appears to be out in the water – refer back to David's 'Moving sands of Motueka spit' article 😊

Conference Field Trip to Tiritiri Matangi Island *by Annette Cunningham*

It was a real treat for me to attend the Birds NZ national conference in Auckland over King's Birthday weekend. I thoroughly enjoyed the two-day lecture programme and learned a lot from the presentations. It is very encouraging to hear of all the work that is being done to help our bird species, both as student research projects in the course of study, as well as wonderful work by amazing volunteers.

But the highlight of the weekend was the visit to Tiritiri Matangi Island (Tiri) on the field day. I had made two previous attempts to get to Tiri, both of which were foiled, so this was third time lucky. And very lucky it was with beautiful, sunny, calm weather.

Tiri was everything I had hoped for and more. Beautifully located in the Hauraki Gulf with stunning 360-degree views from the top of the alarmingly named Coronary Hill, and now mostly covered with lush regenerating bush plus some glorious old pōhutukawa, it was always going to be a treat. But combine that with fantastic and abundant bird life and you have a dream experience in the making.



At around 220 hectares it is about one third the area of our Nelson Brook Waimārama Sanctuary, and the whole island is criss-crossed with excellent walking tracks. I went around the island with a small group of six, and we had with us two experienced guides. So, we were treated to a wealth of information during our walk.

Photo: North Island Saddleback / Tieke (image: Geoff McKay, Flickr CC)

While originally forested, the island was farmed and became mostly cleared pasture land from 1863 to 1971. Since 1984 it has been the focus of a forest regeneration project, with around 250,000 native plants propagated and planted since that time. The growth has been fantastic and the growing forest is beautiful and lush. Kiore were eradicated in 1993.



We were incredibly lucky with bird sightings. We saw numerous North Island Saddleback / Tieke, Korimako, Tūi, Hihi and Kererū. It was also lovely to get sightings of Whitehead / Pōpokotea, Tītipounamu, Red-crowned Parakeets / Kākāriki, Fernbird / Mātātā and the North Island Tomtit / Miromiro.

Photo: Kākāriki (image: Geoff McKay, Flickr CC)

The island has several feeding sites for Hihi and these places were just amazing for the sheer number of birds and the beautiful birdsong as we approached them. While the feeders are essential for the survival of Hihi they also attract very large numbers of Korimako. The Hihi really have to compete very vigorously with these birds and it is amusing watching the interactions at the feeders.



We had a late lunch at the lighthouse where the three resident Takahē were strolling happily around the grassy area there. But for me the jewel in the crown of this great day was, early in the day, hearing the beautiful, haunting call of the North Island Kōkako. It was something I was not sure I would ever hear. And then about 30 minutes later, a wonderful sighting of a Kōkako feeding in a low shrub close to the track. It stayed for about 5 minutes giving us some spectacular views.

Photo: North Island Kōkako (image: Geoff McKay, Flickr CC)

It is a beautiful bird, such a soft grey, and with wattles which seemed more lilac than blue. I will never forget that moment. If you have not been to Tiri, then I cannot recommend more highly getting there if you can.

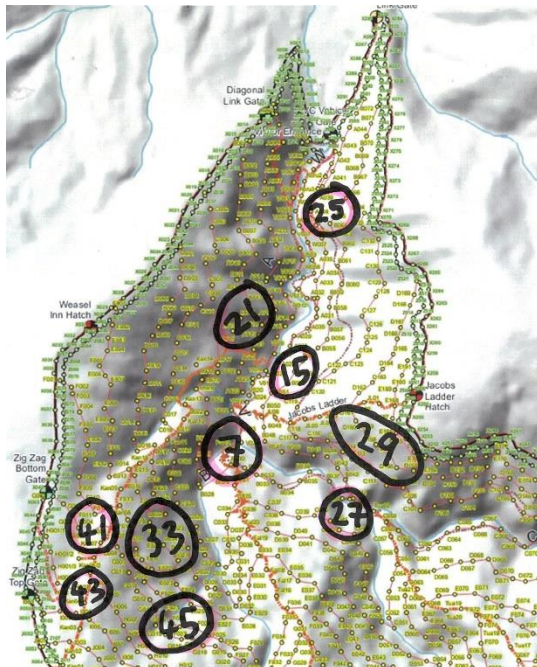


From Ingrid Hutzler, newly moved to Mohua / Golden Bay

We spotted this adult Whio on 24 April in the Wainui River, half-way up between the start of the track and the falls, where it was busy preening itself on a rock.

Update on Kiwi Pukupuku released into Brook Waimārama Sanctuary

Forty Little Spotted Kiwi from Kapiti Island were released into the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary in early May 2025. Ten of them are wearing radio transmitters. Here is an update from the [Sanctuary Facebook page](#) on 10 June.



Mapping our Kiwi Explorers

‘Here’s a glimpse at where our 10 tracked kiwi pukupuku have settled in across the Sanctuary — and we’re thrilled to report they’re all alive, well, and making themselves at home.

We’re now hearing kiwi calls echoing from all corners of the ngahere. Even better? Kiwi droppings have been spotted at the top of the Sanctuary, and kiwi footprints on the tracking cards. These are clear signs that each bird is carving out its own territory and finding the perfect spot to call home.

Kiwi #25 has not ventured far and has made their home right next to the visitor centre.

We’re thrilled to see them doing exactly what we hoped.’

For your listening pleasure – some nature-themed NZ podcasts

RNZ Wild Sounds podcast feed is an amalgamation of environment stories from RNZ, old and new.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/podcast/wild-sounds>

DOC Sounds of Science - a behind-scenes-look at how we care for NZ's native species and natural environment.

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/podcast/>

Tune into Nature with Dunedin-based bird nerd and film-maker Karthic SS.

<https://www.karthicss.com/podcast>

Birds NZ Nelson Committee

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Birds Nelson [Facebook](#) group

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This newsletter was edited by Alison Ballance. Please send material for future newsletters to editor Paul Bennett thebraveryofbeingoutofrange@gmail.com. Bye for now, mā te wā.

THE END