



TŌREA PANGO

NELSON BRANCH BIRDS NZ. NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 19. July/August 2025

Once again thank you all for your continuing support. Hopefully I'm back in the role of putting this newsletter together. Alison has done a great job in my absence, and I really appreciate how she seamlessly took over. I'm still trying to catch up on all that's been going on and suspect that this edition may be missing important things. I'm sure you will let me know!

The recent bouts of extreme rainfall in our region have impacted on people, wildlife and even the landscape itself. Despite this it appears that we have remained very active with meetings, field trips, research projects and continued advocacy for our birdlife.

LAST MEETINGS

July 7th

Twenty people attended the July meeting, which was mostly given over to an excellent talk by Richard Wells on his experiences conducting an albatross census on the remote Snares Islands (see below).

August 4th

Twenty-five people attended the Aug meeting. Items on the agenda were;

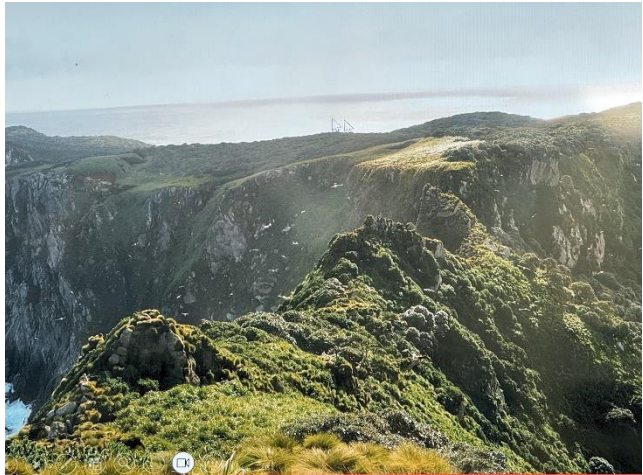
- A talk by Marian and Alec Milne on "Shearwaters and other birds at Wharariki" (see below).
- A quiz by Rebecca Bowater challenging us to ID birds from her world travels.
- A brief 'tern update' from David Melville (see below).

SOUTHERN BULLER'S ALBATROSS CENSUS ON THE SNARES – *a talk by Richard Wells*

At the July meeting we were treated to an excellent talk by Richard Wells centred around his time conducting an albatross census on the remote and hard to access Snares. These islands, consisting of 354ha - are a remarkably small area but crammed with thousands and thousands of breeding sea birds. Unlike many of our offshore islands the Snares has never had any introduced predators, probably because human access is



so difficult due to its remoteness and rugged terrain and in fact only around a hundred people have ever landed here.



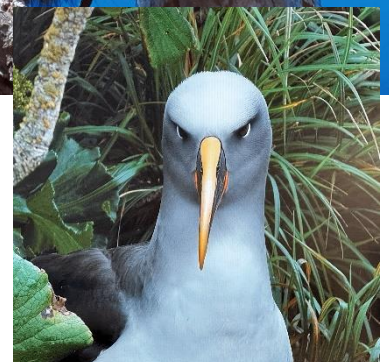
This means that it has always been free of introduced species and is as close to a pristine environment as anywhere in the world. It is also why so many birds breed on the island, with 2/3 of the world's Southern Buller's albatross population and around 8% of sooty shearwaters nesting on this tiny area. Richard says that in fact food supply in the region is limited and as soon as nesting is complete, birds head away from New Zealand to e.g. South America, where the food supply is much more plentiful.

Conditions for researchers are very primitive with no fridge or satellite phone, a hut with hundreds of birds nesting underneath and the ever-present danger of not so friendly sealions. Apparently, you quickly learn not to leave doors open!

The whole island abounds with birdlife and listening to Richard I was particularly jealous of the Snares island snipe and tomtit pictured below.



Several albatross species use the island, with Salvin's nesting on adjacent rock stacks and the Buller's (right) using the main island. Census have been carried out over the years, but covid and funding short fall resulted in the last one being in 2014, Richard decided to alter this situation and lead the fundraising to carry out a new census -with the proviso of course that he could be part of the team!



He went on to describe the difficulties of reaching the island and the weather that had to be negotiated during the crossing.

The census itself involved dividing the island into segments with 3 people counting numbers on each. Generally, agreement was reached. The variable and difficult terrain meant that some areas could be counted by walking through with a clicker, but more remote cliff locations were counted using binoculars. Apart from the census, other duties involved banding chicks and updating data for closely monitored birds within a delineated study site.

Richard's talk included many fascinating snippets of information of the sort that delights not just birders.

- The snares fernbird acts as the oxpecker of the island feeding on ticks extracted from the backs of seals as well as from shearwater burrows.
- The snares crested penguin nests under forest canopy. Nesting colonies reek of faeces and dead birds!

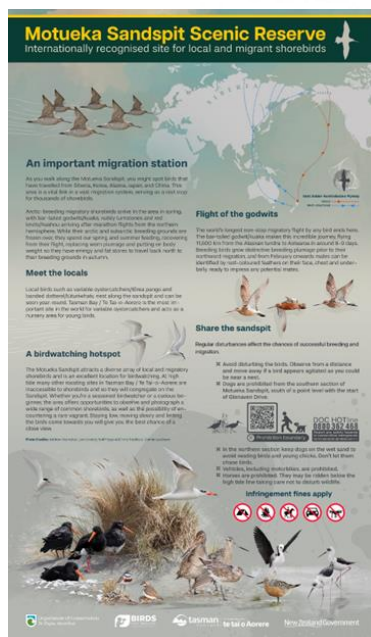


- 'Seal finger' is a bacterial infection of the fingers and hands caused by a Mycoplasma transmitted from seals through bites or other contact. The team had to be especially careful as contracting this would have resulted in immediate evacuation from the island. (I had to look for pictures -- apologies to 'the Lancet')

So -the results—While the census and monitoring of the delineated site has revealed population fluctuations over the years, there does appear to have been a decline in Buller's albatross numbers since 2019, ironically corresponding to increased protection! This may be a short-term issue and currently cause and effect are not established, although the usual suspects of climate change and food availability may be involved.

Thank you again Richard for a great talk. It's hard to hold an audience for almost two hours but you had us all enthralled.

NEW SIGNAGE AT MOT SANDSPIT



DOC are about to put up new and informative signage at the Motueka sandspit! You might need to expand the pics if you actually want to read it. It looks good!

ALBATROSS ENCOUNTER PELAGIC TRIP 19 JULY 2025 REPORT

by Sharen Graham

The marine forecast was looking very good, for no rain and light wind so it was all go. As well as the Nelson contingent, we were joined by people from the West Coast and Christchurch. We had booked the 4-hour extended trip with Albatross Encounter and their Skipper --- Gary. The southerly breeze rose to around 20 knots and keeping binoculars and cameras still became quite challenging.

Two long line fishing boats were processing their catches and around one, there was a flock of an estimated 1,000 birds, most of them albatross and mollymawks as listed below.

Apparently, such flocks were the norm in the 70's and 80's but have become a rare sight these days.

Checklist of species -highlights were:

Albatross: Northern Royal, Southern, Wandering. Mollymawks: Black browed Sub-Antarctic, N Z white capped, Salvin's, Buller's.

Petrels: Giant Northern, Westland, Cape petrel.

Prions: Fairy.

Shearwaters: Fluttering.

Other bird species: Black fronted tern, reef heron.

Mammals: Dusky dolphins, NZ fur seal, humpback whale.



Above. -An assortment of photos from the trip taken by Judah Gray (from ChCh) who joined the pelagic. I'll leave you to ID -they could be part of an upcoming quiz!

SUBMISION TO TDC RE FREEDOM CAMPING

On behalf of Bird NZ (Nelson/Tasman) David Melville has made a very detailed submission to the Tasman District Council on the impact to flora and fauna in relation to proposed changes to bylaws affecting freedom camping. The change would appear to permit this activity at two sites within Tasman District that are of ornithological significance:

Taupata Point, Golden Bay

Staples Street, Motueka

David 's submission details the species present at these sites including 13 species that are currently listed as 'threatened' or 'at risk' by the Department of Conservation, and one that is listed as 'endangered' by IUCN. The submission voices our concerns regarding the potential adverse effects on birds that could result from freedom camping in these areas. Thank you, David, for such a thorough and researched submission. Fingers crossed!

BITTERN SURVEY

We have received an email from Wendy Ambury of the 'LOVE BITTERN!' Project. I am not sure at this stage where we are with this or if anyone is organizing/ interested in organizing it for our region. The dates for Nelson /Tasman are 7-9 October. I would imagine that outside the confines of the Mangarakau Swamp there wouldn't be a lot of booming heard—but who knows? Anyway, this is a link to the relevant page of the 'Love Bittern' website for a spot of further reading.

[The Great Matuku-hurepo Muster 2025](#)

WINTER CENSUS OF 2025 *Rob Schuckhard*

Hi all, that winter census of 2025, that was a challenge. Over the 35 years I have been involved with the wader counts in the Nelson and Tasman Golden Bay area, this was the first time (apart from Covid in February 2022) where we have a partial count and cancelled some areas. At first, we delayed the end of June date and the alternative slot for counting in July was even worse.

Farewell Spit could not be visited. The area was almost continuously in the cross hair of significant conveyor belts of tropical fronts with immense downpours of rain. The lighthouse accommodation ended up in a lake. Such situation has not been experienced before.

Golden Bay and Tasman Bay have been incomplete in coverage due to inaccessibility of areas where birds do roost. Also, the damp situation created a dispersal of the oystercatchers in the paddocks near the coast. Such dispersal made it impossible to have a good indication of numbers in our areas.

How many birds did we miss? In total we counted, without Farewell Spit about 6000 birds. For many years, we have been very consistent with the total number of shorebirds in our area. About 50.000 in the summer count, 30.000 in spring and in the winter about 20.000. So, all in all we counted about 30% on what we normally would expect. It is most appreciated for those that went out to do their patch. We have at least a continuum for those areas. For the rest we hope the next count will not be challenged in the way we experienced in the winter of 2025.

Many thanks to all of you.

Kind Regards Rob

FLOOD DAMAGE AT MOTUEKA SANDSPIT *Kathryn Richards*

I visited Motueka Spit recently saw the flood debris that has washed up. There were up to 70 apple bins there at one stage!



EASTERN (PACIFIC) REEF HERON *Rebecca Bowater*





Not so much in the way of rare bird sightings here at this time of year but Rebecca Bowater did manage to capture the beauty of this reef heron that has been seen feeding along Rock's Road in Nelson

PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

This is the latest promotional poster for BirdsNZ, which I have been asked to include in the newsletter.

BIRDS | SCIENCE | PEOPLE



Beach patrol at Pakiri. Darren Markin

Since setting up our Beach Patrol Scheme in 1951 our members have gathered over 30,000 records of 440,000 birds of 115 seabird species to map their coastal distribution

You can join Birds New Zealand for just \$1.75 a week.
That's \$90 a year, and just \$45 for students.

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TERN UPDATE *David Melville*

At the August meeting David gave us a brief update on tern activity in our area. An adult Australian tern and a juvenile begging for food have been seen at the Mot sandspit

Australian [Gull-billed] Terns

- Daryl Eason reports an adult and begging juvenile at Motueka Sandspit



Caspian Terns

C08 reported at Motueka Sandspit - banded Bell Island Shellbank as a chick 21 January 2013



Caspian Tern	Sweden	U 22698	30y 0m
<i>Sterna caspia</i>	Sweden	U 68036	27y 11m

Elapsed Time Band 09100283, banded in February 1989 at OFF MANNING BEACH CORNER INLET, VIC (-138 deg 41 min, 146 deg 50 min). Recovered after 20 years 0.4 month at WELLINGTON POINT RESERVE WELLINGTON POINT, QLD (-27 deg 27 min, 153 deg 14 min) in February 2018 after moving 1382 km. Recovery method: TRAPPED BECAUSE BIRD/BAT TANGLED IN FISHING GEAR Recovery status: WAS REHABILITATED & RELEASED ALIVE WITH THE BAND.

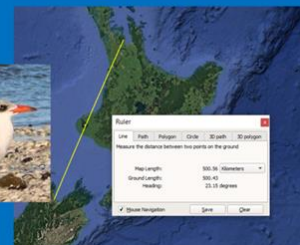
K05 banded as a chick Bell Island Shellbank 18 December 2023

2 August 2025, Taramaire, Firth of Thames

~20 months old



Note 'droopy' wing = arrived from long flight?



Caspian tern C08, banded as a chick on Belle Island in 2013, has been reported at the Mot sandspit. Still going strong. Meanwhile K05, also banded at Belle Island but in 2023, has been reported from the Firth of Thames. These two birds clearly pose questions and opportunities for research around longevity and movement of Caspian terns in NZ.

Innermost primary pearly grey
– new, recently replaced.



Moult of immatures still little understood.

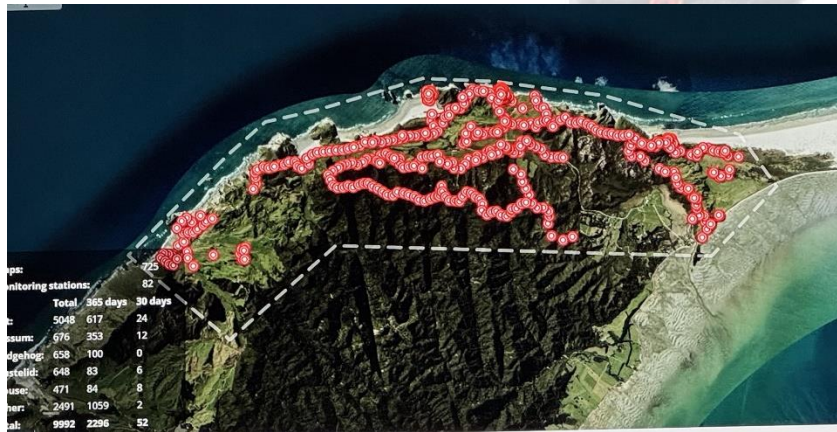
And finally, this photo shows a newly replaced primary in an immature bird. The moult of immature Caspians is little understood and David asks for the photographers amongst us to have their cameras at the ready around these birds and to forward him any relevant photos. (*photo credits in slides*)

“SHEARWATERS AND OTHER BIRDS AT WHARARIKI” *Marian and Alec Milne*

Marian and Alex work for an organisation called HealthPost Nature Trust (link below)

<https://www.healthpost.co.nz/about-us/healthpost-nature-trust?srltid=AfmBOooGbVQfuqCZil6VDhGpuYh01SEK32PKffNS743Buwvjh1ewQy07>

Working alongside Iwi and other organisations they have been involved with translocation of fluttering shearwater to an area at the base of Onetahua /Farewell spit. This is part of the overall “Pest Free Onetahua” project. Pest Free Onetahua is a partnership between [Tasman Environmental Trust](#) and [Manawhenua Ki Mohua](#), working closely with DOC, local landowners and the Mohua community. While no easy task, and requiring a great deal of volunteer time, coordination and sheer hard work, I was impressed by both the scope and the feasibility of this.



This is the 3rd year of fluttering shearwater translocation. Initially a predator (and mouse) proof fence needed to be constructed near the base of the spit around a site which already had some fluttering shearwater and diving petrel activity. And of course it had to be trapped (shown left).

Chicks were relocated from the Marlborough sounds. However, for success there is a limited window of opportunity. Obviously the older the chicks the less work is required to feed them, but they need to be taken before they have started to emerge from their burrows. Apparently, a glimpse of the night sky is enough to programme the chicks to return to the same place as breeding adults. It also reduces workload over time if chicks are of similar age.

Having been caught the chicks are taken



to the Spit and located in artificial burrows within the fenced area, a process involving much planning and many volunteers. (photo right) Initially

the burrows are closed until the chicks are deemed mature enough to start emerging to exercise their wings.

Meanwhile of course they must be tube fed, a process involving sardines a blender and lots of time.

In general, the process seems to have run smoothly, although an outbreak of avian pox affected two chicks which eventually recovered

So far shearwaters have been translocated over a 3-year period, and this is the first year in which it is possible that adults from the first year could return. Obviously, there is much anticipation.



In addition to providing safe nesting for shearwaters and diving petrel, the predator free Onetahua project is starting to provide a

wonderful and much needed reserve for many other species including reptiles and invertebrates. Obviously, the gannet colony will benefit, but additionally fernbird are starting to be seen in good numbers, spotless crane are turning up and there is even a pair of greater spotted kiwi in the area.

Another great talk which kept the audience both entertained and informed. Thank you, Marian and Alec.

SPOTTED SHAG CENSUS

Watch this space! Martine Darrou has developed a Spotted Shag census method and would like to invite members with an interest in participating in this project over the next few years to reach out to her. More information and detail in upcoming meetings /newsletters.

GANNET /AVIAN FLU MONITORING

At the August meeting David Melville invited expressions of interest from members who would like to be involved in monitoring the gannet colony on Farewell Spit for the black iris condition linked to avian flu. The monitoring is in conjunction with Otago University and monthly visits to the colony will be made. Email david.melville@xtra.co.nz if you are interested. Sounds like a great opportunity.

That's it for now. Please keep those photos and snippets coming in. You don't need to be ornithologist of the year! Photos of your blackbird nest, a quirky observation, your favourite birding spot, a question to start discussion. And I'm looking for my next victim for "Members

Profile” which I intend to start up again in the next newsletter. Don’t wait to be picked on- offer yourself up!

Nga mihi Paul Bennett thebraveryofbeingoutofrange@gmail.com

BREAKING NEWS!

A couple of items have just rolled in as we ‘go to press’

Firstly, an update on the **MOT SANDPIT SITUATION**. David Melville writes; “I walked down Motueka Sandspit on Wednesday on a 4.2m tide. There is one major channel cut through the main spit quite near the northern end - see attached photos. It was thigh deep with an uneven floor. its crossable (and the water was not too cold!) with care. Further down the Spit there are a couple of other shallower crossings. It seems likely that these will fill up in due course (based on previous cut throughs)



And how exciting is this! **HARRIER BANDED IN NELSON SIGHTED IN CROMWELL!!**

I’m sure there will be more to say here, but this is the first sighting of one of our banded harriers outside the region. 101, banded as a one-year-old by Paul Fisher has been seen and photographed in Cromwell by Nick Beckwith. Clearly this raises questions around dispersal and movement of these birds. Hopefully this will be the subject of a future article. Meanwhile a photo of 101 clearly showing his leg band- taken by Nick.



