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Otago Region Newsletter 6/2025

June 2025



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/>

Ornithological Snippets

There have been regular sightings of **South Island Takahe** | **Takahē** on the Greenstone-Caples and Rees-Dart Tracks. A **Marsh Crake** | **Kotoreke** on 2 May at Upper Tomahawk Lagoon was the first sighting there since July last year; 2 hybrid **Black x Pied Stilts** | **Kakī/Poaka** were at the same location on 17 May. 2 **SIPO** | **Tōrea** had returned to Balclutha on 6 May, with 4 the following week. Dawn Palmer found an unseasonal **Banded Dotterel** | **Pohowera** near Queenstown on 18 June. **60 Black-fronted Terns** | **Tarapirohe** on Lake Dunstan on 14 March were noteworthy, as were 4 at nearby Lindis Crossing on 9 April.

A **Little Black Shag** | **Kawau tūi** was reported from Queenstown Gardens on 17 April, while a **Royal Spoonbill** | **Kōtuku ngutupapa** near Tarras on 9 April was unexpected. An **Australasian Bittern** | **Matuku-hūrepo** was seen foraging in a watercourse in the Tahakopa Valley in April, and with another near Papatōwai in early June. There was a **Reef Heron** | **Matuku moana** on 1 April at Taiaroa Head, and 3 **Cattle Egret** on 15 May.

between Owaka and Pounaweia. Single **White Herons** | **Kōtuku** were seen at Glenorchy in the first week of April, Glenfalloch Gardens on 12 April, and 1 at Tomahawk Lagoon from 10 May.

Franny Cunninghame saw a **Little Owl** | **Ruru nohinohi** by the MacLennan River Bridge on 4 June. 2 **Kaka** | **Kākā** were reported from Lake Hayes on 20 May, and singles from a garden in central Tapanui on 28 May, and near Tautuku Beach on 4 June. A **Tomtit** | **Riroriro** was an unexpected garden visitor in Queenstown on 18 June. Franny Cunninghame also encountered several **Fernbird** | **Mātātā** in the dunes behind Tautuku Beach in early June. A **Cirl Bunting** on 1 May near Balclutha was in exactly the same location as one in 2021.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

eBird News

The recent eBird Global Big Day was well supported in Otago, with the region contributing 53 unique checklists (not accounting for shared lists) from 25 observers. The species count was 84, which was 3 ahead of Canterbury, with Auckland 3rd on 79. These totals were significantly higher than in 2024.

Otago's **Brown/Southern Skua**, **Northern Giant Petrel**, **Soft-plumaged Petrel** & **White-chinned Petrel** were the only NZ records, while **Yellow-eyed Penguin**, and **Otago/Foveaux Shag** were not recorded anywhere else in the world on the day.

Checklist media

A new feature in eBird is the ability to add photos (and audio) not just of birds, but of habitat, other animals and the general birding experience. There is also a category for Experience, where you can upload photos that document your visit without being directly related to habitat. As with bird media, checklist media should match the location and time of the checklist

Further details at <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001269559>

Unique distance tracking in eBird mobile

For those diligent eBirders who understand and carefully follow the rules, and manually adjust the distance after retracing their path; and for those who are blissfully unaware of this requirement – you no longer need to worry about it! The latest development in eBird mobile is the automatic recalculation of the unique distance of a checklist, to take into account any backtracking or retracing of steps. In addition, previously submitted checklists will have their distances adjusted. If you are using the website to submit a checklist, there is now a

reminder to allow for backtracking when filling in the Time & Effort section. Further details can be found at <https://ebird.org/news/unique-distance-tracking-in-ebird-mobile>

Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com

BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Health & Safety



BirdsNZ Council have asked for Regional newsletters to include a standing request to report on Health & Safety issues.

A reminder to members that when involved with organised BirdsNZ Field Trips and activities, that we should not hesitate to call 111 to respond to medical events or incidents that result in harm.

If anyone has been involved in or is aware of an incident that resulted in harm to any of our activity participants, please contact the Regional Representative, so that the President and EO can be notified immediately

Plan ahead, stay safe while birding everyone.

Dawn: birds.otago@birdsNZ.org.nz 027 442 7348

Updates and Messages from the Regional Representative

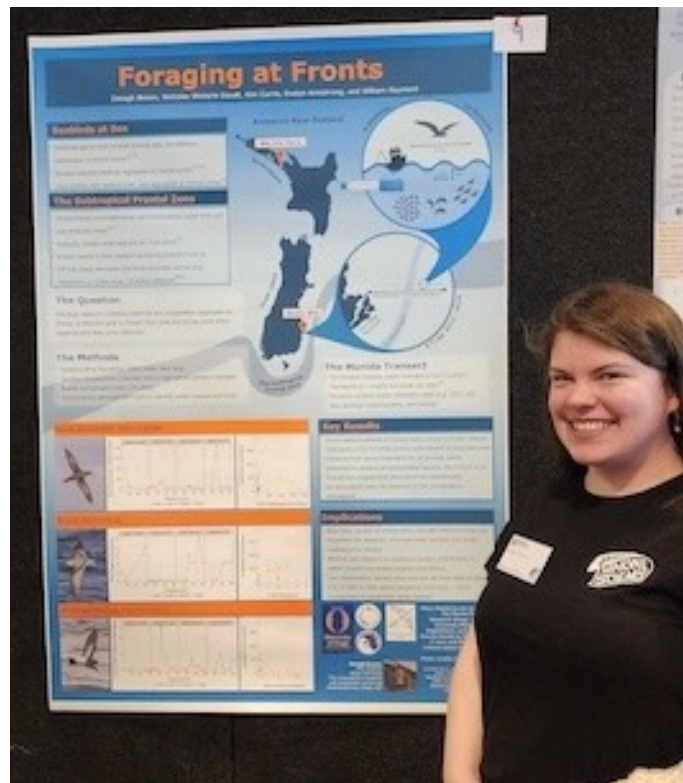
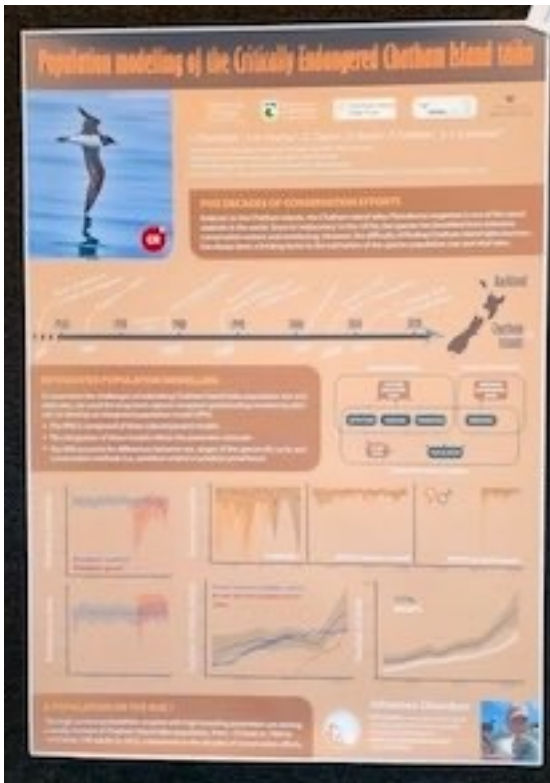
Pigeon Island field trip

The Pigeon Island field trip is now fully booked, with a waitlist. BirdsNZ members will be given priority.

Dawn will be in touch with those who have expressed interest to provide trip details.

BirdsNZ Conference 2025

Twenty-four people from Otago went to the BirdsNZ Conference in Auckland this year! A wonderful turnout. Several of our members presented talks and posters, including Ela Hunt, Zunaira Noreen, Johannes Chambon and Daragh Brown. As always, the quality of photos in the photo competition was fabulous, presentations and workshops were engaging, and there were several field trips on offer for those able to stay an extra day. There were so many highlights, and you can check out the conference abstracts on the BirdsNZ website or follow this link: <https://www.birdsNZ.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-Conference-Programme-with-Abstracts.pdf>



As I reflected on the entire conference experience, it was inspiring to be part of the collegiate "hivemind" gathering of so many experienced and contributing members, and to listen to presentations from members at our universities, regional councils, research and conservation organisations, and professionals involved in bird research. Adrian Riegen's talk at the conference conclusion, about his long and shared journey (thanks, Bruce McKinlay) to gain birding access to and develop relationships that support the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), was a highlight.



Conference 2025 left me eager to hear more of the continuing endeavours of our BirdsNZ members as they explore the frontiers of the yet-to-be-described.

Well done Auckland! I'm looking forward to Conference 2026 in Wanaka already!

Orbell has been translocated!



I can report that Orbell has safely negotiated airport security and was granted safe passage by the Air New Zealand cabin crew on his flight from Auckland to Queenstown after the Conference. Orbell will spend the year with us here in Otago, so if you have an outing he should attend, do let me know!

Links to the latest news and newsletters

News items:

2025 NZ Garden Bird Survey: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/nz-garden-bird-survey/>

AOC 2025 in Perth: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/aoc-2025/>

Notornis June edition published: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/notornis-latest-edition-published/>

Birds NZ Magazine June edition published: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/birds-new-zealand-magazine-published/>

Newsletters:

Manawatu – June 2025: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/manawatu-newsletter/>

Canterbury – May 2025: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/canterbury-newsletter-wrybill/>

Articles:

Where in NZ are our birds: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Oscar-Thomas-Beach-Patrol-Data-Species-and-Districts-Article-2504.pdf>

2024 MDS/Urban Bird Distribution: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2024-MDS-Urban-Bird-Distribution-Report-2505.pdf>

Page updates:

AOC Student Grants: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/awards-and-prizes/aoc-student-grants/>

Affiliates: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/affiliates/>

About Us: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/>

BirdsNZ National Birding Schemes

If you want to know more about our national birding schemes, visit our website at this link, <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/research/#projectsawn>

Birding at Lake Hayes

On Saturday morning, I led the growing local birding group around the shores of Lake Hayes. This group is organised nearly every month by new BirdsNZ member, and the Executive Officer of the Whakatipu Wildlife Trust. It was cold and overcast, but 13 of us (including 3 BirdsNZ members) got out to see what we could. Five in the group had never been birding before! We saw a colony of little shag (14 in total including some dark immature birds), more were seen near the scraps of their nests where the colony had been recorded on a previous visit.

Pūteketeke numbers are approaching their winter low, but Australasian shovelers were seen in scattered pairs along with rafts of Scaup along the lake margins. Large willows are being felled to make way for the expanding raupo reedland and Carex sedgeland, which hopefully will suit the marsh crake when they're done. A large flock of Canada geese and spur-winged plovers occupied the open water next to the Lake Hayes trail in the southwest corner.

Welcome swallows were busy foraging over the lake margins, and harriers were gliding around the nearby hills. An unexpected near touchdown of the Sunrise Balloon on the lake was a colourful treat for this otherwise grey day.



Dawn Palmer

Red letter blue petrel day at the Otago Canyons

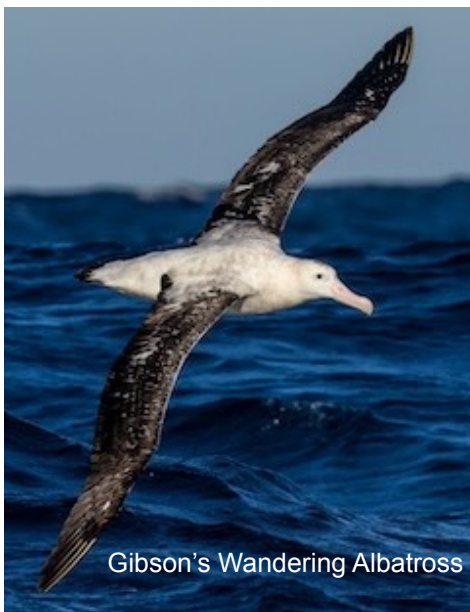
It was a red letter blue petrel day at the Otago Canyons yesterday, with 22 flybys from this rare subantarctic migrant! They occur in the south Atlantic and Indian Oceans, but the only south Pacific population is on Macquarie Island. Since the eradication of cats in 2001 they've been recovering at a rate of 12% per year, so hopefully this is a reflection of that work!

Also spectacular to see ten seabird species that can't reliably be found anywhere else in Aotearoa New Zealand without going to the subantarctic, highlighted in the list with an asterisk. Southern giant petrel and Antarctic fulmar are great bonuses but they aren't uncommon off Kaikōura! I think along with being one of our best days out at the Canyons, this hammers home Dunedin as the wildlife capital of NZ (and NZ as the seabird capital of the world!).

The next trips scheduled for 21st and 27th June are currently full but get in touch if you'd like to join the waitlist. Future pelagic trips to the Otago Canyons are unconfirmed as the vessel is changing hands, but will be advertised on the Birds Otago Facebook group if they continue. Have a look through the photos and eBird trip report below

Tuesday 17th June 2025 Species estimates:

8 Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*
 15 Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*
 1 Snowy Wandering Albatross* *Diomedea exulans*
 1 Gibson's Wandering Albatross *Diomedea gibsoni*



1 Light-mantled Sooty Albatross* *Phoebastria palpebrata*
 40 Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri*
 30 White-capped Albatross *Thalassarche cauta*
 1 Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini*
 6 Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*
 3 Grey-backed Storm-Petrel* *Garrodia nereis*
 6 Black-bellied Storm-Petrel* *Fregetta tropica*
 3 Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*
 5 Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*
 2 Antarctic Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

160 Cape Petrel *Daption capense*
 5 Soft-plumaged Petrel* *Pterodroma mollis*
 7 White-headed Petrel* *Pterodroma lessonii*
 22 Blue Petrel* *Halobaena caerulea*
 300 Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*
 1 Broad-billed Prion* *Pachyptila vittata*
 3 Antarctic Prion* *Pachyptila desolata*
 2 Grey Petrel* *Procellaria cinerea*
 6 Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica*
 5 Fluttering Shearwater *Puffinus gavia*
 1200 Silver Gull *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae*
 4 Black-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus bulleri*
 100 Southern Black-backed Gull *Larus dominicanus*
 1 Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
 16 Black-fronted Tern *Chlidonias albostratus*
 8 White-fronted Tern *Sterna striata*
 1 Australasian Gannet *Morus serrator*
 4 Little Shag *Microcarbo melanoleucos*
 8 Spotted Shag *Phalacrocorax punctatus*
 120 Otago Shag *Leucocarbo chalconotus*
 4 South Island Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus finschi*
 1 Variable Oystercatcher *Haematopus unicolor*
 2 Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*
 2 Australasian Harrier *Circus approximans*
 2 New Zealand Fur Seal
 1 New Zealand Sea Lion



Grey-backed Storm-Petrel



Antarctic Fulmer

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/386048>

Text and Photo Credit Oscar Thomas

Calling all the spotted shag lovers!

For the past 2 years I have been monitoring the spotted Shags population in the Otago region. Looking in eBird for the last ten years, I noticed that there is a sharp decrease.

At the conference in Auckland I had a chat with Matt Rayner, he too agreed that numbers has decreased in the North Island. We discussed undertaking a National census, to start in August 2025, and continue for a minimum of 2 years. I would like to to present a progress report for the South Island, at the 2026 National conference and need as many volunteers as possible please!



Martine Darrou
darma1@me.com

Otago Harbour Survey 2025-2027

The Otago Harbour supports a wide range of birds. Monthly Counts spread over 40 years (1977-2010) has documented the seasonal pattern of bird usage of the harbour and changes in the usage. It is timely to undertake this survey again to document the response of birds to changes in footpaths along the foreshore.

The harbour has been divided up into seven sections, which are to be counted monthly in about two hours by two people. The following dates and time have been selected for the first half of the 2025/2027 survey. The start time for the survey is two hours BEFORE the high tide time listed below. I'll be updating more detailed instructions before we get underway.

Month Date	Time
Sept 21	1515
Oct 19	1510
Nov 16	1400
Dec 21	17308
Jan 18	1625
Feb 15	1515
Mar 15	1400
Apr 19	1710
May 17	1555
June 14	1445
July 12	1340
Aug 9	1225

Previous surveys emphasised the importance of Otago Harbour as a post breeding congregation site for waders and waterfowl. Shags by comparison have highest numbers in winter. The counts reflected the national decline of black-billed gulls and recorded increases in numbers of royal spoonbill in Otago and grey teal, paradise shelduck and variable oystercatchers.

I'll be hosting a training session on SUNDAY 17 AUGUST at 14:00 to go over this and finalise instructions and briefing teams. It will be at the boat launch site at the Otago Yacht Club Neptune Street. In the meantime, if you want to be part of this and have a favourite part of the Harbour you wish to count for the next two years let me know. Drop me an email at brucejmckinlay@gmail.com

JOIN US!



33TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HISTORY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

29 JUNE - 5 JULY 2025

PEOPLES | PLACES | EXCHANGES | CIRCULATION

Public plenary: Historical and contemporary issues in conservation and the environment

Panelists:

- Ruth Morgan (Australian National University)
- Brendan Flack (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Kāi Te Ruahikihiki; East Otago Taiāpure Committee)
- Catriona Macleod (Manaaki Whenua | Landcare Research)
- Philip Seddon (University of Otago)

Conservation concerns have been and continue to be at the forefront of environmental research. Come and hear experts in ecotourism, de-extinction, predator-free NZ, fisheries management, sustainability and climate adaptation discuss some hard issues.

www.ichst2025.org

Torea update / South Island pied oystercatcher

On a recent trip to the spit at Waiputai / Blueskin Bay on 27 May 2025, a Birds New Zealand member from the Otago Branch (Nick Beckwith) surveyed torea / South Island pied oystercatcher.

Nick timed his visit for the rising tide, with it being particularly high with water over the end of the spit. In his limited time at the spit, Nick observed about half the birds with flags from the recent successful cannon-net catch on 10 March 2025, when flags were put on 73 individuals at Waiputai.

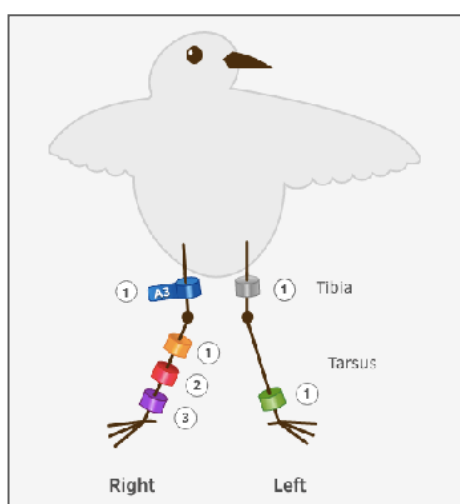
Although Nick may have missed some torea with flags, because it can be hard to identify all birds when they are moving around, or the orientation of the flag on the birds, it is possible that some birds may have moved to other locations.

We encourage all Birds NZ members in Otago and further afield to actively check torea for flags and note down the letters and numbers on them – the flags from torea in Otago will usually be coloured blue, while those with flags from other regions will be other colours. All observations of torea with flags should be submitted to: <https://app.birdbanding.doc.govt.nz/sightings>

The recent cannon-netting of torea at Waiputai was a collaboration between Te Papa Atawhai – Department of Conservation (DOC), Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research (MWLR), Birds New Zealand, and the Otago Regional Council. We thank Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka Ki Puketeraki, mana whenua at Waiputai, for their involvement and support of this work.

For information on a national project on torea involving DOC, MWLR, Birds New Zealand and Pūkorokoro Naturalist's Trust, Anne Schlesselmann from MWLR provides a summary in this article: www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Birds-NZ-Magazine41_March-2024.pdf. An update on the recent cannon-netting operation in Otago is provided in the previous newsletter by Bruce McKinlay: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Otago-2504.pdf>

Scott Jarvie



Example of a bird with a flag and bands

Programme 2025

Birds NZ Otago Branch meetings for 2025 will be held on the 4th Tuesday of the month (from February to November) in the Benham Seminar Room, 2nd floor of the Benham Building, [Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street](#), starting at 7.30pm. Please arrive prior to this as the doors lock automatically unless someone is there to open them from inside.

Tuesday 24 June	Jerusha Bennett - Parasites infecting Aotearoa birds / manu
Sat 4 to Sun 6 July	Pigeon Island / Wāwāhi Waka field trip (Contact Dawn)
Tuesday 22 July	Finn Stoneman - Foraging ecology of tawaki / Fiordland crested penguins in Dusky Sound
Tuesday 26 August	Peter Langlands - Breeding sites and success of Canterbury kautuku / bitterns
Tuesday 23 September	Ellen Hoy - Kuaka / Godwits of the Avon-Heathcote
Tuesday 28 October	Bruce McKinlay - Otago Harbour Bird Survey from 1977-2010
Tuesday 25 November	Annual Quiz Night!

SO MANY WAYS TO HELP OUR BIRDS



Birds New Zealand's Bird Atlas Project is recording bird populations and distribution around the country to inform evidence-based conservation and management.

www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/join-now/

JOIN US NOW



Contributions for the next newsletter should reach the editor by **15 July** sodlin@gmail.com

Disclaimer

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