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## *Otago Region Newsletter 8/2025*

### *August 2025*



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

### **Ornithological Snippets**

A Marsh Crake | Kotoreke at Lake Hayes on 1 and 2 August, was the first sighting there for 18 months. 2 Variable Oystercatcher | Tōrea pango feeding in a Balclutha paddock on 19 August were well inland for this species.

Banded Dotterel | Pohowera had returned to their breeding grounds near Tarras on 20 July and 4 Black-fronted Terns | Tarapirohe were at Tucker Beach, Queenstown on 16 July. A Reef Heron | Matuku moana was seen at Katiki Point on 29 July, while a long-staying White Heron | Kōtuku at Tomahawk Lagoon was joined by a second bird on 16 August.

Finally, there have been continued Kaka | Kākā reports at Kaitangata and Kaka Point, with further sightings near Balclutha and at Pounawea.

Please send any interesting reports to [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

**Richard Schofield**

## eBird News

I have spent recent dark evenings entering checklists from old notebooks into eBird. I won't mention how old some of these notebooks are, but there is a surprising amount of detail in some of the lists, from the days when we used pencil and paper instead of tapping a screen. Unfortunately, there is usually some aspect of what makes a complete checklist missing, in many cases either distance travelled or time spent watching. So most of these checklists have been entered as Historical, but there is still a wealth of information in some of them, and judging from the number of records that get flagged, it is interesting to see how bird populations have changed over the years, mainly down, but occasionally with sightings that were rare at the time, but now regular, if not common.

For some of my early overseas trips, lists were a bit vague, sometimes only a single list for the entire visit, so pinning a sighting to a particular date sometimes took a bit of detective work, including reading through old travel journals, and reviving memories at the same time. Nowadays, although I still try to keep a journal when travelling, it is more likely that my eBird lists act as a diary. If only I'd known 50 years ago that eBird was coming along!

**Richard** 027 281 8701 or [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:birds.otago@birdsNZ.org.nz) 027 442 7348



The BirdsNZ Conference 2026 will be held in Wānaka, Otago.

The Venue is the Wānaka Lakes Centre.

The Dates are 30 May to 1 June.

A link to the location of the venue and the link to the venue are below.

Venue location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/HHDjFj6GB4c4WVXw7>

About the venue: <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/venues/lake-wanaka-centre/>

### Accommodation

The **Wānaka isite** is supporting us with secured group bookings at a range of providers so please enquire with them regarding your accommodation booking.

To secure your accommodation booking, please email [hello@wanaka.co.nz](mailto:hello@wanaka.co.nz) or call Wānaka isite at (+64) 03 443 1233 (available 9 AM – 5 PM daily).

A deposit is required immediately after isite confirms your booking.

### Call for conference field trip leaders!

The Birds NZ 2026 conference is to be held next year in Wānaka from the 30th to 31st May, with field trips on Monday 1st June. All field trips must have a nominated BirdsNZ representative on the trip. Their role is to be a point of contact, ensure everyone is on the boat/bus, report any incidents/near-misses, and report in upon completion of the trip to the conference organiser who will relay messages to the president. Trip costs are TBC but will include packed lunches and transport. The proposed field trips are below.

Are you planning to attend the conference and able to help out by leading a trip? Preference for trip leaders to be Otago-based Birds NZ members with knowledge of the relevant sites and first aid certification, however there is also scope for a second lead to provide support. Any questions or to express interest, please contact Oscar via [oscarkokako@gmail.com](mailto:oscarkokako@gmail.com)



A grebe with a teenager on board  
Photo Credit: John Darby [wanakaapp.nz](http://wanakaapp.nz)

<b>Wānaka Field Trips</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Draft agenda</b>	<b>Level</b>
<b>Wānaka Wetland birding</b>	All within 30min drive of Wānaka. Half-day	Depart Wānaka 9:15, arrive Albert Town 9:30 for short walk. Depart 10:00 to arrive at Diamond Lake at 10:45, walk and lunch. Allow 30min back to Wānaka, potentially via Emerald Bluff wetlands and/or West Wānaka wetlands en route.	Easy
<b>Mou Waho Island visit</b>	15km water taxi, 1.5 to 2hrs ashore (Possibly longer). Half-day	Depart Wānaka Marina 10:00, arrive Mou Waho 10:45. Depart 12:45 to arrive back at Wānaka 13:30.	Easy/ Mid
<b>Blue Pools forest walk</b>	150km/2hrs return driving. All day	Depart Wānaka 8:15, arrive Blue Pools 9:30 for 3km return easy walk. Lunch at Cameron Flat 12:00. Afternoon either Cameron lookout or Haast Pass lookout. Depart 14:30 to arrive back at Wānaka 15:45.	Easy/ Mid
<b>Rob Roy glacier hike</b>	100km/2hrs return drive gravel, 10km return walk (allow six hours). All day	Depart Wānaka 7:45, arrive Raspberry Flat 9:00 for 10km return hike, allow six hours. Lunch at lower lookout. Depart 15:00 to arrive back at Wānaka 16:15.	Mid/ Hard
<b>Tiel Valley Experience</b>	160km/2.5hrs driving return, short heli flight and 2.5hr walk. All day	Depart Wanaka 08:00 to arrive in Makarora 09:00. Short heli flight up to Tiel Valley and walk back to Makarora. Around 3hrs total.	Mid

## Updates and Messages from the Regional Representative

The Otago Branch members are creating opportunities for our members and friends to get out birding, including the Harbour Survey, Spotted Shag surveys, birding in the Botanic Gardens, the Town Belt 5MBC stations, Matuku Muster activities, and the October field trip. We have Peter Langlands speaking to us next Tuesday at our Branch meeting, and our AGM will follow this.

I would like to thank Sue Odlin, who has served as Treasurer and newsletter compiler for the Otago Branch since 2019. Sue gave notice of her intention to step down at our AGM last year, and Craig McKenzie has stepped into this Branch role. Thank you for your service to the Otago Branch, Sue.

Happy reading!

## **Links to the latest news and newsletters**

### **News items:**

History of the King's College Bird Club (by R.B. Sibson):

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/history-of-the-kings-college-bird-club-by-r-b-sibson/>

### **Newsletters:**

Manawatu – August 2025:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/manawatu-newsletter/>

Auckland Programme – Jul 2025 to Jan 2026:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/auckland-newsletter/>

Otago – July 2025:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/otago-newsletter/>

### **Articles:**

2025 PAF: Passerine Publication - Overview article:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025-PAF-Passerine-Occasional-Publication-Overview-Article.pdf>

2024 PIBCRF: Birdlife on Manuae Is - Final report:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/funding/pibcrf/pibcrf-projects/>

## **Branch News**

### **Dunedin Town Belt Bird Trail**

Are you:

- Looking for a walk in the City?
- Wanting to see some birds which are common or not in the City?
- Wanting to upskill your technique on identifying and counting birds?
- Wanting to get in touch with nature?
- All of the above?

For more information go to [www.birdcount.nz](http://www.birdcount.nz)

### **Update on the Otago Bittern Project**

It has been some time since an update was last provided on the Otago Region Bittern Project. This regional project is a partnership between Birds New Zealand Otago and the Otago Regional Council (ORC) to survey Australasian bitterns, marsh crakes, and spotless crakes in the wetlands of the Otago region. It was initiated in September 2022 with funding provisionally provided for 5 years. The ORC purchased Acoustic Recording Devices (ARDs) and has covered our expenses for transportation to and from monitoring locations, software purchase for analysis, workshop hosting costs, analysis time for digital spectrogram data, and administration of the funding agreement.

This work is necessary as there has been no previous comprehensive assessment of the distribution and numbers of Bittern and Crake in Otago. The project uses ARDs to sample



at dawn and dusk, following a standardised protocol to gather sound files. Since the start of the project, we have collected data for the 2022, 2023 and 2024 breeding seasons. We plan to conduct further sampling in September, October, and November at multiple sites across Otago. Table 1 summarises the coverage and number of ARDs that we are managing. Sites are located throughout Otago as shown in Figure 1. This map shows sample sites and incidental sightings received since the project's commencement.

Table 1 summarises the number of Sites and ARDs deployed in the project for 2022-2024

Season	Number of Sites	Number of ARDS
2022	6	12
2023	24	65
2024	30	75

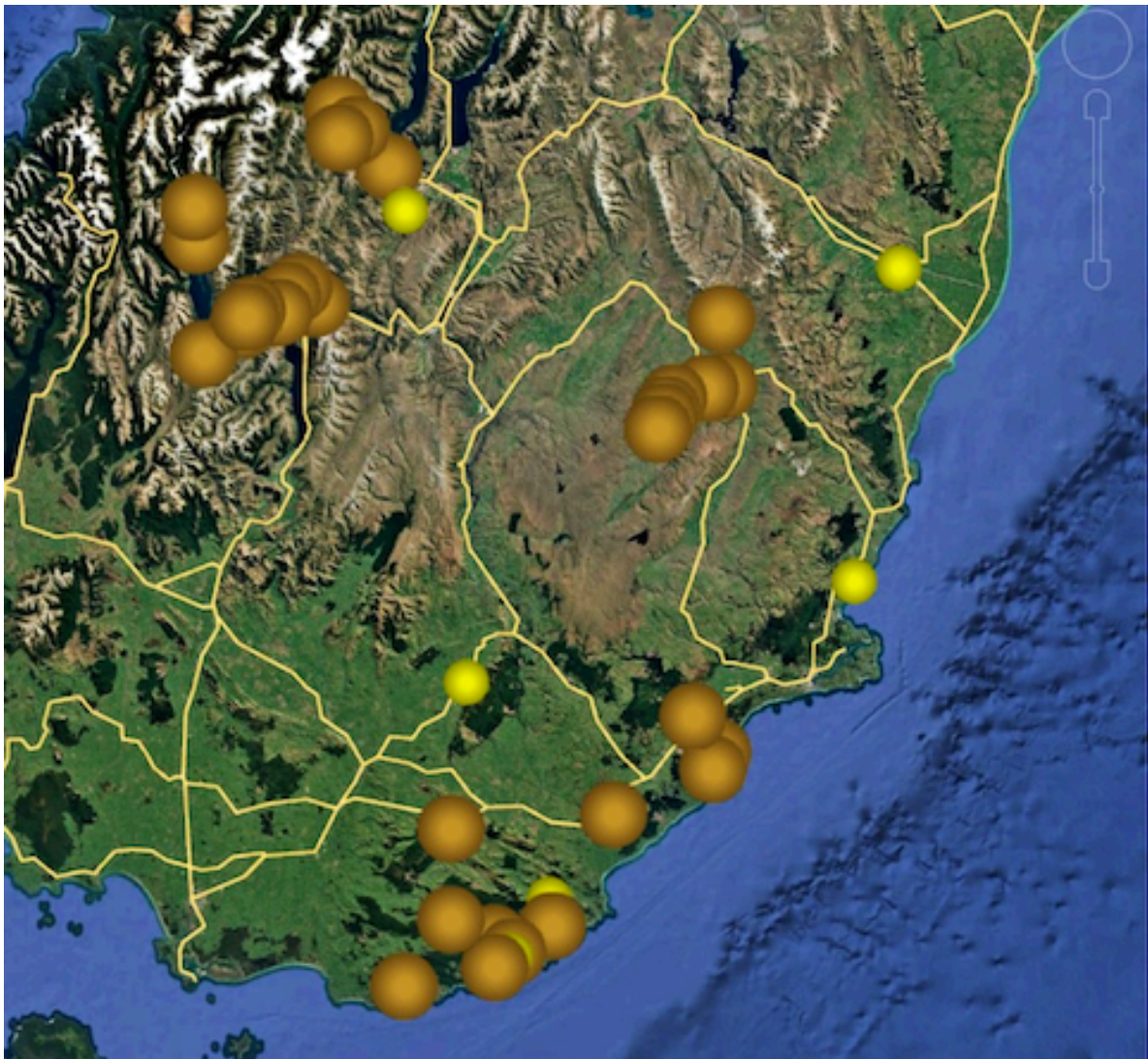


Figure 1: Legend: brown = inventory areas; yellow = recent incidental sightings received since 2022

Source Map: Google Earth Pro; Data SIO, NOAA, US Navy, NGA, GEBCO Image Landsat/ Copernicus. Imagery date: 1/1/2021. Accessed 16/6/2025



As of 31 March 2025, a total volunteer effort of 1,300 hours of work, including administration, deploying ARDs in the field, retrieving them, uploading data, curating data, and servicing ARDs. Additionally, we have developed partnerships with Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau, based at Sinclair Wetlands and Tiaki Maniototo in the Upper Taieri wetland complex, as well as the Forest and Bird Society in the Catlins, all of which have undertaken

After three years, we have a baseline collection of sound files from the most promising sites across Otago. Analysis of the sound files has been slow, but we have preliminarily confirmed the presence of bitterns in Sinclair Wetlands and Lake Tuakitoto.

To speed up processing, we have engaged contractors with support from DOC to undertake the initial sub-sampling and analysis of the sound files. The eventual results will give us a first look at where booming bitterns can be confirmed. In addition to being part of the project objectives, this data will enable us to identify priority sites for the 2025 season. As this contract progresses, we will be able to share updates on the location of bitterns in Otago, allowing their conservation to be better supported.



Thanks to our committee, Mary Thompson, Francesca Cunningham, Catriona Gower, and Ela Hunt, and to all the people who have put out and retrieved ARDs throughout Otago, the landowners who have given access, and to the ORC, which has funded this work.

**Dawn Palmer and Bruce McKinlay**

## **Birds Otago August meeting: Breeding sites and success for Canterbury kautuku/bitterns - Peter Langlands & AGM**

Benham Seminar Room, Department of Zoology - 7:30pm Tuesday 26th August 2025

Our speaker Peter Langlands has had an interest in the cryptic Australasian bittern / kautuku since 2005, and has been involved in the creation of a national bittern database alongside DOC which revealed the species had rapidly declined in range and number, giving it a threat status of 'Nationally Critical'. With a focus on Canterbury, Peter has developed a strategy to photo-ID individuals and use trail cameras to monitor breeding success with exciting results. Sharing footage through social media is an important part in raising awareness of bittern conservation, and Peter looks forward to presenting key findings from this research thus far.

Monthly Indoor Meetings run by the Birds New Zealand Otago Branch are held on the 4th Tuesday of the month starting at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, on the 2nd floor of the Department of Zoology in Central Dunedin. The doors need to be opened manually so please arrive early. All are welcome to attend, there will be hot drinks and biscuits! We also offer a zoom link:

Birds NZ Otago Monthly Meeting Zoom Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83922655184>

Meeting ID: 839 2265 5184

Passcode: 633186

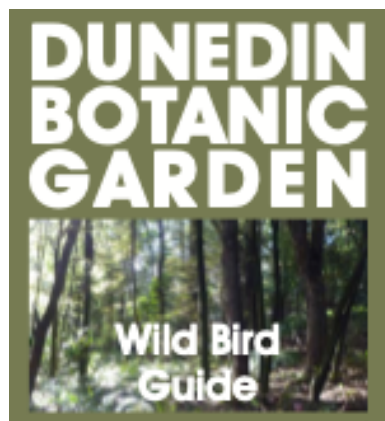


### **Chatham Island Bird Tours**

Also if you haven't heard from Lesley Whyte directly, the dates for the Chatham Island bird tours are:

- Tour 1: 9–16 March 2026
- Tour 2: 16–23 March 2026

## **Bird watching in the Botanic Garden, 7 September**



I'm organising the Spring birdwatching walk again this year and I'm looking for guides.

We'll have a quick chat and health and safety briefing at 9.45 am on Sunday 7 Sept at the Info Centre, then groups will move off around 10 and return to the Info Centre by 11.30 am.

I think most of you have been guides for this event before, and thanks to Bruce, Will and Mary who have already let me know that they're available.



I hope to make it to the next meeting on the 26 August and see you all then.

In the meantime could you please let me know by text 0226018579 or email [smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:smiddleton7@yahoo.co.nz) if you're available to be a guide.

The Botanic Garden are very supportive of this event this year and I hope to get some good publicity.

**Suzanne Middleton**

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## 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.

Birds NZ Otago Monthly Meeting Zoom Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83922655184>  
Meeting ID: 839 2265 5184                      Passcode: 633186

Tuesday 26 August	Peter Langlands - Breeding sites and success for kaituku / bitterns in Canterbury    Followed by AGM
5 - 7 Sept	Dawn - Matuku Muster
Sunday 21 September	Bruce - Harbour Survey
Tuesday 23 September	Ellen Hoy - Kuaka / Godwits of Southshore Spit
3 - 5 October	Dawn - Matuku Muster
Sunday 19 October	Bruce - Harbour Survey
25 - 27 Oct	Oscar - Tautuku Catlins field trip
Tuesday 28 October	Bruce McKinlay - Otago Harbour Bird Survey from 1977-2010
7 - 9 Nov	Dawn - Matuku Muster
Sunday 16 November	Bruce - Harbour Survey
Tuesday 25 November	Annual Quiz Night!
Sunday 21 December	Bruce - Harbour Survey

Contributions for the next newsletter should reach the editor, [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)  
by **16 September**

### Disclaimer

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