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Otago Region Newsletter 9/2025

September 2025



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

Ornithological Snippets

The first **Shining Cuckoo**|**Pipīwharau** of the spring was heard at Tautuku on 13 September. **Weka** continue to be seen around Dunedin; a bird was seen at Second Beach on 15 September, and a chick with 2 adults in North Dunedin was reported in the Otago Daily Times on 16. An **Australasian Little Grebe**|**Tokitokipio** was seen at Glenorchy Lagoon on 6 & 7 September. A **Little Black Shag**|**Kawau tūi** was at Pounawea on 24 August, with another reported at Lake Hayes on 27. An **Australasian Bittern**|**Matuku-hūrepo** was seen at Sinclair Wetlands on 14 September and a continuing **White Heron**|**Kōtuku** was at Glenorchy on 5 September.

Maree Johnstone reports a **NZ Falcon**|**Kārearea** flying past her dining room window on 5 September! It was flying parallel to the house and did a right hand turn and flew over the roof. There are also fat **NZ Pigeon**|**Kererū** dining out on plum blossoms and new leaves. Finally, **Kaka**|**Kākā** are still being reported from new locations, with the latest being one in

Milton reported by the Clutha Leader, while birds are still present at Pounaweia and Balclutha, at least.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

eBird News

Options for submitting records of Greylag Goose have recently been amended, and anyone reporting this species is asked to use the “Greylag Goose (Domestic type)” category from now on. This should now be the only Greylag Goose option available, so please do not add wild-type Greylag Goose to your checklists. All records of Greylag Goose already submitted will be converted to the domestic type in due course. In a similar vein,

eBird Big Day

This year’s October Big Day is on 11th October. Like Global Big Day, October Big Day is an opportunity to unite around our shared love of birds. [Last October](#), nearly three quarters of a million people joined in this worldwide celebration.

Wherever you are on 11 October, take a few minutes to enjoy birds and share what you find on eBird. Participate from anywhere—even from home! By taking part in October Big Day you’re also celebrating [Global Bird Weekend](#) and [World Migratory Bird Day](#). Be a part of the global team and help set a new record for October birding.

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



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 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



A grebe with a teenager on board
Photo Credit: John Darby wanakaapp.nz

Wānaka Field Trips	Length	Draft agenda	Level
Wānaka Wetland birding	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
Mou Waho Island visit	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
Blue Pools forest walk	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
Rob Roy glacier hike	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
Tiel Valley Experience	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

September Update

Our Conference Committee have been hard at work preparing the first draft of the Conference Budget and Registration Form which has been sent up to Council for our first milestone review of the first cut draft. Preparations are very much a work in progress.

We've had a wonderful level of support and outreach from local conservation organisations and businesses who have offered to lead some of our field trips. RealNZ have also sponsored us with generous support for one of the field trips.

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

Surveying Otago wetlands for Spotless & Marsh Crakes by Call-playback

Let's make a concerted effort to look for crakes.

One way of doing this is to play crake calls at likely wetlands and look and listen for a response. Even at a small patch of wetland with reeds or raupo and shallow muddy edges, it is worth spending 5 minutes playing calls and listening and looking. **Record the date, time, and the GPS location of the wetland and result** – the presence of a crake would be very exciting but even nil record is important to note. Those who are heading to Tautuku for the Labour Weekend field trip should get a chance to listen for crakes.

You need to download to your smartphone the scheme of calls devised by DOC from the following link.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2i1evaidmiyowoc1236hv/h?rlkey=oi2p9xnl31fse8a9hieokhupg&st=a30pfz3y&dl=0>

DOC has devised a scheme of calls with 30 second pauses for listening in between playing the various calls. This is part of their standardised crake survey methodology.

Play=30sec + Listen=30s + P=15s + L=30s + P=15s + L=30s + P=15s + L=30 + P=15s + L=2 minutes (End) note: the pauses for listening are built into the sound file.

You can play the calls from your phone but don't drop it in the swamp!

If you have a Bluetooth speaker, then place this a few metres away from you and play the sequence for one of the crakes. If you are walking along a track through wetland, try call playback every 150 m or so.



Image by Nick Beckwith

You can really only try for one species at one wetland at one time and come back another day to try for the other species. Or play spotless calls in morning and marsh calls in evening. Of course calm weather is preferable. Listen for other swamp birds at the same time (e.g., bittern and fernbird) and record their numbers. And why not do an eBird checklist too!

Send your playback records to Mary nzmaryt@gmail.com

Update on the Spotted Shag / parekareka project

There has been a lot of interest in the spotted shag / parekareka nest counts with 13 volunteers, and five going weekly in Otago. Volunteers have reported on the progress of nest building and chicks hatching from the Nuggets to Oamaru boat harbour.

Matt Rayner has provided an update from the 2025 Hauraki Gulf spotted shag / parekareka count, and unfortunately, the news is not good. He reports, "a new record low of nest numbers that sees the linear decline as statistically significant for the first time. Based on this, we are losing somewhere between 4-9 % of nests from yearly totals year on year".

Marian Milne from Golden Bay reported their numbers had plummeted this year; "The first count we did in 2019 had nearly 500 nests, but just 51 this year, as of September 14."



Juvenile Spotted shag / parekareka (Diego) at Smalls Beach

Photo credit: Martine Darrou Spotted shags / parekareka with eggs at Smalls Beach



Thank you all for your support for this important count. Monitoring is continuing as the breeding season progresses! Reach out to Martine Darrou on 021324034 or darmal@me.com to get involved.

Glossy Ibis

Otago member and BirdsNZ Council member, Martine Darrou, attended the 50th anniversary celebration of the shorebirds at Pūkoro Mirinda Shorebird Centre.

75 people attended and while Martine was there, she did not miss the chance to go birding and was very fortunate to see two Glossy ibises foraging near the Piko hide.



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BIRDS
NEW ZEALAND
He Kaitiaki Māori o Aotearoa

October Big Day



Hey Otago BirdsNZ members,

My name is Zachary, and I am in my third year studying at Otago. Over the last year, I have been an executive and member of a new club that has formed, the “Otago University Birding Society”. I thought that for the Big Day on 11 October it would be a good opportunity for the members of our club to connect with Birds NZ and collaborate.

However, as our club has a lot of international students we do not have a lot of transport options, so we were hoping to ride share with Birds NZ to Aramoana and then do a joint walk! Our current plan is to meet by the OUSA building on Albany street at 9 am then drive to Aramoana.

Once there we will do the Aramoana salt marsh walk together and then after that walk out along the mole. Please let me know if you are interested and how many spaces in the car you can provide.

Email: zdickison12@gmail.com Phone: 0274596485

Ngā mihi nui, **Zachary Dickison**

The bittern matuku-hūrepo project is gearing up for another survey season.

Our Catlins team will be monitoring bittern detected over the past three years of the project. Franny Cunningham and Catriona Gower will be organising Matuku Muster active listening events over the full moon phases of 3, 4, 5 October and 7, 8, 9 November.

Franny has booked accommodation over these weekends in the Forest & Bird Lenz Reserve Accommodation so please confirm your place directly with

Franny francescacunninghame@gmail.com

Lenz Reserve is located 5km south of Papatōwai at 614 Chaslands Highway, where the bridge goes over the Fleming River. It is shared bunk room accommodation and costs are covered by this collaborative bittern project which is supporting participation in Matuku Muster (Thanks ORC, BirdsNZ Otago).

No need to commit to the whole weekend. Any count effort is valuable.

We will be deploying acoustic recording devices into the wetlands of the Matukituki Valley, Maniototo area and a few sites in Coastal Otago.

We'd also like to deploy some where bitterns have been reported by members of the public on eBird and i-naturalist in the Waitaki area. If anyone is interested in helping with deployments up in the Waitaki reach out to birds.otago@birdsNZ.org.nz

Inland Birding



Local birders in the Whakatipu have been busy this spring with birding in the Queenstown Gardens led by the Whakatipu Wildlife Trust and supported by the Otago RR, Dawn Palmer, on the first day of Conservation Week (1 September); kereru, tui, bellbird, fantails, New Zealand Scaup, Puteketeke and black shags were highlights.

A few more of us went to Tucker Beach on the final day of Conservation Week (7 September) where three kotare were found to be displaying territorial behaviour, calling and cree-ing determinedly.



Buddleia is overtaking some of the dotterel



A local chat group has now been created for inland birders, and on Sunday, 14 September seven of us walked along both sides of the Shotover River in the Tucker Beach Wildlife Management Reserve to try and find, without success, our banded dotterels. However, one of our local and very keen young birders, member of BirdsNZ Audrey Austin, has been monitoring our only location where dotterel have been recorded near Queenstown this season, on Purple Ash Drive. This is a grassy terrace on the Frankton Flats surrounded by

carparks and construction projects. Audrey has named and suggested the sexes of each bird, generating a fun discussion in the group about "Sasha" and "Aster" sending us to ponder the guidebooks and introduce the group to this species.

With wild weather in the forecast as we transition from Winter to Spring, we are hoping to deploy our acoustic recording devices into the wetlands of the Matukituki Valley on the weekend of the 20 of September.

Dawn Palmer

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

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
by **21 October**

Disclaimer

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