



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 3/2003 June 2003

Bird Observations from Stewart Island

In February Dean Nelson and I completed the Northern Circuit tramp around the northwest part of Stewart Island. What follows is a potted summary of the more interesting bird observations that we made along the way. I have separately summarised these on Atlas sheets for inclusion in that project.

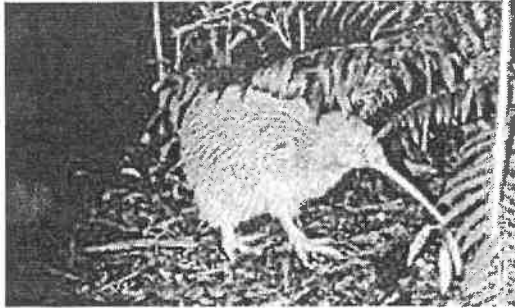


In the forest along the northern and western coasts parakeets and **South Island Kaka** were heard about once a day. **Tui**, **Grey Warbler**, **Silvereye**, **Tomtit**, **Fantail**, **Bellbird** and **Kereru** were present throughout the forests. The commonest exotic was **Chaffinch** and the occasional **Dunnock** was seen. Along the beaches (which were spectacular) **Red-billed Gull**, **Black-backed Gull**, **White-fronted Tern** and **Variable Oystercatchers** were common. At Murrays Beach there was a **Yellow-eyed Penguin** in the water just off the beach.

At Christmas Village hut a **Blue Penguin** made its presence heard. Less common were shags with only the occasional **Pied Shag** seen at Murrays Beach. Also seen at Christmas Village were a **Gannet** offshore and a **Little Shag**. Also offshore here and at Yankee River were **Sooty Shearwater** in moderate numbers.

We first heard **Kiwi** at Yankee River Hut and from there right around the island they were either seen fleetingly or heard on a regular basis. While out walking in the

evening at East Ruggedy hut four individuals were heard for an extended period. Two were together and the others scattered around the Valley. Generally calling was quite short and an individual **Kiwi** would only make 2-4 calls and then go quiet. In

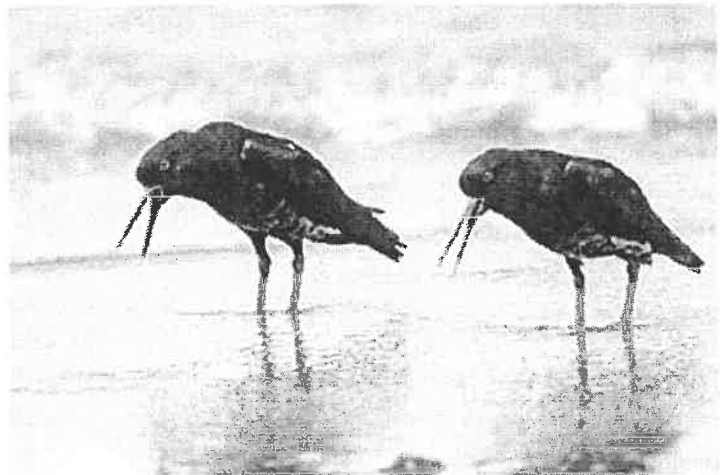


some places **Kiwi** made themselves very obvious such as at Hellfire Pass hut one morning when two **Kiwi** woke everybody up by stomping up and down the track outside the veranda. They carried this performance on for about 20 minutes by which time even the sleepest of the Swiss trampers had managed to get out and have a good look. At Masons Bay

Kiwi were easy to observe by just going for a walk up the track just on dusk. Although not all the visitors present were successful some did have **Kiwi** come right up and peck around their feet. A **Kingfisher** was seen at the stream at East Ruggedy Beach as was a **Spotted Shag**, **Banded Dotterel**, and a **Morepork** was heard.

We arrived at the northern end of Masons Bay at high tide and the first thing we saw was a group of 19 **Variable Oystercatchers** roosting amongst rocks at the top of the beach. Interestingly there was one **SI Pied Oystercatcher** amongst them. Further on down Masons Bay **Banded Dotterel** were present all over the wet sand along with occasional singleton and small groups of **Banded**

Dotterel. In all we spent about four days exploring Masons Bay and generally poking around in fabulous weather. One day we went down to the southern tip of Mason for fish and saw in the grassland near the old Kilbride homestead a **Redpoll**. **Variable Oystercatchers** were present all along the beach some with $\frac{3}{4}$ grown chicks just about ready to fledge. In the sand areas between the Ernest Islands and the main part of Masons Bay **SI Pied Oystercatcher** were present foraging in the sand. Standing on the top of the closest of the Ernest Islands we could look south to the Titi Islands and watch **Sooty Shearwater** wheeling about in the breeze. On another day we climbed Big Sand Hill (all of 156 m) just near the old Island Hill Homestead. On the way **Stewart Island Fernbird** objected to our passing their small swamp soak. While sitting on top a flock of eight **Tui** went wheeling past heading nowhere in a hurry. **Harriers** were also quartering the sand country looking for prey. **Spur-winged Plover** made their presence felt around different parts of Masons Bay. On the way back we crossed one of the large sand blows and came across some 86 **NZ Dotterel**



roosting. There were scattered in loose aggregations across a large pebble area. When we first approached a large proportion of the birds had their heads tucked up under their wings and allowed us to come within 5 metres before moving away.

From Masons Bay we went across the swamps to Freshwater Hut and the pakihis along the boardwalks were filled with **Fernbird**. As we approached Freshwater we came across our first **Stewart Island Robin** which much to our surprised was colour banded. We guessed that it was one that had been missed when the recent translocation to Ulva Island was undertaken. Around Freshwater Hut **Tomtit**, **Grey Warbler**, **Bellbird**, **Tomtit** and **Tui** were all common. **Dunnock** and **Redpoll** were also present with **Redpolls** feasting out on the seed heads for the large *Chionochloa* tussocks outside the hut. We heard a **Kaka** go overhead and a **Morepork** called that evening from up the valley.

After getting more food I returned to Masons Bay and set out along the Southern Circuit, which goes from Mason Bay to Doughboy Bay and then down the Rakeahua Valley. Crossing Adams Hill **Kiwi**, **Grey Warbler**, **Bellbird**, **Tomtit** and **Tui** were all observed while **Parakeets** were heard. Along Doughboy Bay itself **White-fronted Tern**, **Variable Oystercatcher**, **Red-billed Gull**, **Black-backed Gull**, **Spur-winged Plover**, **Banded Dotterel**, **White-faced Heron**, **NZ Pipit** and **Redpoll** were all present along the beach. In the forest behind **Grey Warbler**, **Bellbird**, **Kereru**, **Tomtit** and **Fantail** were all observed.

Tall podocarp forest with massive totara and rimu glades dominated the Rakeahua Valley with good numbers of **Bellbird**, **Tomtit**, **Silvereye**, **Fantail**, **Tui**, **Kereru**, **Kiwi** and **Robin** seen. Good numbers of **Parakeets** were heard in the forest and **Spur-winged Plover** were heard in the lower valley. In the manuka forest around the Rakeahua Hut I saw my only **Brown Creeper** on the island. Also along the river a **Kingfisher** flashed by heading upstream. While at Rakeahua Hut I climbed Mount Rakeahua and to the south Table Hill. On Table and around the scrub edge to the north saw all the bait stations that DOC use to poison cats for the protection of nesting **NZ Dotterel**.

From Rakeahua Hut the track rejoins the sea along the South West Arm of Patersons Inlet. Along the seashore **SI Pied Oystercatcher**, **Mallard**, **Black-backed Gull**, **Red-billed Gull**, **White-fronted Tern**, **Little Shag** were all present. In the forest behind **Kiwi**, **Bellbird**, **Tomtit**, **Blackbird**, **Fantail** and **Grey Warbler** were all seen, while **Parakeets** were heard in the forest canopy yet again.

All in all a wonderful three weeks with some spectacular weather both good and bad some excellent views of **Kiwi** and some very nice observations of a good range of birds. Interestingly enough we did not see any **Rifleman**, **Long-tailed Cuckoo** or **Shining Cuckoo**.

Bruce McKinlay

Falcon on Otago Peninsula

At about 2.15 p.m. on 11 May 2003, my wife, Connie, heard **Bellbirds** and **Tuis** giving their alarm call, and she went over to the aviaries expecting to find a cat. Instead, she saw a **New Zealand Falcon** sitting on the aviary. She called me over to see the **Falcon** running on the roof of both the **Antipodes** and **Yellow-crowned Parakeets'** cages. The **Antipodes** flew to cover and the **Yellow-crowned** panicked, flying all over the cage while the **Falcon** attacked the side of the cage. I got my camera and took photos of the bird. It remained for about 30 minutes, then flew off over the slip reserve.

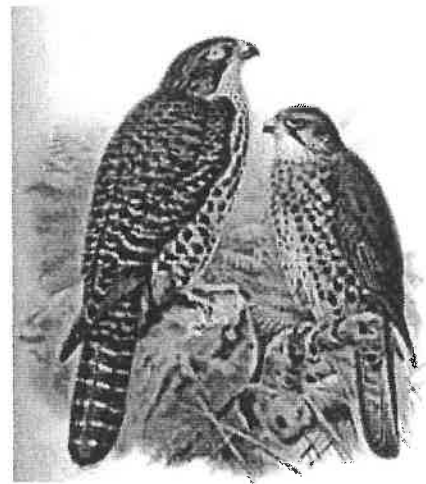
Reports have been received that two **Falcons** were seen at McTaggart Road in Company Bay on 3 May (Graham Loh) and other birds have been seen by tourists at Glenfalloch.

I believe these sightings of **Falcons** are the first record for the Otago Peninsula.

A.C. Wright

Falcon in South Otago

Lesley Gowans and I have seen a **NZ Falcon** on six out of seven days atlassing from 25 April to 2 June. Common factors have been sloping ground and flocks of small birds feeding. On each occasion we had been looking at large numbers of finches in roadside grasses and paddocks of winter feed for sheep. We were sometimes startled to see how swiftly and purposefully the **Falcon** flew through the area.



On one occasion we were on the road in the middle of the Milburn quarry, when we saw hundreds of birds, mainly **Redpolls**, chasing the **Falcon**, which had just appeared. The flock flew in a swirl around the **Falcon** until it went away. Two **Harriers** continued soaring while this was happening.

Other spots were in West Otago, South Otago, south of the old coach road, and Clarendon, just south of Lake Waihola.

Louise Foord

Classified Summarised Notes

Yes, with the end of June it is the end of another birding year and the Classified Summarised Notes are due again. For those of you new to OSNZ, the CSN are a list of the unusual sightings for the year. The list for the country is published as two separate listings, one for the North Island and one for the South Island. The

objective is to record unusual sightings, numbers or behaviour. They are not the rare sighting, which are recorded via the Rare Birds Committee, but rather those observations that are worth of recording briefly in *Notornis*.

If you have any thing you would like to submit for consideration please get it to me as soon as you can. (If you are a member of the email group, any observations you have already submitted via email will be considered.) My fax, postal and email address are on the letterhead of the news letter. The information I need is the name of the bird, location, date and number of birds. Do not forget that unusual behaviour may also merit an entry.

The entry below is for **Kaka** and the initials in brackets are those of the observer, with names given at the start of the list.

Weston area 1 for four months from June, [AGH]
Craig Rankin Reserve (Catlins) 1 on 14/9 [FS]

Please help by submitting your observations.

Jim Wilson
Regional Recorder

Crested Grebes at Lake Hayes in 2003

On 18 January 2003 I completed my first survey for the year looking at **Crested Grebes** on Lake Hayes. Eight pairs appeared to be holding territory. There were no young, which was indicative of the late breeding season that had affected other bird species in the region. In addition, which seemed unusual, there was a group of eight unattached birds sitting out in the lake west of the outlet and nearby a similar group of four grebes. This made a total of 28 adults on Lake Hayes.

My next visit made on the 24 February 2003 produced a much higher total, 42 adults and 11 juveniles, the highest count on Lake Hayes to date. The loose group of unattached birds, referred to above, had increased to 14 and remained in the same area until they left the lake sometime shortly before 7 March. It is recognised that the first breeding of **Crested Grebes** is delayed until their second year, so it is likely that the grebes in this group were first and second year adults from Lake Hayes and other lakes in the Wakatipu area prospecting, and not yet ready to breed. If this is the case it augers well for increased breeding success of grebes in Lake Hayes and elsewhere.

Another surprise was finding on the far side of the lake, opposite Bendemeer Bay, two adults with five well developed juveniles. Brood division had taken place, three with one adult and two with the other. This was not a permanent arrangement as they came together as a family unit for practical reasons when it suited them. This happened several times during one morning and allowed one adult to leave the group

for an hour or longer, the supervision of the five juveniles being left to its partner. This adult would continue to feed its own brood while on some occasions the closest juvenile was the recipient. The other siblings accepted this arrangement with little complaint and maintained their distance. Once the five siblings set off on their own and disappeared from sight in the direction of Bendemer Bay. They responded immediately to their parent's raucous call, the signal for them to return.



The successful rearing of four young on Lake Hayes is not uncommon and has also been observed on Lake Johnson. Five is exceptional and a record for Lake Hayes.

On 24 April 2003 I found that the total grebe population on Lake Hayes had moved to the inflow end and, while the adult population had decreased to 21, the juveniles now numbered 13, successfully reared by five pairs.

Since 1995 when a pair of grebe first bred on Lake Hayes their increase has been spectacular and demonstrates among other factors that a 5-knot speed limit on power boats can be effective.

If a census was made at the end of a grebe breeding season in the Wakatipu, Lake Dunstan and Lake Hawea areas, the result would revise the figures of 250 and 300, the total estimated population in the South Island and quoted in two recent articles written about this species. Apparently the good news of what has happened at Lake Hayes is not widely known.

George R Chance

Atlassing in Otago

Following up from the article in the April 2003 newsletter, we have now entered our 4th year, with the summer season covering an additional 43 squares not done before. By the time you read this, the autumn season will have been completed as well. Initial indications show a well-covered season, with the assistance of North Islanders holidaying in the Deep South.

The Gore trip, part of the autumn survey, although somewhat cool, was a rather pleasant gathering of the few dedicated 'Atlassers.' A total of 42 squares were surveyed, 23 in Southland and 19 in Otago. Of these 19, 16 were new.

A few figures: **Blackbirds** and **Starlings** were present in 41 out of the 42 squares, followed by the **Harrier** in 40, **Magpies** and **Redpolls** in 39, the **Song Thrush** in 33

and the **Chaffinch** in 32. Sighting of the **NZ Falcon** in three squares was nice; the **Pukeko** in only 2, was very low. Was it too dry this year?

Another computerised map for Otago in winter has been added to this newsletter. Let's see what we can cover this time.

Peter Schweigman
Atlas coordinator for Otago

Ornithological Snippets

Hamish Spencer first heard and then saw a **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** near Palmer's Quarry in North East Valley on 8/4/03. He has not seen this species in the Valley for several years.

Alan Baker reports a number of sightings from north Otago. He saw a **White Heron** at All Day Bay on 9/3/03, as well as one (quite possibly the same bird) at the Waianakarua River mouth on 3/4/03. Four **Black Stilt** were at the edge of a lake beside Birchwood Road in the Ahuriri Valley on 1/4/03. He also reports two **New Zealand Falcon**: one at Stoneburn on 8/3/03, which perched in a small tree beside the road, giving excellent close views, and another at Lindis Valley on 2/4/03.

Programme 2003

The indoor meetings are in the Otago Art Society Building on the corner of Great King and Albany Streets starting at 8 p.m.

Thursday & Friday, 19 & 20 June	Oamaru Penguin Symposium 2003 See http://www.penguin.net.nz/ops/ops2003.html Contact: A.G. Hocken, ☎ (03) 434 8188, agh@ihug.co.nz	
Wednesday, 25 June	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Melanie Massaro Topic: The Ocean Wanderers – Birds of the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic Ross Sea
Wednesday, 27 August	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Ian Jamieson Topic: The Takahe Recovery Programme
Sunday, 2 November	Summer Wader Count. High tide at Aramoana 10.15 a.m. (Backup date 30 November, High tide 8.45 a.m.) Contact: Ken Gager, ☎ 487 6670	

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