



THE  
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OF NEW ZEALAND  
(INCORPORATED)

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## *Otago Region Newsletter 4/2003 August 2003*

### **Midwinter's Fishing Trip**

On the weekend of the winter Solstice I went with David Blair in his ketch, the *Irene*, for a day trip to Cape Saunders after blue cod.



We got underway before dawn so there were just fleeting glances of **Stewart Island Shags** and **Spotted Shags** in the gloom as we motored out from Portobello Bay. Right down the harbour **shags** and **Red-billed Gulls** and **Black-backed Gulls** made their presence felt with eerie cries in the dawn or glimpses as they flew by. Just off the Aramoana wharf I looked up and there was a juvenile **Gannet** cruising along the edge of the sandbanks. This was followed shortly by a **Caspian Tern** doing the same thing.

Rounding Taiaroa Head, where the speckling of white spots on the headland reflected a successful breeding season for **Northern Royal Albatross**, we headed south on a long swell with a light breeze. It was an hour's cruise along the edge of the Peninsula past all the **Yellow-eyed Penguin** beaches. Along the way **Red-billed** and **Black-backed Gulls** were common; groups of **Stewart Island Shags** headed by to some unknown feeding area. The occasional **White-fronted Tern** cruised by and **Cape Pigeons** and **mollymawks** swooped by just off the surface. A school of common dolphins was encountered off Victory Beach, while off towards the eastern horizon a dense smear of birds indicates a feeding site.

Off Cape Saunders and into the fishing saw us bobbing up and down as the breeze and the tide fought it out. Numbers of **Snares Cape Pigeons** settled on the water

around the boat in the hopeful expectation of some fish waste. They were joined by **Buller's Mollymawks**, which were happy to settle for a period of about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an hour. To take off an effortless process occurred of turning into the breeze, extending the wings and them just seemingly standing up in the water, flexing the wings in some particular manner and lifting off and away. One **molly** was successful after hanging around the boat, as a hapless undersized blue cod was not quick enough to dive deep and was consumed whole. **Gulls** and **terns** made up most of the birds off the Cape but they are added to by the occasional call of a **Blue Penguin** that was fishing there as well.

The trip home was a repeat of the outward leg and it is only once we approached the Heads and saw two **Royal Albatross** wheel overhead and over the headland that something different was seen. The **Stewart Island Shag** colony at Taiaroa was densely bunched up and I could then see that the **Spotted Shags** in the water were in full breeding plumage with green mask and full double crests. The usual groups of **Stewart Island** and **Spotted Shags**, and **gulls** accompanied the cruise up the harbour.

All in all, another good day of seabirds. Oh and we all got a good feed of blue cod as well.

Bruce McKinlay

## The Birds at the DCC Green Island Landfill

At the commencement of the Atlas Scheme the Dunedin City Corporation's landfill site at Green Island was chosen as a special Atlas site, not just to record the presence or absence of bird species. The total numbers of all birds were also recorded and compared with the ones obtained during our survey of the Kaikorai Estuary back in 1989 – 1991 (see *Notornis* 40: 273-284, 1993.)

The Atlas survey was carried out over a two-year period, 2000/2001, and 2002/2003, both periods for two to three times a month. The number of species has increased dramatically, from 9 during 1989/1991 to 19 during the surveys of 2000/2003. The obvious reason for this increase is the tidying up of the Landfill site, covering the waste material as soon as practically possible, cleaning surrounding waterways, the installation of sedimentation ponds (fresh water) and the planting of trees and shrubs.

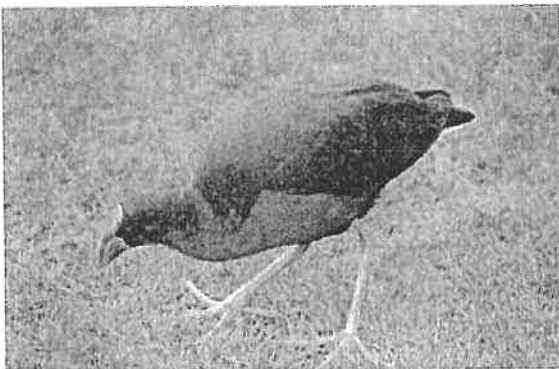
It is interesting to read the differences in averages for the various periods, using the four species, seen during at least 60% of the surveys.

Species	1989-1991	2000-2001	2002-2003
<b>Black-backed Gull</b>	1182.4	47.2	32.9
<b>Red-billed Gull</b>	119.6	27.5	47.0
<b>House Sparrow</b>	79.1	64.2	45.0
<b>Starling</b>	46.1	269.8	192.5

The very low numbers of **Black-backed Gulls** since 2000 are due to an eradication programme, carried out the late 90s and still continuing. Unfortunately the **Red-bills** suffered somewhat as well, which was not intended. It gave room, though, for the **Starlings**. And this salmonella problem amongst the **House Sparrows** might be the reason for the lower figure during 2002/2003.

No comparison can be made of the remaining species tabulated below, with the species in the 1989/1991 period. They just didn't turn up at the landfill site.

Species	2000-2001	2002-2003
<b>Black Swan</b>	11.3	4.0
<b>Paradise Shelduck</b>	9.8	11.9
<b>Mallard</b>	16.7	14.3
<b>Australasian Harrier</b>	2.8	2.3
<b>Pukeko</b>	12.9	31.4
<b>Skylark</b>	7.5	8.1
<b>Blackbird</b>	10.1	13.5
<b>Song Thrush</b>	4.8	6.7
<b>Chaffinch</b>	8.8	14.0
<b>Greenfinch</b>	23.8	22.8
<b>Goldfinch</b>	12.7	12.9



It should be noted that in March 2002 the Transfer Station was installed on site. As a consequence the dumping site was reduced and disturbance by noisy mechanical loaders and compactors increased. The only significant decrease is in **Black Swan**, but I have no idea why. And of interest is the increase in **Pukeko** numbers.

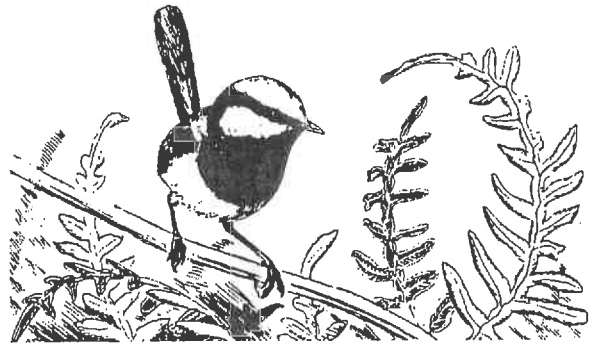
And the rarest bird during the 2000/2001 period? A **Black-fronted Dotterel**!

Peter Schweigman

## Winter Birding in Victoria, Australia

At the end of June we spent a week in Victoria and, although the primary objective of the trip was business, we had the opportunity to spend some time birding in the area around Melbourne. While Suzanne attended a workshop in Werribee, I decided to check out the nearby water treatment works, having heard rave reviews from a variety of sources. The complex covers a vast area on the shores of Port Phillip, and access is by permit only – locked gates and the sheer size of the place see to that. However, I was fortunate to meet a couple of local birders, who offered to show me around.

The early stages were effectively farmland, and here were good numbers of **Whistling Kites**, **Swamp Harriers** and a few **Australian Ravens**; also a couple of **White-throated Chats** and the first of many **Superb Fairy Wrens**, including a male in breeding plumage. Heading down to the oxidation ponds, there were large numbers of ducks, including tens of



thousands of **Pink-eared Ducks** in a dense flock, **Musk Ducks**, a pair of **Freckled Ducks**, **Australian Shelducks** and **Hardheads**. Waders were represented by **Red-necked Avocets**, **Red-necked Stints** and **Red-capped Plovers**, among others. It seemed an unlikely spot, but down by the estuary we saw a couple of **Blue-winged Parrots**, and there were also a few **Black-shouldered Kites** in this area.

The eastern suburbs of Melbourne were our next stop. We usually find that parks are a good starting point for the common birds in a new area, so spent a couple of hours in Jells Park. There were plenty of parrots here, including our only **Musk Lorikeet**, plus the more usual **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, **Galaks** and **Eastern Rosellas**. **White-browed Scrubwrens** and **Brown Thornbills** were common here, as in most areas of bush over the next few days. For a while we thought that the high-pitched whistles we heard all around were frogs, but they turned out to belong to **Bell Miners**, which were surprisingly elusive.

From here we headed to the Dandenongs, and though still relatively close to the city, it was a world apart. On our first bush walk, at Ferntree Gully, we added **King Parrot**, **Crescent Honeyeater** and **Bassian Thrush**, then, after thinking we had heard an Eastern Whipbird, decided it must have been a **Superb Lyrebird** after it started imitating a **Blackbird**, a **Magpie** and a **parrot**!

Further north around Healesville, bush birds were rather thin on the ground, probably due to the time of year. However, **Superb Lyrebirds** are most active in autumn and winter, and during a trek in the Toolangi State Forest we were rewarded with good views of a singing male, and heard at least half a dozen more performing their repertoire. **Eastern Spinebills** were quite common in this area, and at nearby Jehosaphat Gully we found three female **Lyrebirds** and a probable **Pilotbird**. The day was rounded off by Suzanne forcing me to inspect a couple of the wineries in the Yarra Valley!

Before leaving the area the next day, we visited the Healesville Sanctuary. This park had been recommended to us by a number of people as the foremost wildlife sanctuary and rescue facility in Australia (the first platypus bred in captivity was here). As well as many captive natives, there were many free ranging wild species – these included the ubiquitous **Thornbills** and **Fairy Wrens**, fortunately for Richard

a male in breeding plumage was discovered! We were rather puzzled as to why there were so few in their spring time plumage, or rather, why there were any at all!



We spent our last day back to the south-west of Melbourne, in the Brisbane Ranges National Park, and later the You Yangs. Here things got a bit livelier, with various **Honeyeaters**, including **New Holland**, **Yellow-tufted**, **White-eared** and **White-naped**; also good views of both **Yellow-rumped** and **Buff-rumped Thornbills**. We were quite taken aback at Lower Stoney

Creek to find **Brown Treecreepers** hopping about on the ground and scavenging on the picnic tables; however the **White-throated Treecreepers** lived up to their name.

In the area between the two parks, we came across several **Scarlet Robins**, the males with their dazzling plumage, and also a small group of **Red-rumped Parrots**. One of the birds we were hoping to see in the You Yangs was **White-winged Chough**, and we were driving away, rather disappointed by their absence, when with a screeching of brakes we narrowly avoided ploughing into a flock of 60 of them feeding on the road.

So away from the coast, a quiet time of year birdwise, but still plenty to see with a little effort. We finished the trip with about 105 species, many of them new to us.

Richard & Suzanne Schofield

### **Busman's Holiday on Putauhinu Island.**

In March and April this year I was fortunate enough to spend a month on Putauhinu Island off Southern Rakiura, working with Henrik Moller and team from the University of Otago's 'Kia Mau Te Titi Mo Ake Tonu Atu' Research Team.

The Research is a co-management project with Rakiura Maori to look at what is happening with **Titi** and seeks to improve our collective knowledge about the state of **Titi** populations, and determine long-term trends in numbers for the species. The research is being conducted throughout the range of **Titi**, but one of the major sites for sampling is Putauhinu Island.

Travel to the island is relatively easy being a three hour trip on the Foveaux Express catamaran from Bluff. Along the coast of Rakiura **Titi**, **Cape Pigeons** and **mollymawks** were present in low numbers. The trip was a good one with hardly any wind and a moderate swell. Rounding the north-west corner of Rakiura brought Codfish Island (Whenua Hou) into view, while off to the east were the long even

sand dunes of Masons Bay. Coming into view through a light haze were the Southern Titi Islands – the Moggys, the boat group, Big South Cape (Taukipeheka) and Putauhinu.

For the month that we were there we were going to remeasure some sixty permanent transects to determine burrow occupancy, thoroughly investigate burrow geometry to determine how many nests there really are in a burrow, and band chick and adult titi in a study area.

Putauhinu is about 160 ha in size and is covered in forest and shrub communities. On the top of the island are large extensive areas of tall rata forest while along the fringes are areas of *Olearia* forest. In other parts small pakihi are found with *Dracophyllum* scrub and flax. Around the coast are extensive areas of wave platform and kelp beds. The birders who stay on the island, supported by DOC, removed rats about three years ago. The results of this operation are everywhere on the islands, with large areas of the megaherb, *Stilbocarpa*, increasing around the island. Also numbers of wetas present on trees at night are reportedly increasing since the rats' removal.

Throughout the forest areas **Bellbirds, Tuks, Tomtit, Grey Warbler, Red- and Yellow-crowned Parakeets** are common. Less common are **South-Island Robin** and **Saddleback**. Both of these species were reintroduced after the rat eradication and are now found throughout the Island.

**Saddleback** and both **parakeets** were occasionally seen on the ground feeding.

The sight of two species of **parakeet** foraging in the lower canopy is some thing that I'll not forget soon. **Tui** and **Bellbirds** were competing for sap in trees of *Olearia*. It was clear that the bigger **Tui** could hold off a number of **Bellbirds** while exploiting the sap resource. The occasional **Harrier** was present above the island awaiting the emergence of titi chicks to feed on. Also present around the pakihi were **Codfish-Island Fernbirds**. Like the **Saddleback** and **Robin**, **Fernbird** were translocated to the island after the removal of rats but also as an insurance population whilst rats were eradicated from Whenua Hou. Uncommon on the island were **Kingfisher, Morepork** and **Starling**.



Around the coast of Putauhinu there were extensive wave platforms, which along with an excellent view from the hut, made seabird observations easy. Common around the island most days were **Buller's Mollymawks, Cape Pigeon** and **Titi**. Slightly less common were **Giant Petrels** and **Shy Mollymawks**. The **Giant Petrels** in particular were most often associated with fishing boats. **Diving Petrels** were often seen skimming across the waves and on one day we saw a **Wandering**



**Albatross** scavenging behind a fishing boat. Closer inshore, **Spotted Shags** breed on the island and juveniles were often seen as were **White-fronted Terns**, **Red-billed Gulls**, **Black-backed Gulls** and infrequently **Broad-billed Prions**.

However the sheer numbers of **Titi** were just overwhelming: whether it was standing outside the hut just after dark on when a good breeze was present, or catching adults as they came in to the study areas, or getting up before dawn and just watching the 'river' of **Titi** heading down to the takeoff areas for getting airborne, these birds were everywhere.

It was an unforgettable trip and I was privileged to be able to visit another one of New Zealand's great seabird islands.

Bruce McKinlay

### **Kingfishers (and Other Birds?) at Aramoana**

We saw two **Kingfishers** at Aramoana on the salt marsh side on the afternoon of 27 July 2003. The birds were on wires overlooking the marsh and flying down for crabs, presumably. Another bird was on wires overlooking a lagoon on Port Chalmers road.

And which birds are causing the following? On a seat in the reeds and on the rails and platform of the boardwalk at Aramoana were hundreds of little crab feet, scattered about. There were no carapaces, so it seemed these had been eaten. We also saw little piles of crunched up shell and couldn't decide whether these were droppings or had been coughed up. It seemed like birds had been battering crabs to death on the back of the seat and rails. Would **Kingfishers** do this? We have seen them bash prey on a branch and we don't think **seagulls** would be so systematic in hunting out these "bashing" sites. Also, eating the big shell and not the legs was a puzzle. Does anyone have any ideas? Otherwise we will have to camp out for the day to find out.

Mary Thompson and Sue Galloway

### **Atlassing in Otago**

The Autumn 2003 coverage, the fourth one of the 5-year programme, was rather successful in that an additional 77 squares not previously surveyed were covered. We have now covered close to 80% of Otago in autumn, of which 7 squares were done more or less on foot. Needless to say, our winter coverage lacks well behind with 43.5% covered after 3 years.

Shortly it will be September, the start of our fourth atlas Spring season. For your convenience the traditional computerized map is part of this newsletter

Peter Schweigman  
Atlas coordinator for Otago

## Ornithological Snippets

A report came in on 17/6/2003 of the sighting of three banded **Pied Stilts** at Brighton. This report was followed up the next day and they turned out to be three juvenile **Black Stilts**, all banded and released at the Tasman River in January this year. They were last seen there on 10 March but were not found on a survey on 14 March.

On 25/4/2003, Richard & Suzanne Schofield heard and saw 2 or 3 **Marsh Crakes** near Otematata.

Richard & Suzanne Schofield report that last year's **mystery heron** from Inchclutha was rediscovered on 13/7/2003, this time associating with **White-faced Herons**, rather than **Cattle Egrets**. It still doesn't have a name, but an almost identical bird has been photographed in Darwin, Australia. They also saw 4 **Cattle Egrets** at Inchclutha on 13/7/2003. **Cattle Egrets** have also been spotted from the Flood-free Highway, just north of Waihola, by Abby Smith and Hamish Spencer (19/07/2003) and Ian Southey (26/07/2003). Alan Baker saw a **White Heron** at the Waitaki River mouth on 2/8/2003.

Alan Baker has also seen two **NZ Falcons**: one in a riverside willow in the Shag Valley on 15/6/2003 and one in the Dunedin Botanic Garden on 22/6/2003, which posed on lower branches of 4 large trees in the Lower Garden.

## 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.

Wednesday, 27 August	Indoor Meeting Topic: The Takahe Recovery Programme	Speaker: Ian Jamieson
Wednesday, 22 October	Indoor Meeting Topic: Putauhinu	Speaker: Bruce McKinlay
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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