



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

PO Box 12397
WELLINGTON

Frank Austin
Regional Recorder
8 Dunblane St
Maori Hill
Dunedin
Phone (03) 467-5214

Louise Foord
Regional Representative
P.O. Box 12002
Maori Hill
Dunedin
Phone (03) 467 5041
Fax (03) 467 5071

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Showing Off Otago's Birds

Last month, for three days (11-13 March) I had two American bird-watching friends visiting, and we traveled around various parts of the southeastern South Island.

Although we did not get to go to sea, we did see some special birds. On Friday 11 March, we visited the Blue Mountains, going to the same place I had last been with the late Malcolm Foord. As on that previous trip, we were rewarded with my personal highlight of the day, a large flock of **Mohua**, possibly 25-30 of them, noisily foraging near Rankleburn. **Bellbird** were everywhere, even in the pine forest (as were the **Redpoll**), but we never saw a **Tui**. Possibly the next most widespread bird was the **Rifleman**, with



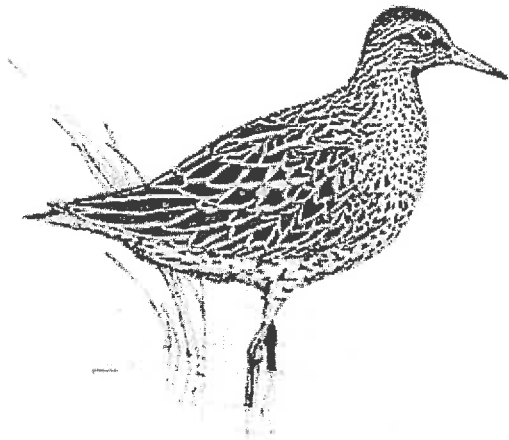
several family groups of 3-4 birds in several places in the bush. Foreign birders are always keen to see this species because it belongs to an endemic family, now considered one of the most divergent of the passerines, with no close relatives elsewhere in the world. In the tree tops were small flocks of **Brown Creeper**, often accompanied by a **Grey Warbler** or a **Fantail** or two. We saw several **Tomtit**, too, usually silently looking at us from a low perch as we walked past. We heard **Parakeet** and **Falcon** but we could not spot them, sadly. **Kereru** were hard to find, but we did see several soaring above the forest.

The next morning we first drove to the top of Mount Cargill to look for **Fernbird**. I had never had much luck looking here before, but this time struck gold: we saw three birds in clear view, including one that ran down the path to meet us as we mimicked its call, and then played near our feet. Right next to the bronze marker at the summit, a family of **Brown Creeper** flitted into view, right at chest height, which was also tree-top height.

We then headed south and lunched on the beach at Waldronville. Dozens of **Sooty Shearwater** were flying north, just beyond the first breaker, the closest I have ever seen them to shore. The Kaikorai Estuary had several **Spoonbill**, as well as a good assortment of ducks (**Mallard**, **Shoveler** and **Paradise Shelduck** mostly), **Pied Stilt**, and both **Oystercatchers**. We drove on to Taieri Mouth and took the track along the edge of the estuary. Again, we saw several groups of **Brown Creeper** and **Bellbird** were everywhere. There were more **Silvereye** and **Grey Warbler** here than the Blue Mountains, probably a reflection of the scrubby nature of the bush. Again, not one **Tui** was to be seen.

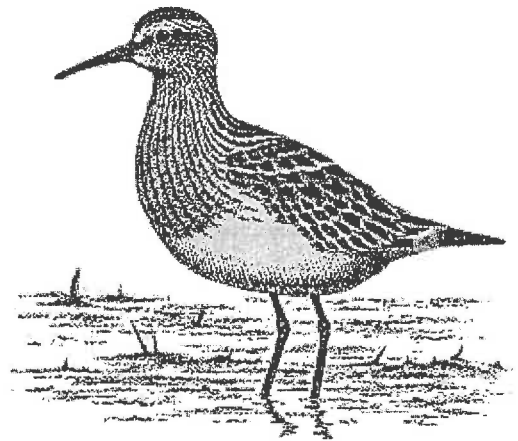
On the Sunday (13 March), we drove north and surprised a **Little Owl** sitting on a rock at the roadside just south of Trotters Gorge. The Gorge itself had several black **Fantails** as well as the most **Brown Creeper** I have ever seen in one place: they

were everywhere. Our best views of **Kereru** were here, too, but again we couldn't find a **Tui**. We continued north to Lake Wainono, where the sea has washed to cobbles over the track that used to run north along the edge of the southernmost pond. We had to walk, but were rewarded by the fantastic sight of 7 **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, some of which were in breeding plumage (a first for me,



I think), with a lone **Pectoral Sandpiper** for contrast. The latter was clearly not about to migrate: it was not in its breeding dress, nor was it plump like some of the sharpies. We got so close we could even see the longer bill it had compared to the sharpies, as well as the obvious difference in the breast feathering.

Interestingly, it did not really flock with the sharpies, either, ignoring them when they flew off for a short distance. On the cobbles were a couple of Fur Seals, as well as two **Stewart Island Shag**. How far north does this species roam?



We saw many other birds that I've not mentioned, but I didn't see a **Tui** until after my guests had left, and that was in my garden anyway!

Hamish Spencer

More on Crested Grebe in Central Otago

Dave York and George Chance visited Queenstown on 21 February 2005. At Butcher's Dam we found the usual tranquillity of the area was disturbed by extensive road works, and no **Crested Grebe** were seen. A detour to Lake Johnson was more rewarding, and Dave recorded 6 adults.

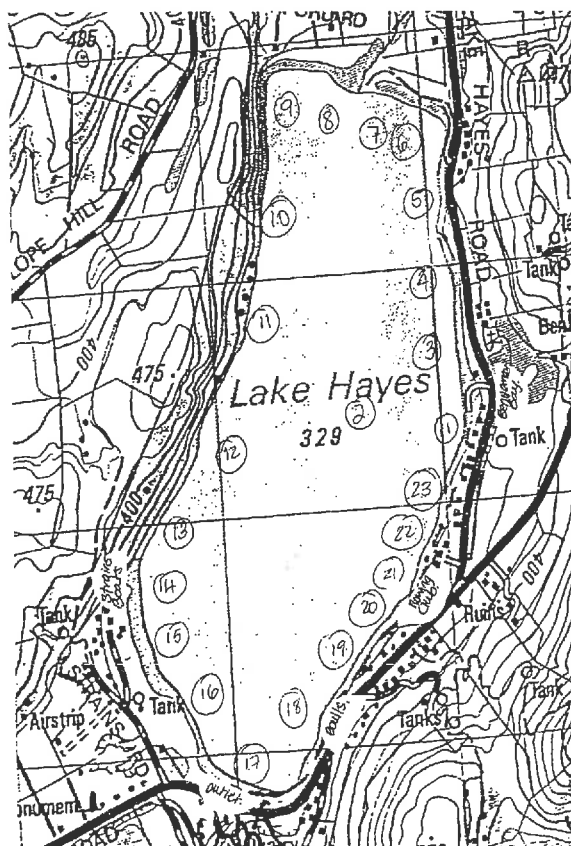
Following Mary Thompson's report of a pair of grebe at Moke Lake (Newsletter, December 2004), on November 28, 2004, we headed in that direction. Dave found one **Crested Grebe**, and although we returned to the area later, Dave was unable to find its mate. Although it was late in the day, traffic was heavy on this remote road. With the absence of cover and the increased popularity of this lake, breeding success for grebe at this lake is now unlikely.

We had arranged to meet Dawn Palmer at Lake Hayes early on Wednesday morning. Dave and Dawn set off in their separate craft to do a circuit of Lake Hayes. Their counts of **Crested Grebe** were much the same, and Dawn's results are shown in the tables below.

George Chance

Lake Hayes Survey, 22 February 2005, D. Palmer & D. York, 8:15 - 11:00 am

Site	Species	Adults	Juveniles	Chicks
1	Grebe	2	1	1
	Mallard	6		
	Scaup	3		
2	Grebe	2		
	Scaup	1		4
	Little Shag	1		
	Coot	1		
3	Grebe	3		
4	Little Shag	1		
	Mallard	1		
5	Grebe	2		
	White-faced Heron	1		
	Coot	1		
6	Grebe	1		
	Little Shag	1		
	Feral Goose	23		
	Harrier	1		
	Mallard	11	1	
7	Grebe	2		
	Coot	1		
	Mallard	1		
	Little Shag	8		
8	Grebe	2		
	Spur-winged Plover	30		
	Paradise Shelduck	7		
9	Grebe	6		2
	Black Swan	2	4	
	Scaup	4		1
	Coot	1		



	White-faced Heron	2		
	Mallard	2		
	Little Shag	2		
10	Grebe	2		
	Scaup	8		
	Mallard	1		
11	Grebe	4	1	
12	Grebe	2		
	Scaup	6		
	Mallard	1		
13	Mallard	4		
	Scaup	36		
	Coot	1		
14	Scaup	7		
15	Grebe	3	1	
	Harrier	2		
	Coot	2		
	Scaup	14		
	Mallard	2		
16	Grebe	2		
	Coot	43		
	Mallard	14		
17	Grebe	5		
	Scaup	42		
18	Scaup	96		
	Little Shag	2		
19	Grebe	2		
	Little Shag	2		
	White-faced Heron	1		
	Mallard	7		
	Scaup	18		
20	Grebe	2		
	Scaup	10		
	Mallard	4		
21	Grebe	2		
	Scaup	5		
	Little Shag	1		
22	Scaup	54		
	Little Shag	1		
23	Grebe	2		
	White-faced Heron	1		
	Mallard	2		

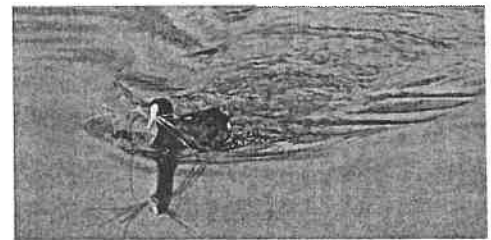
Species Diversity and Abundance at Lake Hayes, 22 February 2005

Species	Adults	Juveniles	Chicks	Total
Crested Grebe	44	3	2	49
Black Swan	2	4		6
Mallard	56			56
Scaup	299		5	304
Coot	50			50
Feral duck				0
Little Shag	19			19
Spur-winged Plover	30			30
Paradise Shelduck	7			7
Black-billed gull				0

Swallow				0
White-faced Heron	5			5
Harrier	3			3
Kingfisher				0
Black Shag				0
Quail				0
Feral goose	23			23
Fantail				0
Goldfinch				0
Chaffinch				0
Grey Warbler				0
Shoveller				0
Pukeko				0
Grey Teal				0
Totals	540	7	7	554

Ornithological Snippets

Alan Baker and his father stayed in Omarama from 28/2/2005 to 4/3/2005. They saw **Crested Grebes** with young on Lake Benmore, Lake McGregor and the Wairepo Arm of Lake Ruataniwha. The best place for **Coots** was Otematata, where they saw young of all ages and a bird on a nest. On 1/3/03, there were 12 **Caspian Terns** resting on the shingle at the mouth of the Ohau River.



Lesley Gowans had a pair of **Little Owls** nesting nearby in the trees. They will be a change from the plague of **Magpies**.

Richard Schofield reports a **Kakariki** sighting at Chloris Pass, between Owaka Valley and The Wisp, on 31/1/2005. He was doing some photography at the top of the pass, when he heard the unmistakable chatter of Kakariki. He didn't see the birds initially, but they sounded like **Red-crowned**. About ten minutes later he heard the call again at close range, and saw a bird heading towards The Wisp. The combination of call, size and obvious red on the head convinced him it was a **Red-crowned**.

Louise Foord has seen **Rosellas** in the garden several times in March. She had been watching a nice crop of greengages ripening in the high treetops, until the **Rosellas** finished them off. On 20/3/2005 Louise clearly saw 4 at once. They also seemed to be eating leaves in the top of a plum which had not fruited. Now they are making a start on her few apples; they do this annually.

On 2/4/05 Alan Baker had a close view of 2 **Fernbirds** in the flax-manuka scrub at Shag Point.

Programme 2005

- Wednesday, 27 April Indoor Meeting Speaker: Shelley Morgan
 Topic: Hunting Activities and Movement of Domestic
 Cats at Travis Wetlands
 8 p.m., Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340
 Great King Street
- Sunday, 19 June Winter Wader Count. High tide at Aramoana 1.16
 p.m., 2.0 m. Contact: Ken Gager, ☎487 6670
- Wednesday, 22 June Indoor Meeting Speaker: Dr Suzanne Bassett
 Topic: Kiwi
 8 p.m., Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340
 Great King Street
- Sunday, 13 November Summer Wader Count. High tide at Aramoana 1.27
 p.m., 2.1 m. Rain date 27 November. Contact: Ken
 Gager, ☎487 6670

Newsletter Editor: Hamish Spencer, 50 Grey Street, NEV, Dunedin.
h.spencer@otago.ac.nz



B & D McKinlay
 97 Tomahawk Rd
 Andersons Bay
 Dunedin 9001